



# MICROAGGRESSIONS

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# Introduction

Dr. Robinson

- Community-based social worker for 21 years working with marginalized populations
- African American, Latina, Indigenous incarcerated women, teen parents
- Low-income communities
- Served women, youth and families through nonprofit organizations and public schools in Kalamazoo, Ann Arbor, and Southwest Detroit.
- Research focus: healing and resilience; post-traumatic growth after adverse childhood experiences; physical and mental wellbeing among African Americans, flourishing.



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# Overview

- What are microaggressions?
- Why is this important?
  - Impact
- Microintervention strategies
- Practice Intervening

# Microaggressions

Dr. Chester Middlebrook Pierce (1970)

- Harvard Professor of Psychiatry
- Coined racial microaggressions
  - Based on his observations of daily and cumulative injuries experienced by African Americans
- Subtle, cumulative mini assaults

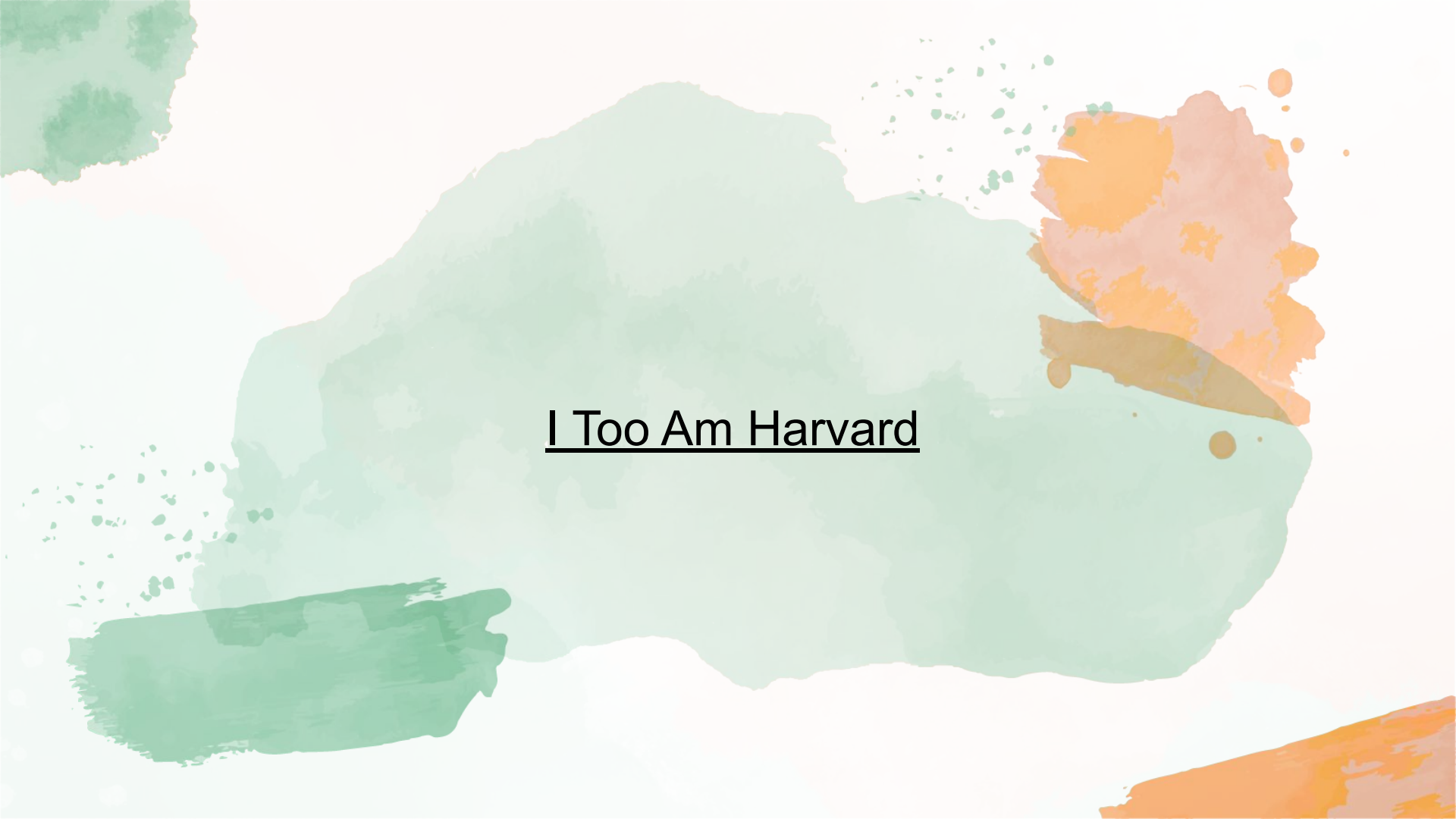


# Microaggressions

Brief, commonplace verbal, behavioral or environmental indignities that communicate hostile, derogatory or negative slights and insults towards marginalized people

May be intentional or unintentional

(Sue et al., 2010)



I Too Am Harvard

# *Racism/Sexism vs. Microaggressions*

## Isms...

- Overt
- Fostered by institutional power and systems - i.e. schools, courts, government
- Intentional based on overt beliefs

## Microaggressions

- Rooted in implicit bias
  - Based on underlying beliefs
- Often unintentional
- Subtle
- May be well-meaning
- Fostered by stereotypes, family, friends, media and other sources that influence how we see the world

# *Contexts of microaggressions*

- Racial
- Gender
- LGBTQ+
- Academic/Institutional - hierarchy
- Geographic/Economic
- Ability
  - Physical
  - Cognitive
  - Mental health
- Health and others...



# Types of Microaggressions

**Microassault:** a verbal or nonverbal attack meant to hurt the intended victim through name-calling, avoidant behavior, or purposeful discriminatory actions

**Microinsult:** Communications that convey rudeness and insensitivity and demean a person's racial heritage or identity

**Microinvalidation:** Communications that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of an individual

# *Microaggression Themes*

1. Assumption of intellectual inferiority
2. Second-class citizenship/Alien in one's own land
3. Assumption of criminality
4. Assumption of inferior status
5. Pathologizing cultural values or communication styles
6. Color-blindness - I don't see your race
7. Myth of Meritocracy - race doesn't matter for success
8. Gender role bias
9. Sexual objectification
10. Abnormality - something wrong with being LGBTQ+

# Microaggression Dilemmas

**Dilemma I: Clash of Realities:** Differing perspectives b/w races, genders, identities

**Dilemma II: The invisibility of unintentional expressions of bias.**

**Dilemma III: Perceived minimal harm of microaggressions** The perpetrator or others believe one who complains to be oversensitive.

**Dilemma IV: The Catch-22 of responding**

- To respond is to open oneself up to criticism, retaliation, isolation, irritation, annoyance
- To not respond is to leave oneself vulnerable to self-criticism, anxiety, sleeplessness, depression, unresolved anger, non-authenticity, etc.

# Small Sights, Cumulative Effect

- Often MA's are overlooked as small slights
- Cumulative effect is LARGE and can be detrimental to physical and mental health
- Like a woodpecker pecking away at a tree

# *Impact of microaggressions*

- Many people (scholars included) feel that MA do not exist
- Detrimental effects on psychological wellbeing
- Loss of ambition, productivity and hope
- Mental health symptoms
  - Depression
  - Anxiety
  - Chronic psychological distress
  - Impede learning and problem solving
- Job Performance

Jane Elliot and Racism

# Why Are People Silent?

- Microaggressions and implicit bias are often subtle and seemingly invisible
- Microassaults/insults have been trivialized as innocuous
- The belief that antiracism is not their fight
  - I feel badly, but it's someone else's job to fix it
- Fear of attack, retaliation, or other repercussions
  - Social, professional, or political
- Not knowing WHAT to do
- Battle fatigue/emotional turmoil of constant fighting



# *Group Discussion*



If Microaggressions Happened  
to White People



The background features a soft, watercolor-style wash of light green and pale yellow. Overlaid on this are several larger, more vibrant splashes of color: a large, textured green splash in the center, a bright orange splash in the upper right, and a dark green brushstroke at the bottom left. Small, scattered dots of green and orange are also visible, adding to the artistic, hand-painted feel.

*So, What do I Do?*

## Self-Awareness

- **Be intentional.** Start observing microaggressions around you and from you
- **Practice.** Be mindful about how you speak and THINK
- **Accept responsibility** for when your well-intentioned comment is perceived as microaggressive and commit to doing better
- **Invite others** to correct you
- **Don't take offense or defend.** State your intention and apologize
- It may be help to **ask for insight**

# *Strategies and Tactics to Address Microaggressions*

Practical strategies to share with clients, employees, students, communities and other stakeholders

1. Make the invisible visible
2. Educate perpetrators and stakeholders
3. Disarm microaggressions
4. Use external supports and alliances

The background features abstract watercolor splashes in shades of green and orange. A large, light green splash is the central focus, with smaller green splashes scattered around it. To the right, there are orange and reddish-orange splashes, and a dark green brushstroke is visible at the bottom left. The overall style is soft and artistic.

# How to Deal with Racist Jokes

The background features a soft, watercolor-style wash of light green and pale yellow. Overlaid on this are several larger, more textured splashes of color: a large, irregular green shape in the center, a smaller orange splash to its right, and a dark green horizontal brushstroke at the bottom left. Scattered throughout are small, delicate green and orange dots, giving the overall composition a hand-painted, artistic feel.

# *Microinterventions*

# 3 *Types of Microinterventions*

1. **Microaffirmations**
2. **Microprotections**
3. **Microchallenges**

# Microaffirmations

Small acts that validate and affirm a person's humanity, identities (i.e. racial/cultural/gender etc.), experiential reality, and worth or value

Make a person feel welcomed, seen, heard, respected, valued, supported, and affirmed

*i.e. compliments; supports; validations*

*(Sue et al., 2020)*

# Microprotections

Everyday actions from parents, significant others, or influential figures that

- a. teach the young to understand the reality discrimination and microaggressions
- b. send messages or engage in actions that promote pride
- c. equip them with tools to deal with bias and discrimination

*i.e. racial literacy/critical consciousness*

*(Sue et al., 2020)*



# Microchallenges

Direct actions that challenge and attempt to disarm, end, neutralize, or deflect the biased behavior or policy.

They are much more forceful and confrontational forms to combat discrimination and bias

*i.e. engaging in civil disobedience or social advocacy*

*(Sue et al., 2020)*

The background features abstract watercolor splashes in shades of green and orange. A large, light green splash is the central focus, with smaller, darker green splashes scattered around it. To the right, there are several orange and reddish-orange splashes of varying sizes. The overall style is soft and artistic.

# 5 Tips for How to Be an Ally



*Let's Practice*

# References

1. Sue, D. W., Calle, C. Z., Mendez, N., Alsaidi, S., & Glaeser, E. (2020). *Microintervention Strategies: What You Can Do to Disarm and Dismantle Individual and Systemic Racism and Bias*. John Wiley & Sons.
2. Sue, D. W. (2010). *Microaggressions in everyday life : Race, gender, and sexual orientation*. Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley.

## YouTube Video Links:

- I Too Am Harvard: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=85JVcniE\\_M](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=85JVcniE_M)
- Nicole's View (2017, October 28). Get in the know!: The unapologetic Mrs. Jane Elliott [Video]. YouTube.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gwGVSnjCV6E>
- Microaggressions Against White People:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KPRA4g-3uEk>
- How to Handle Racist Jokes: <https://youtu.be/Bq1aTLsS69Y>
- 5 Tips for Being an Ally: [https://youtu.be/\\_dg86g-QIM0](https://youtu.be/_dg86g-QIM0)

The background features a white canvas with several watercolor-style brushstrokes. A large, horizontal orange stroke is the central focus, with the text 'THANK YOU!' written in a dark green, hand-drawn font across it. Other brushstrokes in shades of light green and teal are scattered around the edges, creating a soft, artistic feel.

THANK YOU!