Microaggressions: A Primer

1 Definition:
Microaggressions are brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to certain individuals based on their group membership.

- They are subtle put downs
- They may be verbal, non-verbal or environmental
- They may be intentional or unintentional
- They may seem harmless but after a lifetime of accumulation, they can contribute to bad health outcomes, anxiety, depression, self-doubt and more.
- Perpetrators of microaggressions are often unaware that they engage in such communications

2 Examples of Microaggressions:
- “You don’t act like other ________ (insert e.g., Blacks, Asians...).”
- “Don’t all your people do _______.”
- “But you don’t look Jewish”
- “Where are you really from?”
- “What ARE you?”
- Asking women in meetings to take notes and not men.
- Avoiding eye contact with someone who has a disability.

3 Impact of Microaggressions:
- Self doubt
- Feeling invisible
- Feeling as though I don’t belong
- Adverse impacts on health
- Feelings of worthlessness
- Depression/Anxiety/Anger

4 Strategies to Address Microaggressions:

IF YOU ARE MICROAGGRESSED:
- Take a deep breath
- Assume good intentions
- Speak your truth, name what happened
- Calmly share your experience
- Identify support network
- Self Care
- Empower yourself

IF YOU ARE ACCUSED OF COMMITTING A MICROAGGRESSION:
- Listen with respect/don’t be defensive
- Be open to your own biases
- Acknowledge that you do not know something
- Refer to PALS handout

According to Derald Wing Sue, “microaggressions are everyday encounters of subtle discrimination that people of various marginalized identities experience throughout their lives.” They are often subtle and unintentional and the person who commits a microaggression is often unaware they have hurt someone. Nonetheless, the accumulated impact of daily microaggressions cause real pain, anxiety, depression, self doubt and may even have adverse health impacts on the recipients.