

## What is Unconscious Bias? What are Microaggressions?

**Unconscious Bias:** Also known as *implicit bias*, unconscious bias refers to our attitudes, perceptions and stereotypes that influence our understanding, actions, and behavior when interacting with various identities. These preferences, which can be for or against groups, are developed through an exposure to stereotypes and misinformation informed by our upbringing and life experiences. Residing deep in the subconscious, these biases are different from known biases that individuals may choose to conceal for the purposes of social and/or political correctness.<sup>1</sup>

**Racial Microaggressions:** Subtle, verbal and nonverbal, racial insults, indignities and denigrating messages, often automatically and unconsciously, directed toward an individual(s) due to their racially marginalized identities. Usually committed by well-intentioned people who are unaware of the hidden messages committed, the impact of their statements and the unintentional connection to the institutional, interpersonal and internalized manifestations of racism.<sup>2</sup>

### Impact of Unconscious Racial Bias and Microaggressions in Schools

#### *Treatment in School Discipline*<sup>3</sup>

- African American students are punished more frequently than their white peers, although they do not exhibit more frequent and serious misbehavior, and African American students receive harsher disciplinary sanctions than their white peers for the same offenses
- White students are more likely to be disciplined for objective violations like smoking and vandalism, while African American students are more likely to be referred for subjective infractions like showing disrespect, loitering, or making excessive noise

#### *Mental and Physical Health*<sup>4</sup>

- Racial microaggressions have been found to: (a) assail the mental health of recipients, (b) create a hostile and invalidating work or campus climate, (c) create physical health problems, (d) lower work productivity and problem solving abilities
- People of color who encounter greater amounts of racial microaggressions are likely to exhibit a number of mental health issues, such as depression or negative affect as well as physical health issues such as pain or fatigue.

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity: <http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/>

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from: Sue, (2010) *Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation*

<sup>3</sup> Adapted from NAACP LDF Report, "Barriers Rooted in Race and Gender Bias Harm Educational Outcomes and Must Be Addressed" <http://www.naacpldf.org/press-release/barriers-rooted-race-and-gender-bias-harm-educational-outcomes-african-american-girls>

<sup>4</sup> Adapted from Psychology Today: "Racial Microaggressions in Everyday Life," <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/microaggressions-in-everyday-life/201010/racial-microaggressions-in-everyday-life>

### *Academic Achievement*

- Studies suggest that the impact of microaggressions affects students of color differently. For examples, Asians are viewed as the model minority and Black students and Latino students were viewed lesser than, discouraged from joining advanced level classes, and attributed unfair discipline and their lower grades to racial discrimination.

### *Self Esteem<sup>5</sup>*

- There is a strong link between positive self-esteem and better educational outcomes for African American girls.

### *Effects on Perpetrators<sup>6</sup>*

- On cognitive, emotional, behavioral and spiritual levels, research in psychology indicate that when microaggressive perpetrators become increasingly aware of their biases, they often experience debilitating emotional turmoil (guilt, fear, defensiveness), cognitive distortion and constriction - false sense of reality, and behavioral avoidance or inauthentic actions that impair relationships with marginalized individuals and/or groups.
- Microaggressions may also hinder conversations and might work to create a false sense of superiority for the individual making the comments, especially within a classroom setting.

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<sup>5</sup> Adapted from NAACP LDF Report, "Barriers Rooted in Race and Gender Bias Harm Educational Outcomes and Must Be Addressed" <http://www.naacpldf.org/press-release/barriers-rooted-race-and-gender-bias-harm-educational-outcomes-african-american-girls>

<sup>6</sup> Adapted from Psychology Today, "How does oppression (microaggressions) affect perpetrators?" <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/microaggressions-in-everyday-life/201102/how-does-oppression-microaggressions-affect>