MAKING SENSE OF Microaggressions

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TAKEAWAY:

→ **PSE DiSTEM Network**

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The word
microaggression
is a term devised by Chester Middlebrook Pierce,
a Harvard University Professor.

He described it as . . .

SUBTLE, STUNNING AND OFTEN AUTOMATIC NON-VERBAL EXCHANGES WHICH ARE PUT-DOWNS.

Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez, and Willis, 1978, p.66

Others have defined it as . . .

MICROAGGRESSIONS ARE THE EVERYDAY VERBAL, NON-VERBAL, AND ENVIRONMENTAL SLIGHTS, SNUBS, OR INSULTS, WHETHER INTENTIONAL OR UNINTENTIONAL, DEROGATORY, OR NEGATIVE MESSAGES TO TARGET PERSONS BASED SOLELY UPON THEIR MARGINALIZED GROUP MEMBERSHIP.

Sue, D.W. (17th November 2010) Microaggressions: More than just race. https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/microaggressions-in-everyday-life/201011/microaggressions-more-just-race

INCLUDE PUT DOWNS, FAULT-FINDING, CONTROLLING BEHAVIOURS, PASSIVE AGGRESSION, COLD SILENCES, BLAMING, SHAMING AND HUMILIATING.

Cousins, S. Overcoming Everyday Racism.
p.102 London. 2019. Jessica Kingsley Publishers

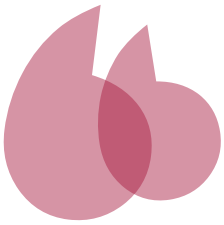
And questioning . . .

WHILE IT MAY FEEL AS IF IT IS A SHOW OF INTEREST, IT CAN BE A CONSTANT INVASION OF PRIVACY AND PERSONAL BOUNDARIES.

Cousins, S. Overcoming Everyday Racism.
p.102 London. 2019. Jessica Kingsley Publishers

MICROAGGRESSIONS DO NOT ALWAYS INVOLVE NEGATIVE VERBAL STATEMENTS OR OVERT INTERACTIONS, THEY CAN BE OBSERVED IN THE CLIMATE OF THE WORKPLACE.

Brailsford. "Where are you from"
p.78. Black Identities and White Therapies (2021) Monmouth. PCCS Books Ltd



THE PERSON WITH A PREJUDICED THREAT RESPONSE MAY PAY LESS ATTENTION TO THE BLACK PERSON, FROWN MORE, LAUGH LESS, MAKE SLIPS OF THE TONGUE, HESITATE AND ENGAGE IN VERBAL MICROAGGRESSIONS.

Williams,M. The Science Of Hate.
P.89. 2021. London. Faber & Faber Limited

Micro-aggressions are:

- **Experienced** day in, day out.
- They can be **covert** and **minimal slights** that have **maximum impact** when experienced over a lifetime. And they contribute significantly to our wellbeing and to our sense of belonging and of not belonging.
- **Commonplace** and **hidden** in a language that is normalised.
- They are so **repetitive** that we become almost immune to them.
- They act as **putdowns** whatever their intention.
- And they **thrive** in the right conditions.

We bring aspects of ourselves to conversations about race and these may be:

A critical self

One that is both self-critical and critical of others. The conversation inside our head might be telling us that we don't know enough, we might say the wrong thing ,they don't know what they're talking about and they've said the wrong thing. The conversation is not only a challenge when it involves others it is a challenge when it involves a conversation with ourselves.

A self that would rather not see colour

A naïve self is a self that believes we are in a post- racial era. This may involve people thinking that they see people as individuals and minimise a person's race or racism.

An oppositional self

One that cannot easily sit without opposing ideas. And is resisting, combative and disruptive of the flow of healing conversations.

The guilty self

Evaluating oneself negatively because of past and present actions or conscious and unconscious thoughts.

The rescuer

The charged-up self is the fixer and the person that wants to take over and control the conversations. The rescuer is often someone who doesn't listen to the needs of others.

The wise self – A listening empathic self

One that can contain different perspectives, one that is informed and yet open to learning and one that focusses on relational engagement and the active building and maintaining of relationships.

Adaptive functioning

The target of any microaggression is left to interpret the motive and meaning behind these encounters.

Psychological energy is expended to:

1. Discern the truth and the reality of the experience.
2. Protect oneself from insults and invalidations.
3. Try to ascertain what action needs to be taken.
4. Understand/struggle with the motivation of the perpetrator.
5. Come to terms with the thoughts and feelings that arise as a result

What to do when you witness or experience microaggressions:

1 **Be curious** with microaggressions, for example, ask questions like:
   - What is the intention behind what you said?
   - Can I ask what you mean by that?
   - These are 'soft challenges' for bringing the conversation into the here and now.

2 **Be compassionate** – empathy is dialled down towards people of colour and the darker you are the more that empathy is dialled down.

3 **Educate** and share knowledge.

4 **Make a complaint** or support a complainant – a difficult and demanding challenge.

5 **Set boundaries** that are personal to you - it's often enough to say 'this is not how I see the situation' 'let's not go there, because this doesn't feel okay?

6 **Go the extra mile** to create an anti-racist society.

Reflection

Reflection

Think of a time when you might have said or felt some of the things described in this handout.

What were the ingredients:

- That woke you up?
- Raised your awareness of different perspectives?
- Helped and supported a change in your viewpoint?

THANK YOU :)

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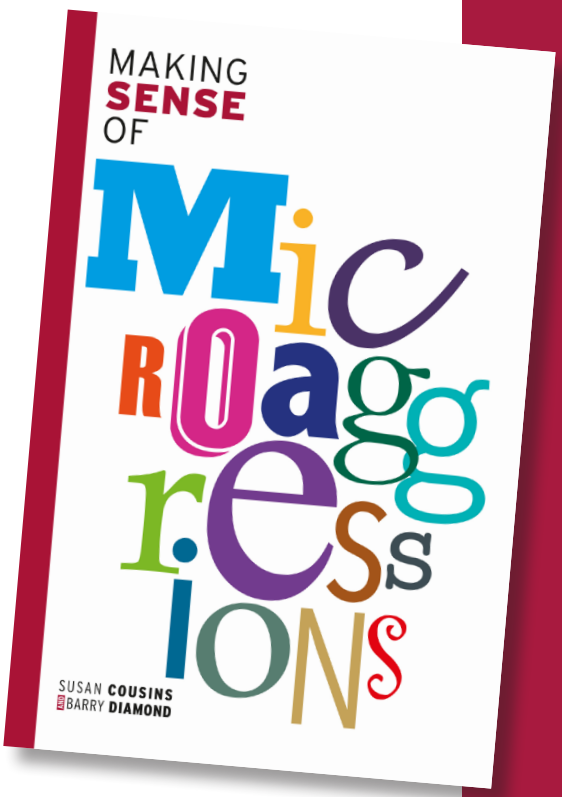
@barrydiamondtoo



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