

Microaggressions spring from and contribute to a cycle of oppression that maintains the status quo

- in the past, focus has been on overt and large-scale macroaggressions like genocide, institutional discrimination, hate speech
- but recently have started paying attention to everyday interactions that enforce the status quo: microaggressions are covert and small-scale interactions that sends hidden, disrespectful messages to members of marginalized groups, while also marking them as targets for other forms of violence (Pierce 1970, Sue 2010, McClure 2020)
- microinsults make some stereotyped feature of your social identity overly salient—e.g. saying to a woman “You’re not like other girls”
- microinvalidations treat you like you’re not in the room

Examples that have become obvious (Nadal 2013, Rini 2021):

- “That’s so gay” (hidden message: it’s weird/wrong to be gay)
- “No homo”
 - harms via internalization, tacit approval of homophobic violence, erasure
 - seems okay to say if don’t know anyone who’s gay
 - fell out of use once people realized that they had gay friends, family, colleagues

Examples that are still obscure (Weekes and Bain 2020, Tremain *Biopolitical Philosophy*):

- “That’s crazy” (hidden message: it’s dangerous/wrong to be mentally ill)
- “That’s lame” (hidden message: it’s bad/anti-social to be physically disabled)
 - harms via internalization, tacit approval of anti-disability violence, erasure
 - seems okay to say if don’t know anyone who’s disabled
 - remains common because people don’t realize they have disabled friends, family, colleagues

How do we improve these everyday exclusions?

- individual duty to imagine “those people” in “our” spaces—choosing our words with care
- communal duty to make spaces accessible by reducing stigma, allowing open discussion, providing material supports so it’s safe for oppressed people to make our presence known

Works Cited:

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