

*Microaggressions in
everyday life: The
American Jewish experience*

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Purpose of Presentation

- Describe the manifestations of microaggressions against American Jews
- Explain how microaggressions affect the lives of American Jews
- Explain how American Jews rely on their cultural and religious identity for coping with stress and trauma

Antisemitism or Anti-Semitism

- Anti-Semitism first coined by Wilhelm Marr in 1879 to express anti-Jewish feelings
- Many now use “antisemitism” to prevent co-opting of this word for anything other than its original intent: Jew-hatred
- For example, some Arab groups claim they cannot be “anti-Semitic” since they themselves are Semitic
- Hence, eliminating the hyphen takes the focus away from the term “Semitic”

American Jews or Jewish Americans

- Emphasizes the primacy of being Jewish through use of *American* as a descriptor of *Jew*
- Acknowledges the nomadic heritage of Jews as a Diaspora people who often needed to flee when antisemitism reached dangerous levels
- Of course, within-group differences exist, and some may prefer Jewish American

Microaggressions against American Jews

- Racial microaggressions against People of Color are one way in which racism manifests on a daily basis (Sue et al., 2007)
- Microaggressions against American Jews are one way in which antisemitism manifests on a daily basis (Schlosser, 2008)
- Three forms of Microaggressions:
 - Microassaults
 - Microinsults
 - Microinvalidations

Being excluded in the literature – Another microaggression

- Sue et al. specifically excludes the experience of peoples' other marginalized identities
- Jews have been frequently ignored in the multicultural literature (Langman, 1995, 1999; Schlosser, 2006)
- Sue et al. list “Displaying a swastika” as a Microassault
- Need to describe the experience of American Jews in terms of microaggressions

Ascription of Intelligence

- Assigning intelligence to a person of color on the basis of their race
 - “You are a credit to your race.”
 - Asking an Asian person to help with a math or science problem.
- Assigning intelligence to a Jew because of their Jewish identity
 - “You need to get yourself a Jewish lawyer”
 - NYCD “Rabbis”
- Jews were the first model minority

Second Class Citizens

- Occurs when a White person is given preferential treatment as a consumer over a person of color
 - Having a taxi cab pass a person of color and pick up a White passenger
- Occurs when (a) Christians are given preferential treatment over Jews and/or (b) Jews are not seen as an ethnic minority group
 - Examples of Christian privilege
 - Discounting of Jewish identity during multicultural dialogues

Pathologizing Cultural Values

- The notion that the values and communication styles of the dominant/White culture are ideal
 - Asking a Black person: “Why do you have to be so loud/animated? Just calm down.”
- The notion that the values and communication styles of the dominant/White culture are ideal
 - Telling a Jew that she or he is pushy
 - Jewish women seen as a “JAP” or Jewish mother.
 - Jewish men seen as intelligent, neurotic, weak, and effeminate.

Assumptions

- Assumption of Criminal Status
- A person of color is presumed to be dangerous, criminal, or deviant on the basis of their race
 - A store owner following a customer of color around the store
 - A White person waits to ride the next elevator when a person of color is on it
- Assumption of wealth, power, and control
- Jews are presumed to be rich and controlling the U.S. banks, media, and Hollywood
 - Jews are simultaneously wealthy and miserly
 - Jews are seen as secretly plotting to take over the world

Alien in own land

- Alien in own land
- When Asian Americans and Latino Americans are assumed to be foreign-born
 - “Where were you born?”
 - “You speak good English.”
 - A person asking an Asian American to teach them words in their native language
- Jews as traitors/disloyal because part of Jewish nation/assumed allegiance to Israel
 - Simultaneously asserting that Jews don’t belong in the US and that they don’t have a claim to Israel
 - JFK and Joe Lieberman

Invisibility of Judaism

- Color Blindness
- Statements that indicate a White person does not want to acknowledge race
 - “When I look at you, I don’t see color.”
 - “America is a melting pot.”
 - “There is only one race, the human race.”
- Invisibility of Jewish identity/assumptions of being able to identify Jews
 - “You’re not Jewish – you’re white.”
 - “You look Jewish” / “You don’t look Jewish.”
 - Oppression Olympics
 - Legitimacy Testing

Myths

- Myth of meritocracy
- Statements which assert that race does not play a role in life successes
 - “I believe the most qualified person should get the job.”
 - “Everyone can succeed in this society, if they work hard enough.”
- Myth of deicide and the blood libel
- Statements that seek to perpetuate antisemitic myths
 - The Jews killed Jesus.
 - Jews used to kill Christian children for religious ceremonies

Denial

- Denial of Individual Racism
- A statement made when Whites deny their racial biases
 - “I’m not racist. I have several Black friends.”
 - “As a woman, I know what you go through as a racial minority.”
- Denial of antisemitism and the Holocaust
- A statement made when people deny their anti-Jewish biases
 - I’m not antisemitic. I have several Jewish friends.
 - As a minority, I understand how bad the Holocaust was for Jews.

Coping with Microaggressions

- Social support (e.g., family, friends, community)
- Use of humor
- Psychotherapy
- Rituals
 - Prayer
 - Holiday celebrations (e.g., Pesach)
- Social Justice Orientation
 - Tikkun Olam (e.g., Mitzvot, Tzedakah)
 - ADL, AJC

Recommendations

- Education and Training
 - Explicitly include Jews in MC courses and dialogues
 - Teach about and fight against antisemitism
- Research
 - Acknowledge Jews as ethnic group
 - Examine antisemitism and microaggressions vs. Jews
- Practice
 - Validate clients' experience of antisemitism
 - See Schlosser (2006) – *Affirmative Psychotherapy for American Jews*

Want More Information?

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