

GROW Diversity Advocacy Council

Microaggressions Toolkit

The Microaggression Toolkit was developed by Vanessa Greene, Associate Dean of Students and Director of the Center for Diversity & Inclusion at Hope College with the support of Jevon Willis, Assistant Director of the Center for Diversity & Inclusion, Margo Walters, Program Coordinator for the Center for Diversity & Inclusion, Michael DeNotto, Assistant Professor and Humanities Librarian, and the GROW Diversity & Advocacy Council. It is our hope that faculty, staff, administrators and students will find this a practical, relevant and user friendly tool to increase your awareness of microaggressions and/or to assist you in educating others. We spent a great deal of time and intentionality on this toolkit to provide you with meaningful resources and strategies to respond effectively to microaggressions in your personal lives, classrooms, and spheres of influence. It is our hope that you will find this resource helpful.

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I. Introduction

Racism and blatant discrimination are still prevalent in our society. In recent years overt and blatant forms of racism have been resurging. Some examples include use of the “n” word, racial slurs and derogatory comments; physical attacks; and murder of unarmed individuals by police. Given the condemnation and stigmatization associated with obvious acts of racism and discrimination, most people engage in a more contemporary and insidious form of oppression, often referred to as implicit biases, covert racism or microaggressions. Micro is defined as something very small, microscopic, and difficult to be seen with the naked eye. These forms of racism can be more harmful, as they are often regarded as innocuous and committed by people who consider themselves allies. Although microaggressions are subtle, they are pervasive and have significant and damaging consequences in the lives and experiences of marginalized groups - psychologically, personally and physically. Their effects often impact people in massive and dangerous ways.

While microaggressions are generally discussed from the perspective of race and racism, any marginalized group in society may become targets - people of color, women, LGBTQ persons, those with disabilities, religious minorities, class and other social identities.

II. Purpose

The purpose of the Microaggression Toolkit is to provide:

- A resource for educators and leaders of diversity, equity and inclusion;
- A greater understanding of the impact of microaggressions; and
- Strategies to effectively address systemic issues that affect the physical and psychological well-being of members from marginalized groups.

The Microaggression Toolkit is a resource for everyone – faculty, staff, administrators, students, and Board of Trustees. It includes definitions of microaggressions, articles and videos of microaggressions, strategies to report microaggressions, when and how to report microaggressions, and a myriad of resources to help better understand the injurious impact of the oppressor on the oppressed.

III. Definition of Microaggressions

Microaggressions can be experienced to various degrees. The following definitions are offered to better understand the type of experiences and considerations related to microaggression experiences.

Harvard psychiatrist Chester Pierce coined the term microaggressions in 1970 to describe racially charged "subtle blows ... delivered incessantly." He describes microaggressions as everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, which communicate hostile, derogatory, and demeaning messages that threaten, intimidate and relegate marginalized groups to inferior status and treatment.

Levels of Microaggressions

Micro-assaults: Conscious and intentional discriminatory actions (e.g. using racial epithets, displaying White supremacist symbols such as swastikas, or preventing one's son or daughter from dating outside of their race).

Micro-insults: Verbal, nonverbal, and environmental communications that subtly convey rudeness and insensitivity that demean a person's racial heritage or identity.

Microinvalidations: Communications that subtly exclude, negate, or nullify the thoughts, feelings or experiential reality of a person of color.

IV. Articles

Gray Matter: Neuroscience offers Insight on Institutionalized Racism

<https://dailytrojan.com/2019/08/28/gray-matter-neuroscience-offers-insight-on-institutionalized-racism/>

The Science of Microaggressions: It's Complicated

<https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/observations/the-science-of-microaggressions-its-complicated/>

Ethnic Minorities are not Hypersensitive to Microaggressions

https://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2019-03/sfpa-emn032219.php

How to Respond to Racial Microaggressions

<https://diverseeducation.com/article/176397/>

How to Respond to Microaggressions

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/03/smarter-living/how-to-respond-to-microaggressions.html>

V. Sample Microaggressions

General

Microaggressions are like Mosquito Bites

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hDd3bzA7450> (1:58)

Racial Microaggressions Campaign

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SidVLsEd7Ic&feature=youtu.be> (7:44)

Microaggressions in the Classroom

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZahtlxW2CIQ> (18:03)

Using Privilege to Respond to Microaggressions

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GTvU7uUgiUI&list=RDhDd3bzA7450&index=14> (3:56)

Race

Microaggressions against Asian Americans during coronavirus

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bRDXsH8p4mk> (5:12)

What kind of Asian are you?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DWynJkN5HbQ> (2:19)

I am not your Asian Stereotype, attempted to assimilate, but lost self

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_pUtz75INaw (9:38)

Black kids playing next to coffee shop, white woman ask waitress to notify the police

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ufu_RlvACNM&feature=emb_rel_end (1:58)

White woman falsely calls the police on a black man in the park

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lalQ3ABWIZA> (1:55)

Things Mexican Americans are tired of hearing

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hOG5_tw_IM0 (1:20)

White woman tells Latinx to go back to Mexico

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FB11XcUsLIM> (3:45)

Store clerk asks a customer “where are your papers?”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ORMjwW0l62E&feature=emb_rel_end (2:18)

White woman calls black women stupid “n” word at a restaurant

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xtcguACfyLE> (2:45)

White woman calls police falsely accusing family of gang activity

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DaBAbxZGokY> (2:13)

Hispanic woman fired for asking for a raise

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iBIgksEfKEc> (2:20)

Disability

Disability: How you see me

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bwW6mYdJ7Xc> (3:00)

Everyday ableism - unpacking disability, stereotypes and microaggressions

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wdRyInsc5IU> (96:00)

Confronting ableism

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DkSuqtnsyCE--> (18:00)

Microaggressions against people with disabilities

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Swnkj31bsUg> (2:47)

Disability - these are not compliments

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M2cqi0booq8> (4:49)

Disability and work: Stop wasting talent

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=twaKuhvYpss> (14:50)

Let's talk about intellectual disabilities

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0XXqr_ZSsMg (11:34)

LGBT

LGBT 101- Introduction to the queer community, understanding vocabulary/terminology (7:00)... --<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DE7bKmOXY3w> (7:00)

LGBTQ - How you see me

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wxHHsteyP4I> (3:33)

This is what LGBTQ looks like around the world (11:50)

https://www.ted.com/talks/jenni_chang_and_lisa_dazols_this_is_what_lgbt_life_is_like_around_the_world?language=en (11:50)

US increase in hate crimes against LGBTQ community

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yXY2a1ked8o> (3:15)

Lecture on microaggressions and the LGBTQ community by Dr. Kevin Gray, author of "That's so Gay!" (1:31:00)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U7fR9Ye8xYk> (1:31:00)

The myth of the gay agenda - Gay lifestyle is a greater threat to civilization than terrorism

https://www.ted.com/talks/lz_granderson_the_myth_of_the_gay_agenda (14:58)

Why I must come out-assigned gender identity at birth, but it did not match

https://www.ted.com/talks/geena_rocero_why_i_must_come_out (8:50)

Offensive homophobic comments in the workplace

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QxOOUjriG4A> (1:27)

Law students conversation with ex-gay therapist

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZDipt48sVyo> (7:19)

Gay couple encounters homophobic nurse during adoption process

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JAJ7T9MXTVI> (6:32)

Confrontation about homophobia tweets

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a1XbBkhonQg> (7:00)

New boss: Gave permission to be open about sexual identity

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aLsWEm_3N6g (7:01)

New teacher encounters homophobia

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y5mn2MMEFc4> (4:15)

Why I chose my LGBTQ daughter over the evangelical church

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rP01bH9Ljf4> (16:05)

Discrimination against gay worker, due to religion

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IYIetBQHhT0> (1:31)

Religion

Church member defends pastors anti-gay rant

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ez0AMf2U5RU> (4:25)

Cop gives sermonette, preaching that gays should be arrested and killed

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0c-arO79hjo> (3:51)

Religious microaggressions group (5:41)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JMmyIU8v_yI (5:41)

Microaggressions against Muslim women on campus

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IBShaW6E0yI> (41:49)

Religious discrimination in the workplace, hijab

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rg5bLE-W0K8> (2:33)

Gender

Sexism microaggressions in a societal and cultural context:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hl2WiSuKdw>(3:56)

Misogynistic microaggressions

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uY37Tnfy2Dg>(7:49)

2020 ethics in action video: Sexism and microaggressions in the workplace

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T9ycch-ayt0>(1:54)

48 things women hear in a lifetime (that men just don't)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9yMFw_vWboE(1:49)

Everyday sexism

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LhjsRjC6B8U>(16:05)

Class

We've all heard the terms “Cracker,” “White Trash” and “Redneck” in reference to poor white people living in America. An MTV decoded series video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wIIt-gTHWOY> (5:05)

Another glass of champagne please

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ysea-nu51Ss> (10:57)

How Hollywood misrepresents the middle class

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cio6aKUYe4s> (6:31)

Are all Asian Americans rich?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BeglEfYy_L4 (5:26)

VI. Strategies to Respond to Microaggressions

As we researched best practice strategies to respond to microaggressions, most resources focused on personal approaches, utilizing the intergroup dialogue framework, such as:

- Ask for clarification (“Could you explain what you meant by that comment and what makes you feel that way?”).
- Separate intent from impact (“I know you didn’t mean it, but your comment was offensive”).
- Share your own experience and process (“I struggled with these issues in the past, as well; however as I engaged more with people from different backgrounds my perspectives changed”).

This approach is great for people who really did not intend to cause harm. However, since this is not the case in every situation, we developed the “GARDE” framework to offer additional ways of responding to microaggressions. GARDE is conceptualized from the mosquito bites analogy to (1) create a greater understanding of the impact of microaggressions; and (2) to provide strategies on ways to respond to microaggression experiences.

GARDE Framework

Gauge: Similar to mosquito bites, when we experience a microaggression the first time, we gauge the situation by assessing the situation: what happened, what was the intent, and how should I respond. We massage the area that was stung and brush it off. Rarely do we mention to anyone that we were bitten by a mosquito or experienced a microaggression the first time. We simply ignore it and continue on with what we were doing without bringing any attention to the situation. Therefore, the **first stage** of the **GARDE** framework is to ***gauge*** the situation.

Analyze: The second time we are bitten by a mosquito or mosquitoes, we analyze the situation differently, as the sting of mosquitoes is painful. We feel the impact of the stings and examine the situation more carefully. We tell people around us about the incident of being stung and ask if they were stung too. We then develop a strategy on how to respond to avoid further stings. The **second stage** of the **GARDE** framework is to ***analyze*** the situation and approach it more assertively to determine if it was intentional or unintentional; a result of ignorance or a purposeful attack.

Respond: After gauging and analyzing the situation there are two primary responses; to acknowledge the impact of the incident or attempt to ignore the painful experiences presented. The ability to acknowledge the impact, despite the intent, creates an opportunity to respond in a way that allows for the demonstration of full agency of self and the ability to reclaim your power. Ignoring the situation without confronting allows for greater vulnerability and increases the likelihood of more mosquito bites and being subjected to future microaggression occurrences. Both responses can impact your overall self-concept as well as aspects of your identity. It is important to understand that the response you choose should be based on the severity of the incident, as well as your perspective on whether it was intentional or unintentional. Some behaviors are clearly a result of ignorance, while others are intended to cause insult and harm. In either case, it is important to respond in a way that clearly communicates the impact of the incident and the problem you have with it. The **third stage** of the **GARDE** framework is to ***respond*** critically to the situation by confronting the issue and impact it had on you and/or others.

Defend: Defend your humanity! Understanding who you are is an important part of a healthy identity and positive self-image. Identifying your power, in response to microaggression occurrences, is finding your voice, your ability to appropriately confront a microaggression situation. Mosquito bites leave lots of scars on your body. Similarly, microaggressions leave invisible scars, but they are there. Generally, we do not sit still and allow mosquitoes to sting us without defending ourselves or we will end up with our whole bodies covered with scars. We

jump up, wave them off, or find some way to protect and defend ourselves. When experiencing microaggressions, it is perfectly okay to take action by sending a clear message that you do not accept or tolerate being disrespected or mistreated, nor do you accept others being disrespected or mistreated, and emphasize that the comment and/or behavior was inappropriate. Again, it is important to gauge and analyze the situation before you respond, as your response will be different based on your assessment of the intent - whether it was intentional or unintentional. The point is that every situation cannot be passed off as unintentional and, therefore, some situations need to be handled more assertively. As most microaggressions are not punishable, it is important to defend your humanity to prevent ongoing scars. The *fourth stage* of the GARDE framework is *defend*.

Eliminate: The final stage of the GARDE framework is to eliminate the pain of the mosquito bites as well as the presence of the mosquitos themselves. In order to eliminate the pain, you must first acknowledge the source of the pain, report it and seek consequences for the harm that was imposed upon you. In order to eliminate the mosquitos/microaggressions, it is important to look at the environmental factors that may allow for these mosquitos/incidents to persist and hold your institution accountable. Ensure that your institution have discrimination policies that address microaggression experiences, as well as processes that protect and support you and your colleagues. It is important to make sure the enforcement of these policies is effective in order to eliminate, protect yourself and others from the insidious and pervasive spread of microaggressions.

When and How to Respond to Microaggressions

<https://hbr.org/2020/07/when-and-how-to-respond-to-microaggressions>

VII. Reporting

Microaggressions are not isolated incidences. Targets, bystanders, and allies all have a role to play in calling out and disarming microaggressions. Anyone who experiences or witnesses microaggressions should file a report as soon as possible.

Hope College Discrimination Policy: [Discrimination Policy](#)

Hope College Discrimination/Harassment Reporting Form: [Discrimination/Harassment Reporting Form](#)

Resources Cited:

Sue, Derald Wing. *Microaggressions in Everyday Life : Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation* Hoboken, N.J: Wiley, 2010.

Turner, Tara, *Racial Microaggressions*, Turner Consulting Group, blog, 2017.

Nagai, Althea, The Pseudo-Science of Microaggressions, National Association of Scholars, 2017.

Washington, Ella F., Birch, Allison h., Roberts, Laura M., When and How to Respond to Microaggressions, Harvard Business Review, 2020.