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-Semitic

- 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**
- **Invisibility of Jewish identity/assumptions of being able to identify Jews**

- 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.”

- “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
Want More Information?

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