

## Deadnaming

Freshman Ace Weinberg has been in classes where other students have intentionally called him a name he was previously referred to as, which is known as a deadname. Weinberg tries not to get too annoyed by people deadnaming him or using the wrong pronouns. "[Their behavior] feels kind of passive aggressive," said Weinberg. "But I know maybe it's not. Maybe they just genuinely aren't understanding."

## Slurs

As a freshman, senior Lexi Singer was the only Black person among people she hung out with. These people said the n-word around her and made jokes about Singer giving them "the n-word pass." "At the time, I kind of brushed it off, but looking back, it was a really really hard time for me to accept myself for who I was," Singer said.

## Students' experiences

When students are faced with microaggressions at school, their ability to engage or they will shut down based on the perception of microaggressions.

When people experience microaggressions, it can be a lot of problems and other things.

MICROAGGR

## Combat and prevent

Victims of microaggressions can choose strategies to address microaggressions based on existing power dynamics, the setting and context of a situation, how victims feel in the moment and their relationship with the perpetrator. Below are techniques bystanders and victims can use to help perpetrators understand the impacts of their behavior and stop them from enacting microaggressions.

### Find humor

When somebody perpetrates a microaggression, a sarcastic response or a joking question from a victim can humanize the victim in the eyes of the perpetrator. This strategy can be effectively used by victims to address microaggressions because it helps perpetrators realize how outlandish their behavior is.

### Educate

Teaching perpetrators about why their behaviors are microaggressions may cause them to recognize the problem with their actions. By explaining the context behind offensive behavior, victims and bystanders can teach perpetrators why certain actions are damaging. If perpetrators learn the impact and historical ties of their actions, they may stop the harmful behavior.

### Empathize

Sharing how microaggressive behaviors can make victims feel may resonate with perpetrators. Bystanders can also share their discomfort with a comment, even if they are not related to the marginalized group being targeted. This strategy can help perpetrators understand the impact of their actions, so they can be more thoughtful about their behavior moving forward.

### Question

Asking questions is a strategy victims and bystanders can use to make perpetrators of microaggressions reflect on their behavior. Perpetrators may realize the harmfulness of their actions and the seriousness of the situation after being questioned about their behavior.



## AGGRESSIONS

### with microaggressions

Ability to learn can be compromised, education consultant Rick Wormeli said. "Students [experience] microaggressions occurring in [classes]," Wormeli said.

### Ignorance

Senior Naina Jobin enters a classroom, she is often met with people who disregard the correct pronunciation of her name, even politely corrects the mistake. "My name gets mispronounced," said Jobin. "So, I just kind of overlook it, but it's definitely a problem. I feel like I didn't really realize it until I mentioned it to other people, and they were like, 'Wait, that's really messed up.'"

### Racism

Last April, junior Olivia Zhao started a list on her phone recording times at school when she is called by the name of an Asian peer. Being the victim of a microaggression can feel isolating, Zhao said. "It's upsetting that I can realize that [the microaggression] is bad, and I have to be the victim of it, but the person doing it is so ignorant about [their actions]," Zhao said.

## Microaggressions: subtle and shameful

By Claire Satkiewicz

Opinions Editor

Informal, unprofessional and messy are a few words people have used to describe sophomore Brooke Smith's natural, afro-textured hair. While Smith has always found these comments upsetting, she recently recognized them as microaggressions.

"They would say, 'You need to straighten or put your hair back to make it formal,' and that was something that I always learned to just roll with," said Smith. "But then I realized that I should be able to wear my hair naturally and not be told that it is messy or unpresentable."

Microaggressions are statements, actions or incidents that may seem harmless on the surface, but are often rooted in harmful stereotypes and can have damaging consequences for those affected by them.

Microaggressions can be viewed as "death by a thousand

paper cuts," said Dr. Shazeen Suleman, assistant professor at University of Toronto's Department of Pediatrics.

"They might be small remarks that stem from an unconscious bias, they might be unintentional, but when you add them up, they can lead to a lot of harm," Suleman said.

Microaggressions are tied to power structures, Suleman said.

"In a school environment, power shifts moment to moment," said Suleman. "That means anybody can receive a microaggression and anybody can perpetuate it."

Smith has found it more difficult to stand up to microaggressions when they are being perpetrated by adults.

Microaggressions erode self-esteem, as harmful

comments are internalized and those insecurities can be carried on as a teenager grows up, Suleman said.

"Over time, we know that [microaggressions] can contribute to mental health concerns, like depression and anxiety, because microaggressions and cumulative-load microaggressions are a form of trauma," Suleman said.

Although Smith has been a victim of microaggressions for several years, she was not able to identify them until she brought up the topic with her mom in eighth grade.

"I didn't want to think that it was all in my head or that I'm going crazy," said Smith. "But I asked my mom, 'Is it rude if such-and-such happens?' And she was like, 'Oh, that's a microaggression.'"

According to Suleman, the best way to prevent microaggressions is to educate others on what they are and why they are harmful, and this education should happen in safe and collaborative spaces.

"You have to be able to name the problem," said Suleman. "So I think if people are not aware of structural racism and discrimination ... it's going to be really hard for people to even name what they're feeling."

Smith feels optimistic about efforts for diversity and inclusion, as spreading awareness about microaggressions will prepare students for how to handle harmful comments.

"I have younger siblings, and now that they are getting the education of what a microaggression is, I can see there's a load that I had on my shoulders that isn't necessarily on theirs," Smith said.