

Microaggressions in the Model UN circuit and other debate extracurricular activities are rampant and many delegates have recounted their experiences either being at the receiving end of them, or hearing them being told to others. Microaggressions, whether they be racist, sexist, or homophobic in nature, create a bubble of exclusivity around MUN as an activity. For years Model UN has been marketed and catered to white upper class males for a number of reasons. Some of those reasons being: the notion that men are better at debate and politics, that white people are more eloquent speakers and writers, and how socio-economic status determines delegates' ability to participate in MUN conferences (which can be costly).

A microaggression, as defined by professor and psychologist Derald Wing Sue, is “the everyday slights, indignities, put downs and insults that people of color, women, LGBT populations or those who are marginalized experiences in their day-to-day interactions with people.”

Microaggressions are used by individuals that strive to make others feel excluded and singled out in a social setting. The last thing someone wants at a MUN conference is to feel less than because of their background or have someone question their ability to publicly speak and debate. We have compiled a list of common microaggressions that have been heard in MUN and go over why they are harmful to the circuit as a whole.

1. **“You are so articulate!/ You sound white when you give a speech.”**

This common microaggression stems from the idea that a person of color is not as “well spoken” or “articulate” as a white person because of their culture’s vernacular. The specific example used above is one of surprise to a person of color giving a Model Un Speech. What this microaggression essentially does is *gate keeps* debate as a skill and activity that was crafted and perfected for white people. It also invalidates a person of color’s ability to participate in debate by saying that the *only* way they can give ‘good’ speech is by sounding ‘white’. Claiming that someone sounds ‘so articulate’ is also revealing the long held prejudice that people of color are ‘uneducated’ in their speaking manner. In the United States, the Jim Caricature is defined by his exaggerated childlike and seemingly ‘uneducated’ vernacular. This trope was created to further the stereotype that people of color do not know how to properly speak, and is now used to question their personal ability to deliver a Model UN speech. There is no such thing as a “white” way to speak. Every single delegate has their own tone, vernacular, and *voice*, all of which are **valid** and not up to **anyone** to decide what is and is not “articulate”.

2. **“Why do you have to be so loud? Why are you being so aggressive/angry?”**

The angry black woman (and man) stereotype is very much present in the Model UN circuit of today, and it is also a form of *tone policing*. Even though this can also apply to

women in the circuit, regardless of race, women of color are much more likely to receive this comment because of how prevalent this stereotype is in our society. White women have for a long time been stereotyped as docile and innocent, while women of color are seen as harsh, mean, and constantly angry. This microaggression is most prevalent during an unmod when everyone is trying to get their ideas heard and recognized. A delegate will turn to a delegate of color or a woman and criticize them for being “too angry”. In reality, no one is being “too angry” or “too loud”. This is a tactic used to demoralize an individual from explaining their ideas during an unmod, while simultaneously furthering a harmful stereotype about their background. If you look at the demographics of crisis committees, there is a surplus of men and many women who do not feel welcome or comfortable participating in crisis. Knowing that the nature of a crisis committee is fast paced and dynamic, we can be sure that many women (especially women of color) are at risk of being called “angry”, “loud”, or even “cunning” and “evil”, simply because a crisis committee requires more individual action than a GA.

We should not be demoralizing others to share ideas by insinuating that their passion is akin to anger.

3. “How can you afford to come to conferences?”

Assuming someone’s income level at a MUN conference is insulting and takes away from their overall Model UN experience. This microaggression is another example of *gatekeeping* MUN as an activity solely for those who are well off. Assuming someone's financial circumstances can also stem from internalized prejudices we have about different races and ethnic groups. Marginalized people are consistently seen as less capable because of their socio-economic status, and bringing this up during committee can most certainly impact an individual's energy and motivation to compete. When someone in your committee just questioned your financial ability to physically be present in the room because of who you are or where you’re from, it might stay on your conscience throughout the entirety of the committee. This can create a scenario where someone might experience the *Imposter Syndrome*, where an individual questions their own merits and fears others will not see them as capable or genuine.

4. “What do *your* people think?/Don’t *you* people think this?”

Yes, MUN is a debate activity, and yes it is important to take into account different perspectives on an issue. However, it is **not** okay to ask a delegate what an entire group of people believe, based on that delegate’s background. This goes back to generalizations made about communities. There is no such thing as a monolithic way of thinking among different ethnicities, races, nationalities etc. By asking this question you are putting a delegate on the spot and expecting them to represent their entire background. Taking into

account that there already is a diversity issue in MUN by singling a delegate out in this situation you are misinforming an entire room of people on a misguided assumption about entire communities. Not to mention how offensive using words like “your people” or “you people” is. It is extremely demeaning to talk to someone this way and is a very aggressive way to address someone’s background. This is also an example of a microaggression that might be used in a speech to generalize a group of people within the debate itself. If something like this is said during a speech it is imperative that staff act accordingly to ensure that broad generalizations are not being made during committee.

5. “Where are you from..No, where are you *really* from?”

It is always important to get to know the people you will be working with during committee and have small talk. It is a great way to bond with other people that share similar interests as you, and meet people from new places. However, denying someone’s nationality/identity because it does not fit your image of what you think they are? Unacceptable. If someone tells you where they are from, then that is where they are from. That is where they group up and that is the place they feel represents them as an individual. For someone to say to them “Well.. you don’t *look* American”, is extremely offensive and demeaning. What does American even look like? Does American mean you have to look European? And this example can apply to a variety of nationalities that participate on the circuit. It is extremely uncomfortable for a delegate to have to sit through an interrogation on their entire lineage. This microaggression normalizes the idea that someone’s nationality has to exactly fit their physical appearance. This is simply not true. This microaggression is usually followed with broad generalizations about a delegate’s lineage that are stereotypical and racist. It might also be followed with a statement like, “I knew it! You just look so *exotic*, I just *knew* you were from somewhere!” Exotifying an individual is not acceptable *anywhere* let alone at a MUN conference.

Where someone is *really* from is not decided by you and your misguided ignorance.

This was a very short list of examples of microaggressions commonly heard on the circuit. The list could be even longer or even variations of the ones mentioned above. The main takeaway from this is that microaggressions used in the circuit have the intent to make a delegate feel like *others* or not included in a certain space. They are offhand comments that alienate individuals that are simply there to participate in debate and have fun. They go against what MUN is supposed to be as an activity and can sour a delegate’s entire experience. When someone says things like “Well those were things of the past, it does not happen anymore”, it is important to inform them of two things: discrimination was never okay or justified in the past, normalizing racism as phenomenon of “its time”

is the same thing as normalizing racism. Second, these things *do* happen in this day and age and they have to be confronted immediately. No one should have to be at a MUN conference and feel excluded because of these comments. Stand up for others if you see this happening on the circuit and learn about the history and connotations of microaggressions.

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