

Microaggressions and Unconscious Bias

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What are Microaggressions?

Intentional and unintentional everyday verbal, behavioral, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based upon their marginalized group membership.

Microaggressions threaten and hinder the ability to create a physically and psychologically safe work environment.



Types of Microaggressions

- **Microassaults** - explicit and intentional with the ultimate purpose of hurting and degrading victims
Example - racial slurs on a bathroom wall.
- **Microinsults** - a little more subtle, but conveys rudeness and insensitivity that demeans a person's racial heritage or identity; done unintentionally, without conscious awareness and biases are not obvious, but victims can still decipher the hidden insult. Example – How did you get this job?



Types of Microaggressions

- **Microinvalidations** - the most harmful because they exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of people of color on a daily basis without thought or understanding and by people who do not believe they are doing anything wrong
Example - Where are you really from? Wow, you speak really good English!



Unconscious Bias

Unconscious biases are social stereotypes that individuals form from their background, personal interactions, societal stereotypes, and cultural context about certain groups of people without conscious awareness.

Example: Model Minority



The Impact of Microaggressions and Unconscious Bias

- Research on Microaggressions and Asian American Women Managers
- 21 Asian American women managers from ages 25-66 years old
- Occupations – ED, judges, law partners, project managers, division managers, regional managers, and EVPs.



10 Themes

- Culture
- Background
- Identity
- Discrimination /Sexual Harassment
- White Privilege
- Stereotypes
- Tokenism
- Recognition and Understanding
- Justification /Coping
- Workplace Relationships



Stereotypes

- **Model Minority** – The perception that Asians are smart, good at math & science, obedient, assimilated, introverted, lack social skills, and have very little challenges or issues
- **Ageism** – Not taken seriously because perceived as too young, no experience, minimal respect because have not earned it with age, credibility & trust issues
- **Glass Ceiling** – Being aggressive is negative for women, but expected of men, less competent because emotional, less value (wages)
- **Bamboo Ceiling** – Competent in only certain areas (math & science), no promotions because experts not leaders, less mentorship opportunities because perception of minimal cultural similarities, changing standards and expectations to prevent promotion, break through very rare, but when it happens - an Asian executive is questioned by colleagues and subordinates on how they got the job



Tokenism

- Tokenized and exploited to meet the goals and objectives of organization
- The line between value and tokenism is the unwillingness of leaders and co-workers in understanding privilege, oppression, and marginalization
- If you are born into an ethnic community, you know everything about it and can effectively represent it
- Lone POC in the organization, so expected to educate everyone on the trials and tribulations of being a POC
- Felt like hired to satisfy quotas and directives rather than value and diverse perspective
- Described as priority minority because they have a seat at the table, but most time no voice



Justification & Coping

- Justification

- treatment is based on people being naïve

- take action - it is up to me to build trust and have compassion for people that are unaware of their privilege and behaviors

- should not let microaggressions bother me, I am emotionally weak

- blame self for potentially doing something wrong and that's why treated a certain way, need to be more compliant, be like everyone else



Justification & Coping

- Coping

- need to create safe space to gather thoughts
- stop talking, excuse self and walk away
- focus on issue and not think about the fact that someone is purposely picking on them because they are Asian
- mimicking – behave like they behave so they think you are like them and not different
- work out & exercise – safe space to reflect
- mental preparation for negative response
- stay mentally positive and not take comments personally
- fake confidence, focus on the task at hand
- small, but very strong support network



Physical Impact

- Physical symptoms such as constant headaches, inability to sleep and heart problems
- Unhealthy fluctuations in weight, chronic body aches and pain, late onset of diabetes, and high blood pressure



Psychological Impact

- Self-doubt and identity issues
- Feelings of worthless in the area of intelligence, integrity and work ethics
- Triggers an identity crisis that causes victim to abandon their cultural values and norms and adopt the majority culture and values in order to feel like they fit in and be accepted



End of Session 1



Impact to the Organization

- Microaggressions & unconscious bias eventually become daunting barriers to motivation, creativity and teamwork
- Negatively influence outcomes, loyalty to the organization, and job satisfaction



Strategies to Address Microaggressions and Unconscious Bias

Unconscious bias training

- Complete an organizational assessment
- Make sure you have buy in from all leaders
- Present data that impacts the organization and grabs attention
- Promote group decision making
- Evaluate & change processes that may promote unconscious biases
- Understand privilege



Strategies to Address Microaggressions and Unconscious Bias

Create a Diversity and Inclusion culture not just a position or department

- Role of a Diversity and Inclusion Officer or department is to support a diversity and inclusion culture, not create it. Creation needs to happen at every level of leadership and employees.



Strategies to Address Microaggressions and Unconscious Bias

Do not just give someone a seat at the table, but give them a voice

- Minimizes feelings of tokenism
- Encourage them to be authentic
- Do your own research and ask additional questions to clarify findings or information – shows you are accountable for learning
- Go beyond mentoring to sponsoring



Strategies to Address Microaggressions and Unconscious Bias

Create a psychologically safe workplace for everyone

- Interpersonal trust is indispensable in co-worker relationships
- Need both cognitive (reliability and dependability on others) and affective trust (emotional connections with others) to interact at a deeper level
- Find ways to help your team members connect at a cognitive and affective level to create strong interpersonal trust
- Interpersonal trust will open up doors for effective communication and conversation

