

An Overview of Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity & Expression (SOGIE) Microaggressions

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Shared via the Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals lgbtcampus.org

1) Use of heterosexist or transphobic terminology:

These types of microaggressions occur when someone uses disparaging heterosexist or transphobic language towards, or about, LGBTQ persons. For me, it is anytime someone says “That’s so gay” and “No homo” in my presence; for my transgender friends, it could be anytime someone says “tranny”, “she-male”, or other derogatory terms. In hip hop, it is common for rappers to unapologetically use the word “faggot”, which then gives permission for kids to use the term unapologetically in everyday life. Maybe this is why 9 out of 10 LGBTQ high school students report experiencing harassment at school and why 2/3 of them say they feel unsafe (Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network, 2010).

2) Endorsement of heteronormative culture and behaviors:

These kinds of microaggressions take place when an LGBTQ person is assumed to be heterosexual, or when they are encouraged to act in gender-conforming ways. I know that I’ve been told that I shouldn’t be so flamboyant or that I should act “more masculine”. As a child, my family forced me to play sports, yet sighed when I played with Barbie. As a young adult, when someone asked me “if I had a girlfriend” or “a wife or kids”, they were essentially telling me that they expected me to be heterosexual. Heterosexuals don’t realize that it is common for them to assume someone is straight, unless proven otherwise.

3) Assumption of universal LGBTQ experience:

These sorts of microaggressions transpire when heterosexual people assume that all LGBTQ persons are the same. For instance, sometimes, people tell me I’m not “a typical gay guy” because of some stereotype I don’t fulfill; other times, people assume that I would automatically get along with another gay guy simply because we are attracted to the same

gender. Lesbian women have reported that people presume that they should all be masculine, while bisexual people have reported that they are often stereotyped as being “confused” (Nadal, Issa, et al., 2011). Many transgender women have reported being arrested and falsely accused of being sex workers (Nadal et al., 2012), demonstrating that these biases and microaggressions could even have legal implications.

4) Discomfort or disapproval of LGBTQ experience:

These types of microaggressions include instances when LGBTQ people are treated with awkwardness, condemnation, or both. This takes place any time a couple looks at my fiancée and me in disgust as we hold hands in public. It also occurs when people proclaim that my sexual orientation is “an abomination” or that a transgender person’s gender identity is “unnatural.” One recent example of this in the media is the story of a [transgender scientist](#) who was outed and ridiculed for her gender identity by a journalist. While the article was supposed to focus on one of her inventions, the writer chose to instead focus the article on her gender identity. While instances like this may occur for many LGBTQ people, this story is especially tragic because the transgender woman who was targeted eventually committed suicide.

5) Assumption of sexual pathology or abnormality:

These microaggressions come about when heterosexual people consider LGBTQ people to be sexual deviants or overly sexual. One example of this on a systemic level is the [federal ban](#) for any man who has had sex with another man to donate blood. So even if a man is HIV-negative and has been in a monogamous relationship all of his life, he is considered to be at risk and therefore an ineligible donor. In the media, an example includes one time when [Paris Hilton](#) said that gay men are “disgusting” and “probably have AIDS” or recently when [The Bachelor](#) said that gay people were “more ‘pervert’ in a sense.” In everyday life, a common occurrence is when people assume that LGBTQ people would be child molesters and are wary about LGBTQ teachers or babysitters. Anytime that any straight man assumes that I would hit on them, not only are they mistakenly flattering themselves, they are communicating that they think that all gay men can’t keep their hands to themselves.

6) Denial of bodily privacy:

These kinds of microaggressions occur toward transgender people primarily and include interactions in which others feel entitled or comfortable to objectify transgender bodies. For instance, when [Katie Couric](#) recently asked Carmen Carrera about her genitals, she inappropriately and invasively asked a question that would never been asked toward a cisgender person (i.e., a person whose gender identity matches their birth sex). How would you feel if someone asked you about your genitalia on national television?

Why does this matter?

All of these microaggressions have a significant impact on people's lives. While some of these experiences may seem brief and harmless, **many studies have found that the more that people experience microaggressions, the more likely they are to report symptoms of depression, psychological distress, and even physical health issues.** For instance, I recently published a study that found that the more racial microaggressions that people of color experience, the more likely they are to also report depressive symptoms and a negative view of the world (Nadal et al., 2014). In another study, LGBTQ participants described that when they experienced microaggressions, they felt depressed, anxious, and even traumatized (Nadal, Wong, et al., 2011). Furthermore, given that LGBTQ youth are known to have a higher prevalence of substance abuse, homelessness, and suicide (see Nadal, 2013 for a review), it is even more important for us to try to minimize microaggressions and make the world a better place for them.