

# Interrupting Microaggressions

By Greta Kenney

MICROAGGRESSION EXAMPLE AND THEME	THIRD PARTY INTERVENTION EXAMPLE	COMMUNICATION APPROACH
<p><b>Alien in One's Own Land</b></p> <p>To a Latino American: "Where are you from?"</p> <p><b>Ascription of Intelligence</b></p> <p>To an Asian person, "You're all good in math, can you help me with this problem?"</p> <p><b>Color Blindness</b></p> <p>"I don't believe in race."</p>	<p>"I'm just curious. What makes you ask that?"</p> <p>"I heard you say that all Asians are good in math. What makes you believe that?"</p> <p>"So, what do you believe in? Can you elaborate?"</p>	<p><b>INQUIRE</b></p> <p>Ask the speaker to elaborate. This will give you more information about where s/he is coming from, and may also help the speaker to become aware of what s/he is saying.</p> <p><b>KEY PHRASES:</b>                      "Say more about that."                      "Can you elaborate on your point?"                      "It sounds like you have a strong opinion about this. Tell me why."                      "What is it about this that concerns you the most?"</p>
<p><b>Myth of Meritocracy</b></p> <p>"Everyone can succeed in this society, if they work hard enough."</p> <p><b>Pathologizing Cultural Values/Communication Styles</b></p> <p>Asking a Black person: "Why do you have to be so loud/animated? Just calm down."</p>	<p>"So you feel that everyone can succeed in this society if they work hard enough. Can you give me some examples?"</p> <p>"It appears you were uncomfortable when ____ said that. I'm thinking that there are many styles to express ourselves. How we can honor all styles of expression—can we talk about that?"</p>	<p><b>PARAPHRASE/REFLECT</b></p> <p>Reflecting in one's own words the essence of what the speaker has said. Paraphrasing demonstrates understanding and reduces defensiveness of both you and the speaker. Restate briefly in your own words, rather than simply parroting the speaker. Reflect both content and feeling whenever possible.</p> <p><b>KEY PHRASES:</b>                      "So, it sounds like you think..." "You're saying...You believe..."</p>
<p><b>Second-Class Citizen</b></p> <p>You notice that your female colleague is being frequently interrupted during a committee meeting.</p> <p><b>Pathologizing Cultural Values/Communication Styles</b></p> <p>To a woman of color: "I would have never guessed that you were a scientist."</p>	<p>Responder addressing the group: "____ brings up a good point. I didn't get a chance to hear all of it. Can ____ repeat it?"</p> <p>"I'm wondering what message this is sending her. Do you think you would have said this to a white male?"</p>	<p><b>REFRAME</b></p> <p>Create a different way to look at a situation.</p> <p><b>KEY PHRASES:</b>                      "What would happen if..."                      "Could there be another way to look at this..."                      "Let's reframe this..."                      "How would you feel if this happened to your ____..."</p>

<p><b>Second-Class Citizen</b></p> <p>Saying “You people....”</p> <p><b>Use of Heterosexist Language</b></p> <p>Saying “That’s so gay.”</p>	<p>“I was so upset by that remark that I shut down and couldn’t hear anything else.”</p> <p>“When I hear that remark, I’m offended too, because I feel that it marginalizes an entire group of people that I work with.”</p>	<p><b>USE IMPACT AND “I” STATEMENTS</b></p> <p>A clear, nonthreatening way to directly address these issues is to focus on oneself rather than on the person. It communicates the impact of a situation while avoiding blaming or accusing the other and reduces defensiveness.</p> <p><b>KEY PHRASES:</b></p> <p>“I felt _____ (feelings) when you said or did _____ (comment or behavior), and it _____ (describe the impact on you).”</p>
<p><b>Second-Class Citizen</b></p> <p>A woman who is talked over.</p> <p>Making a racist, sexist or homophobic joke.</p>	<p>She responds: “I would like to participate, but I need you to let me finish my thought.”</p> <p>“I didn’t think this was funny. I would like you to stop.”</p>	<p><b>USE PREFERENCE STATEMENTS</b></p> <p>Clearly communicating one’s preferences rather than stating them as demands or having others guess what is needed.</p> <p><b>KEY PHRASES:</b></p> <p>“What I’d like is...”</p> <p>“It would be helpful to me if...”</p>

Adapted from Kenney, G. (2014). Interrupting Microaggressions, College of the Holy Cross, Diversity Leadership & Education. Accessed on-line, October 2014. Kraybill, R. (2008). “Cooperation Skills,” in Armster, M. and Amstutz, L., (Eds.), Conflict Transformation and Restorative Justice Manual, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition, pp. 116-117. LeBaron, M. (2008). “The Open Question,” in Armster, M. and Amstutz, L., (Eds.), Conflict Transformation and Restorative Justice Manual, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition, pp. 123-124. Peavey, F. (2003). “Strategic Questions as a Tool for Rebellion,” in Brady, M., (Ed.), The Wisdom of Listening, Boston: Wisdom Publ., pp. 168-189.