

# Ethnic minorities not 'hypersensitive' to microaggressions, research shows

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A new study by Dr. Keon West tested the arguments of those who dismiss negative responses to potential slights as 'hypersensitivity' and claim that ethnic minorities' responses to these events are excessive, or even pathological.

A report of the research is published in the journal *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*.

Microaggressions are brief, or subtle, [experiences](#) of prejudice, like receiving poor service at a restaurant, or being followed around in a shop. They contrast with macro experiences of prejudice, such as a racial slur, or being attacked.

Some critics of microaggression research, including psychologists, have also said that majority (e.g. white people in Britain) individuals would not respond to the same events so severely. Research and interest in microaggressions has increased in recent years, but Dr. West argues that the hypersensitivity hypothesis has undermined the severity of their effects and the serious attention they should receive.

In two studies Dr. West asked both [minority](#) and majority individuals to report on how often they experienced things like microaggressions and their overall life satisfaction. In a third study he asked both white and minority participants to recall a microaggression (or a benign control experience) in a restaurant, and then report their positive and [negative emotions](#).

The results of all three studies, which involved a total of more than 500 participants, were the same: microaggressions led to lower life satisfaction, more negative emotion, and less positive emotion, but the effects were the same whether the person was from an ethnic majority or minority group.

His research found that ethnic minorities and majorities experience the same decreases in happiness and life satisfaction after microaggressions. White participants reacted to microaggressions in the same way as ethnic minorities, they just experienced the microaggressions less frequently.

Dr. West, Associate Professor in Social Psychology at Goldsmiths, said that these findings have important implications for the way we respond to microaggressions:

"This isn't about walking on eggshells or excessive political correctness; nobody likes being treated rudely or with suspicion, and this research shows that [white people](#) don't deal with those experiences better than anyone else. Since that's the case, we should put our efforts into eliminating these experiences, and not into making people less sensitive to them."

Undermining the hypersensitivity idea, he found no evidence to suggest that the negative effects of microaggressions could reasonably be attributed to some unique aspect of [ethnic minority](#) psyche or culture.

**More information:** "Testing hypersensitive responses: Ethnic minorities are not more sensitive to microaggressions, they just experience them more frequently," by Dr. Keon West is published in the journal *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*.

Provided by Society for Personality and Social Psychology

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