Managing Microaggressions

**What are Microaggressions?**

Brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostility, derogation, or negative slights and insults toward minority people (Sue et al., 2007).

Demonstrated covert negative attitudes based on an aspect of cultural diversity.

**Microinsults**

Insensitive and subtle expressions (either verbal or nonverbal) that communicate derogation of people based upon minority status.

*For example...*

Making assumptions of students based on their race or ethnicity (e.g., "Are you here on an athletic scholarship?")

**Microassaults**

Intentional explicit attacks that may include verbal or nonverbal behaviors and occur in private spheres where the offenders feel some sense of safety in their expression of their beliefs.

*For example...*

Using slurs or derogatory terms for various minority groups.

**Microinvalidations**

Communications that undermine and negate the thoughts, feelings, or experience of people based upon their minority status.

*For example...*

"A friend told me that she knew what it is like to be gay because she was a religious minority. While I agree that there are aspects of minority status that may illuminate the experience of other minority groups, her comment seemed to deny the unique aspects of LGBTQ+ people to assume total understanding of my experience." It's not the same.

**How to Help**

1. *Awareness!* Be aware of your own cultural identity, including values, beliefs, and biases, and how microaggressions may occur in your own relationships (Nadal, 2008).
2. *Knowledge*—increase your knowledge by talking with others about their cultural identities and their experiences with microaggressions.
3. Practice openness, humility, curiosity, and forgiveness within your relationships. These include a willingness to be corrected, a desire to learn more, and a dedication to righting injustices as you see them (Burrow & Hill, 2012; McGoldrick, Giordano, & Garcia-Preto, 2005)

**On Campus Resources**

- Cultural Center (562.907.4962)
- Counseling Center (562.907.4239)

This and past inSTALLments can also be found at www.whittier.edu/wellnesscoalition; or sign on to My.Whittier.edu, click on Campus Life → Wellness Letter → Wellness Coalition.