

• *The Community Respect Project* •

Listening is an Art.

It requires Attention more than Talent,
Listening requires Spirit more than Ego, and Others more than Self.

#Oopsism: Effectively Communicating Across Cultures in the 21st Century

*“That’s so White of you.” • “You’re an old-timer. You wouldn’t understand.”
“That’s so gay.” • “Where are you from?” Oops!*

BY DR. TERRY NELSON

Have you ever had a situation when you wished you could literally grab the words that just escaped your mouth? We all have experienced such moments at work or home and with family, friends, associates, and strangers.

Unfortunately, the nature of such exchanges is prevalent and automatic in daily conversations. While a remark may not be intentionally malicious, this does not alleviate the hurt and sometimes disrespect that the words may convey.

Most people would consider these remarks as microaggressions which are defined as “everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, which

communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership.”¹

After teaching racism, implicit bias, and stereotypes topics for almost 10 years at the college level in a predominantly white institution, I have discovered the term “microaggressions” tends to impede classroom discussions because it focuses on remarks and behaviors made by members from a dominant group towards minorities. While microaggressions have evolved to include more than race, i.e., religion, disability, social class, sexual orientation, gender identity, and more, students' minds jump to the most common form of microaggressions –

race. Therefore, students were less likely to participate fully and share their knowledge during class discussions when the term was used.

I prefer to use the term oopsism, a word I coined over seven years ago. I define it as an unintentional blunder (words or actions) by anyone that could be misconstrued as a negative “ism” such as ageism, sexism, racism, homophobia, or elitism, thus creating mental and physical discomfort for the receiver.

Unlike microaggressions that have a dominant group vs. a marginalized group perspective, oopsisms do not solely focus on individuals from a dominant group making a person of a different background feel disrespected.



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