Microaggressions
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What are Microaggressions?
- Subtle words, cues, and/or behaviors that insult, invalidate, or exclude others
  - in spite of good intentions
  - that are easily brushed off:
    - “just kidding” or “don’t be so sensitive”
  - often cue stereotypes, labeling some as outsiders
  - Examples:
    - “No, where are you really from?” (to a person of color)
    - “That’s so gay!”
    - “That’s retarded!”

Being considered an outsider affects one’s:
- sense of belonging
- level of comfort and trust engaging with others
- performance in academics, athletics, interviews, etc.
- chances of success
- sense of personal validation
- overall health

Long-term effects:
- For members of marginalized groups, Microaggressions have been found to:
  - Increase biological/physiological stress
  - Weaken the immune system
  - Increase anxiety, depression, and other mental disorders
  - Disrupt and diminish cognitive functioning
  - Create a hostile environment of “cultural mistrust” and hyper-vigilance leading to compromised health and well-being
  - Over the course of a lifetime, can cause higher mortality rates for members of traditionally marginalized groups

Consider:
- What is the intent of the comment/behavior?
- What are the underlying messages?
- What might be the impact on those who hear the comment/are recipients of the behavior, regardless of who it was directed at? The impact is most important to consider.

Responding compassionately to Microaggressions
(whether Microaggression was directed at you or someone else):
- Breathe!
- Assume the intent was not malicious; assume ignorance
- Remember how important it is to respond: these things rarely get challenged
- Acknowledge discomfort; Cultivate a sense of compassion for yourself and for others (this is difficult!)
- Gently make the invisible visible.