

Microaggression

Sara C. StimsonRiahi M.D., F.A.A.P., F.A.C.P.

Internal Medicine& Pediatrics Board Certified

Academic Hospitalist and Ambulatory Faculty

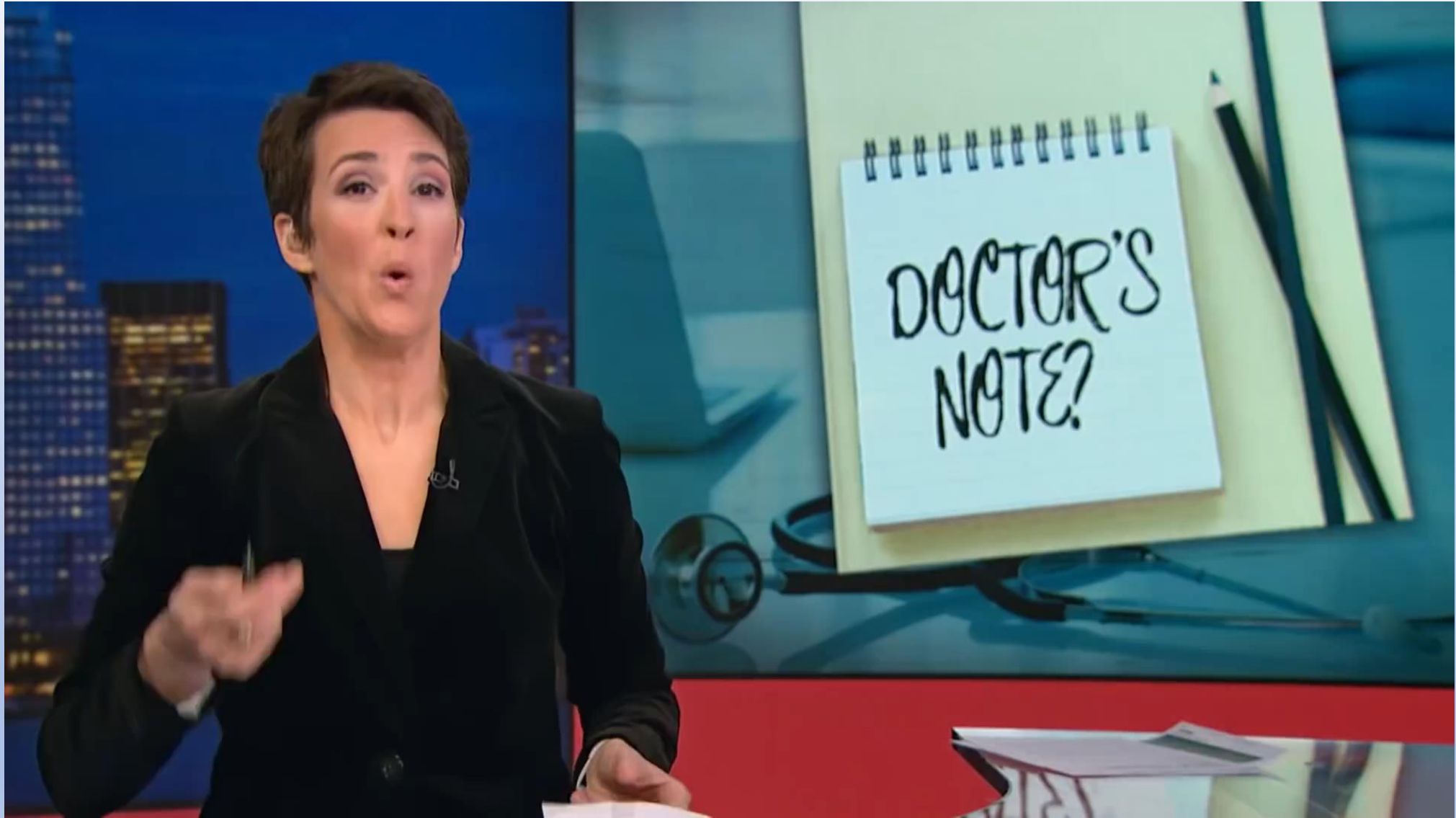
Banner-University Medical Center Phoenix Campus Internal Medicine

University of Arizona Clinical Assistant Professor of Medicine

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Objectives:

- Learn about microaggressions
- Recognize microaggressions and the messages they send
- Understand the consequences of microaggressions
- Recognize how we give microaggressions power
- Learn how to overcome microaggressions



“Racial Microaggressions”

- Term coined by Chest Pierce in the 1970s
- Referring to everyday subtle and often automatic “put-downs” and insults directed toward Black Americans
- Focused solely on race

The Changing Face of Racism

- Overt forms of racism have declined
- Morphed into a more contemporary and insidious form that hides in our cultural assumptions/beliefs/values, in our institutional policies and practices, and in the deeper psychological recesses of our individual psyches
- Become invisible, subtle, and more indirect, operating below the level of conscious awareness, and continuing to oppress in unseen ways

The Changing Face of Racism

- Messages often contain multiple meanings
- Metacommunication – hidden message
- Example:
 - “I mean, you got the first mainstream African American who is articulate and bright and clean and a nice-looking guy. I mean, that’s a story-book, man.”
Joe Biden
- Such a racial microaggression allows the perpetrator to acknowledge and praise a person of color, but also allows him or her to express group stereotypes

Microaggressions - Defined

- Brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial, gender, sexual-orientation, and religious slights and insults to the target person or group
- Perpetrators are usually unaware that they have engaged in an exchange that demeans the recipient
- Simply stated, microaggressions are brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to certain individuals because of their group membership

Targets of Microaggressions

- Can be expressed toward any marginalized group in our society:
 - Race
 - Gender
 - Sexual orientation
 - Class
 - Disability
 - Religion
 - Age

**EXIST ON THE MARGINS
(LOWER OR OUTER LIMITS) OF
SOCIAL DESIRABILITY AND
CONSCIOUSNESS**

Microaggressions

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graph TD; A[Microaggressions] --> B[Verbal]; A --> C[Nonverbal]; A --> D[Environmental]; B --- E["Microinsult – often unconscious<br/>Microassault – often conscious<br/>Microinvalidation – often unconscious"]; C --- E; D --- E;
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Verbal

Nonverbal

Environmental

Microinsult – often *unconscious*

Microassault – often conscious

Microinvalidation – often *unconscious*

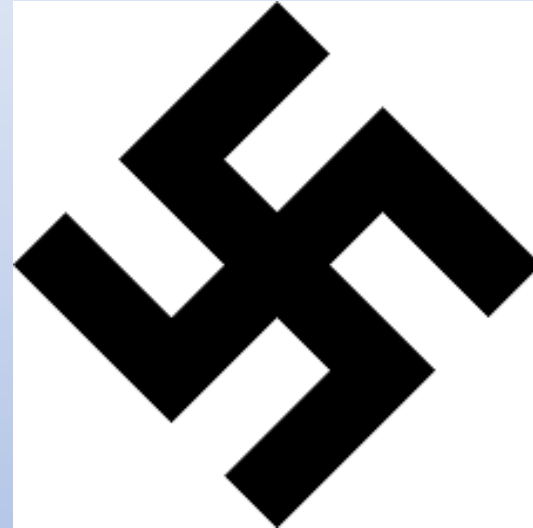
Forms of Microaggressions

MICROASSAULTS

- ***Conscious, deliberate***, and either subtle or explicit racial, gender, or sexual-orientation biased attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors that are communicated to marginalized groups through environmental cues, verbalizations, or behaviors
- Meant to attack the group identity of the person or to hurt/harm the intended victim through name-calling, avoidant behavior, or purposeful discriminatory actions
- Intent - to threaten, intimidate, and make the individuals or groups feel unwanted and unsafe because they are inferior, subhuman, and lesser beings that do not belong on the same levels as others in this society

Microassaults

Nonverbal Forms



Verbal Forms

- Referring to Japanese Americans as “Japs”

Forms of Microaggressions

MICROINSULTS

- Characterized by interpersonal or environmental communications that conveys stereotypes, rudeness, and insensitivity and that demean a person's racial, gender, or sexual orientation, heritage, or identity
- Represents subtle snubs, frequently ***outside the conscious awareness*** of the perpetrator, but they convey an oftentimes hidden insulting message to the recipient of these three groups

Microinsults

- Asking a Latino “Where were you born?”
 - Implies: You are not American
- Use of the pronoun “he” to refer to all people
 - Implies: Male experience is universal. Female experience is meaningless
- A male stranger puts his hand on a woman’s hip or on the swell of her back to pass her
 - Implies: Your body is not yours
- “When I look at you I don’t see color”
 - Denies a person of color’s racial and ethnic experiences

Forms of Microaggressions

MICROINVALIDATION

- Characterized by *unconscious* communications or environmental cues that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feeling, or experiential reality of certain groups, such as people of color, women and LGBTs
- Directly and insidiously deny the racial, gender, or sexual-orientation reality of these groups

Microinvalidation

- Saying to a Latino person “If you don’t like it here, go back to Mexico.”
 - Implies: One’s allegiance is to another country
- Saying “I have nothing against interracial marriages, but I worry about the children.”
 - Implies: The only reason that I have hesitations about interracial relationships is concern about the offspring and it has nothing to do with my personal bias
- Saying “Everyone has an equal chance in this society.”
 - Implies: Racism, sexism, and heterosexism is of little importance in an individual’s success

Different Context of Racism...

Types of Racism

Institutional

- Any policy, practice, procedure, or structure in business, industry, government, courts, churches, municipalities, schools by which the decisions and actions are made that unfairly subordinate persons of marginalized groups allowing other groups to profit from the outcomes
 - Profiling
 - Segregated churches and neighborhoods
 - Discriminatory hiring
 - Educational curricula that ignore and distort the history of minorities

Types of Racism

Cultural

- Individual and institutional expression of the superiority of one group's cultural heritage over another group's, and the power to impose those standards upon another group
 - Native American's not being allowed to practice their religion or speak their native tongues

Types of Racism

Aversive Racism

- 1996 – Dovidio and Gaertner
- Unconscious
- Theory: It is difficult for anyone born in the United States to be immune from inheriting biases
- People truly believe they are nonprejudiced and would never consciously discriminate, but they, nevertheless, harbor *unconscious biased attitudes* that may result in discriminatory actions

Directed at Particular Groups...

Sexism

A form of aversive racism that comes from well-intentioned men who believe in gender equality and would never deliberately discriminate against women

- Examples
 - Assuming that the male resident is the attending physician when the attending is female
 - Professional women are called by their first names instead of their professional names whereas men are called "Doctor"
- Implied messages
 - Women are weak, dependent, and need help
 - Male experience is universal

Latin

Not a racial designator, but an ethnic one

Latinas/Latinos may come from any racial category

They are varied and diverse in customs, traditions, cultures

- Perceived stereotypes are
 - Illegal aliens, drug dealers and lazy
 - Often believed by others to be less warm and less competent
 - Unwanted and unskilled newcomers
- Examples
 - Assuming that a Latin male works as a day-laborer

Asian American

Constitute approximately 4% of the US population

Over 40 distinct subgroups differing in language, religion and values

- Perceived to be
 - Aliens in their own land
 - Potentially disloyal
 - Hardworking, disciplined, intelligent and enterprising somehow making them immune to discrimination
- Example
 - Complimenting an Asian American for speaking English well when they were born and raised in the United States
- Implied message
 - Only Whites are true “Americans”

Native American

Highly heterogeneous group and represent less than 1% of the population, with over 500 distinct tribes

- Perceived to be
 - Alcoholics
 - Nonverbal
 - Savages or primitive
- Examples

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American Indian Patient's Self-Reported Experiences with Microaggressions in Healthcare Settings

My healthcare provider...	% Yes
Avoided discussing or addressing cultural issues	17.1%
Sometimes was insensitive about my cultural group when trying to understand or treat my issues	17.3%
Seemed to deny having any cultural biases or stereotypes	18.0%
At times seemed to over-identify with my experiences related to my race or culture	16.0%
At times seemed to have stereotypes about my cultural group, even if he or she did not express them directly	21.8%
Sometimes minimized the importance of cultural issues	20.2%

Heterosexism

Belief and attitude that

- All people are/or should be heterosexual
- It is more desirable to be heterosexual
- It represents the norm of both gender identity and sexual attraction
- Examples
 - Using disparaging terms such as queer to describe something abnormal
 - “Don’t ask, Don’t tell”
 - Assuming an attractive woman is heterosexual

The Shoe on the Other Foot...



STOP. And think about it...

- Have I ever said anything like that?
- Each communication that we enter into is loaded with the baggage that we have piled up and carried around for years.
- This comes from our parents, families, exposures, friends, circumstances, failures, successes...etc.
- Our vantage points in communication interactions are tunneled and blinded by our past experiences.
- Another example...

Henry Louis Gates, Jr.



- Renowned African-American scholar and professor at Harvard University
- 2009
- Returned from China where he was filming a documentary for PBS *Faces of America* and was driven back to his Cambridge house
- For some reason the door to his home was jammed, and he asked the driver, a dark-skinned Moroccan, to help force it open
- A 911 caller reported two men suspiciously forcing open the door to a house
- A White Sergeant arrived first on the scene
- Both Gates and the Sergeant give differing accounts...

A medium shot of Henry Louis Gates Jr. speaking on a news program. He is wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and dark tie. The background is a blurred cityscape at night. A red banner is at the bottom of the frame.

RACIAL INJUSTICE?
HENRY LOUIS GATES SPEAKS OUT

- Both men are operating from their different experiential realities
- For Gates, his life has probably been filled with many incidents of racial microaggressions that have been continuous and cumulative
- How do we begin to understand the individual realities of one another?

Perspective

Black Americans believe racism is a constant and continuing reality in their lives, while most Whites seem to minimize it.

Some statistics...

Perspective

- When asked how much discrimination still exists against Blacks, only 10% of Whites said “a lot”, while 57% of Blacks said “a lot”
- 60% of Blacks described encountering discrimination and prejudice when applying for jobs, 50% reported incidents during shopping or dining out, and many stated that it was a common occurrence to hear derogatory racial comments
- Over 50% of Whites believe that people of color have achieved equality and that most are doing better than they really are
- 76% of Whites believe that Blacks receive equal treatment, while less than 50% of Blacks believe so
- 2/3 of people of color say that White Americans believe they are superior, entitled to control others, insensitive to race issues, and reluctant to share power and wealth with minorities

Perspective

- A Mother's Story
- We cannot invalidate the experiential realities of diverse groups in our society.
- Be aware that privilege and power oftentimes makes it difficult to see the perspectives of those who experience discrimination and prejudice in their day to day lives

No one is immune from inheriting the biases of the society... all citizens are exposed to a social conditioning process that imbues within them prejudices, stereotypes, and beliefs that lie outside their level of awareness.

BLIND SPOTS



Response to a Microaggressive Stressors

1. Biological: Direct physiological reactions (blood pressure, heart rate, etc) or changes in the immune system; i.e. higher fibrinogen levels
2. Cognitive: Places in motion a cognitive appraisal involving thoughts and beliefs about the meaning of the stressor
3. Emotional: Anger, rage, anxiety, depression, or hopelessness
4. Behavioral: The coping strategies or behavioral reactions utilized by the individual may either enhance adjustment or make the situation worse

Consequences of Microaggressions

1. Assail the mental health of recipients, causing anger, frustration, low self-esteem, and emotional turmoil
2. Create a hostile and invalidating campus or work climate
3. Perpetuate stereotype threat
4. Create physical health problems
5. Saturate the broader society with cues that signal devaluation of social group identities
6. Lower work productivity and problem-solving abilities

There Can Be Positive Outcomes...

Teaching marginalized groups how to recognize microaggressions

- Reduces confusion and uncertainty
- Allows them to practice coping skills
- Helps to maintain self-esteem
- Heighten sense of perceptual awareness
- Ability to accurately read nonverbal and contextual cues
- Enhance cultural flexibility
- Offers a sense of group identity

IRONICALLY, HATE CRIMES ARE ILLEGAL, BUT
MICROAGGRESSIONS ARE NOT.

Power of Microaggressions

As long as microaggressions remain hidden, invisible, unspoken, and excused as innocent slights with minimal harm, we will continue to insult, demean, alienate, and oppress marginalized groups.

Overcoming Microaggressions:

1. Defining microaggressions – must begin with a cognitive and intellectual understanding of their manifestations and impact
2. Recognizing microaggressions – appropriate intervention can only occur when microaggressions are recognized in the *here and now*
 - **Self-monitoring** - being open to exploring the possibility that you have acted in a biased fashion, and controlling defensiveness are crucial to recognizing when you have been guilty of a microaggression
3. Deconstructing the Hidden Meaning of Microaggressions

Closing Points

- Pay closer attention to the words that you use and those that the people around you use
- Challenge yourself to call to attention when a microaggression occurs
- Become aware of your values, biases, and assumptions about human behavior – your worldview... and the experiential realities of other groups – their worldviews.

The Way Forward



Resources

1. Sue, Derald Wing. *Microaggressions in Everyday Life. Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation*. Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons, 2010. Print.
2. Sue, Derald Wing. *Microaggressions and Marginality. Manifestations, Dynamics, and Impact*. Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons, 2010. Print.
3. Banaji, Mahzarin R. and Greenwald, Anthony G. *Blindspot. Hidden Biases of Good People*. New York: Delacorte Press, 2013. Print.
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5. Tool: Recognizing Microaggressions and the Messages They Send. Diversity in the Classroom, UCLA Diversity & Faculty Development, 2014.

Thank you!