AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

ADDRESSING RACE-BASED HATE SPEECH AND MICROAGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR IN SCHOOLS

This information is designed to help teachers respond to students who may need support. It is ***not*** *intended to be used as a diagnostic tool or to replace the use of formal assessments employed by mental health professionals. Additionally, it is important to consider individual differences, the context of the situation, and cultural and linguistic considerations.*

Teachers are encouraged to be change agents as opposed to passive bystanders when they encounter race-based hate speech, jokes, and subtle prejudice-oriented references intended to insult and harm students. Ignoring and tolerating such behavior fosters a toxic classroom culture and dynamics that could have a long-term negative impact emotionally, academically, and socially. Aside from protecting students who are targets of race-based microaggressions and hate speech, teachers need to work with students who initiate the behavior and help them learn from their inappropriate behavior.

RACE-BASED HATE SPEECH VERSUS MICROAGGRESSIONS

Race-based hate speech can take the form of verbal or non-verbal communications: through spoken or written words, bodily expressions, or facial expressions that are meant to ridicule, hurt, discriminate, single out, or not include someone because of their race. Based on implicit biases, they are sometimes unconscious perceptions of racial groups.

Race-based hate speech ranges from subtle microaggressions, which are low-key, vague, and quick interactions, to blatant name calling, bullying, or accusations. Microaggressions and race-based hate speech are similar in that they both can stem from underlying biases and perceptions; but differ in that microaggressions are unintentional faux pas whereas race-based hate speech is overt and includes intentional choices of words. They disrupt the flow of educational framework and settings because they trigger feelings of inferiority and disrupt learning experiences.

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EXAMPLES OF RACE-BASED HATE SPEECH AND MICROAGGRESSIONS

Note that many of these examples can occur in both the physical classroom and in virtual learning environments (VLEs).

RACE-BASED HATE SPEECH	MICROAGGRESSIONS
Staring, dirty looks	"I thought you liked that food."
Hateful slang words	"Isn't that a sketchy neighborhood?"
Having a "X group only party" or online gathering	"I don't see color when I think of you as my friend."
"You people"	"I think you're different from other Blacks," or, "You're not like those other Black people."
Posting hateful content on social media	Posting (or reposting) a meme, GIF, or picture online that perpetuates a racial or cultural stereotype.

WHY IT SHOULD BE ADDRESSED

It is important for educators to address race-based speech and microaggressions to promote and maintain positive school culture and climate for all students. The use of race-based microaggressions alienates students who are targeted by their peers or, in an online format, people posting anonymously. They may experience feelings of sadness, anger, isolation, fear, trauma, and/or powerlessness as a result of their racial identity being devalued by others. In particular, research studies indicate that for students of color, one's sense of belonging and connectedness are related to school culture and climate. When students of color feel marginalized by microaggressive language, they are less likely to establish supportive peer relationships, to feel motivated to participate, or to voice their perspectives during conversations in the classroom. The cumulative impact of microaggressive language may result in students of color being the targets of harassment and discrimination. It is crucial for educators to confront and engage students who use microaggressive language to foster equity and inclusion within the classroom and school environment. Students expect and deserve that educators will create a safe, welcoming, and inclusive space that facilitates classroom learning and positive peer engagement. Furthermore, research indicates that trust is an essential element within a student-teacher relationship. Educators who ignore microaggressive language could inevitably destroy any possible meaningful relationship with non-white students.

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