

Microaggressions cause unintentional discomfort

by ROBYN REED
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“You sound white.”

“You don’t act like most black girls.”

“Is this really your hair, or is it a wig?”

These are phrases that I have heard throughout my lifetime. These phrases are examples of microaggressions, which are brief comments that may be intended to be harmless but which communicate prejudice. Microaggressions are upsetting and make finding my identity and being happy with myself even harder. When people say these things to me, I know they don’t realize the racist undertones of them. Constant negative media portrayal, like the typical black girl with the attitude or the “ghetto”, “hoodrat” black girl, reinforces stereotypes against black girls. The often-generalized view of black girls is that we are loud, ghetto, angry, and aggressive. I’m naturally soft, quiet, and shy. My

personality contradicts the false idea of how a black woman acts, and it leads people to think that I’m trying to fit in to please their views of society. They realize I am different, but it’s a difference that they like, so they say how they feel without seeing the implications that come with it. Since I am not threatening to them, they feel comfortable to say this to other black girls.

The comments on my hair are the most frequent examples of microaggressive comments I hear. My natural hair is long and thick. People expect that black girls have naturally short hair, and that we cling to weaves and wigs to hide it. Most non black people don’t realize that black women have a wide variety of hair types. They see my hair and struggle to believe it’s mine. They even sometimes think I’m “mixed” with another race, implying that black women can’t have long hair on their own. It’s hurtful that people see black features as something undesirable, and that black people

have to be mixed with someone else to balance black features out. It’s even worse to see that these thoughts stem from the fact that eurocentric beauty standards are perceived as the face of society.



art by ARIYANNA DONLEY

Microaggressions are troubling, and it’s not just a problem within the black community. They are something that every minority group struggles with. People wholeheartedly believe that these derogatory

phrases are compliments, because microaggression is an intentional act. It’s hard to see the problem if it doesn’t affect you. I’ve seen and heard too many people ask other minority groups “where they are really from,” despite those people being born in the U.S. It would be rare that someone would look at a white person in the U.S. and not assume that they are from here. That same thinking should be extended to everyone because the U.S. is too culturally diverse to have one racial or ethnic group as the face of the country.

To sound “white” is to be articulate or well educated in the eyes of those who say microaggressive comments towards me. Who wouldn’t want to sound like an articulate person? Of course, it also implies that those who don’t “sound white” are not articulate, and that only white people are articulate. To them, I’m articulate, and well-educated, which is good. They don’t see the hurtful

aspect of the comment. Truthfully, this is offensive because I don’t “sound white”; I sound like myself.

The only solution is to be careful with what you say to people, and to make sure you do not generalize a whole group of people. You could make them feel uncomfortable without even realizing it. I personally struggled with my identity as a black girl. I went through a phase where I didn’t feel black enough because of how I acted in comparison to how most people expected me to act. It took a lot of self-searching and growth to understand that the expectations that have been placed on me by microaggressive comments do not represent how I should act. At some point, we as a society have to realize our faults when it comes to approaching people who are different than us. People should reflect on how their comments could have derogatory undertones.