Microaggressions are subtle, mundane exchanges that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to individuals based on group membership.1,2 They can be verbal, behavioural, or environmental,1 and include staring, glaring, comments, actions, and gestures. These actions are not always conscious, yet are constant - often daily - experiences for people of colour, women, LGBTQ+ communities, people with disabilities, and members of other under-represented groups.24

Prevalence & Effects
College students of colour experienced an average of 291 microaggressions over 90 days.3

Types of Microaggressions2

Microassaults2 (often conscious)
Aims to attack the a person’s group identity, or harm them through name-calling, avoidance, and discriminatory actions.16,17

Microinvalidations2 (often unconscious)

You are so well spoken for an immigrant!

What Can We Do?
To address microaggressions, learn to:2,22

- Define them especially “invisible” ones
- Recognize them In ourselves, and others
- Deconstruct their hidden meanings
- Acknowledge their effects & learn about coping strategies
- Take action23,25 Implement education programs

Why Does This Matter for STEM Professions?
Microaggressions are prevalent across social environments; they exist in media coverage25, clinical therapy26, classrooms21, academia2, workplaces27, and communities19. They are powerful because of the subtle, negative messages they often send1, including that the person does not belong, and they deviate from the accepted norms. These messages are often unconscious and unintentional.

In order to address the lack of diversity in STEM fields, individuals and organizations must acknowledge their unconscious biases and behaviours. Microaggressions are interpersonal and institutional28; they can be as simple as unintentionally excluding a person from an important conversation27.

Education and reflection - individually, communally, and institutionally - are critical steps to making workplace and community environments inclusive to all people, regardless of the groups they identify with. Once identified, action is needed to correct policies and behaviours that have the potential to harm and discriminate against members of our communities.