AGENDA

Session Take-Aways

- Learn how to identify microaggressions,
- Understand the negative impact of microaggressions at work
- Discuss strategies for responding to microaggressions

Activity

Large Group Discussion
Primary objective of the session is to raise consciousness about microaggressions and how participants play a role in either perpetuating or dismantling microaggressions at work.

It is the hope that the session will inspire reflection that will lead to action at some level for each participant, although it is not a guarantee given the amount of self-work that is necessary to achieve this end.

Transformation is a result of practice, after thought, after exposure to information, which this session will do. Your evolution is your work.
HAVE YOU EVER . . .

...heard a remark or observation made about you or another person that made you uncomfortable but didn’t understand why you were upset by it? Or didn’t feel it was serious enough to confront the person about it?

...said something that made someone else uncomfortable but didn’t understand why?
MICROAGGRESSIONS

... daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental messages (whether intentional or unintentional) that signal that a person’s identity or social group (e.g., gender, age, race/ethnicity, class, religion, etc.) is less valued or perceived negatively.

(Sue, 2010)
Microaggressions are often-times unintentional and perpetrators (whether co-workers or superiors) are often unaware that a microaggressive event, incident or communication has occurred.

People tend to judge themselves by their intentions.

The effect on the receiver is what matters.
WHY DO WE SAY/DO THEM?

Because we’re human
Internalized or Unconscious Bias
Ignorance
Prejudice
Provocation
How microaggressions are like mosquito bites • Same Difference

I MEAN A LOT MORE.
3 TYPES OF MICROAGGRESSIONS

Microassaults
Microinsults
Microinvalidations
Colorblindness
Dysconscious Racism
Microaggressions Flow Chart

Racial Microaggressions
Commonplace verbal or behavioral indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults.

- **Microinsult** (Often Unconscious)
  - Behavioral/verbal remarks or comments that convey rudeness, insensitivity, and demean a person’s racial heritage or identity.

- **Microassault** (Often Conscious)
  - Explicit racial derogations characterized primarily by an explicit verbal or nonverbal attack meant to hurt the intended victim through name-calling, avoidant behavior, or purposeful discriminatory actions.

- **Microinvalidation** (Often Unconscious)
  - Verbal comments or behaviors that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or existential reality of a person of color.

**Macro-level micro-aggression** (Systemic/Environmental)
Racial assaults, insults, and invalidations which are manifested on systemic and environmental levels.

- **Aseript of Intelligence**
  - Assigning a degree of intelligence to a person of color based on their race.

- **Second Class Citizen**
  - Treated as a lesser person or group.

- **Pathologizing cultural values/communication styles**
  - Notion that the values and communication styles of people of color are abnormal.

- **Assumptions of Criminal status**
  - Presumed to be a criminal, dangerous, or deviant based on race.

**Alien in Own Land**
Belief that visible racial/ethnic minority citizens are foreigners.

- **Color Blindness**
  - Denial or pretense that a White person does not see color or race.

- **Myth of Meritocracy**
  - Statements which assert that race plays a minor role in life success.

- **Denial of Individual Racism**
  - Denial of personal racism or one’s role in its perpetuation.
Explicit slights primarily characterized by a verbal or nonverbal attack meant to hurt the intended victim

- Microassaults are usually conscious, direct, and intended acts. Usually done through name-calling, avoidant behavior, or purposeful discriminatory actions.

Example: During an awards ceremony, a co-worker notices a Muslim family sitting nearby. Each time the co-worker walks by the family, he mumbles “terrorists” just loud enough for the family to hear.
MICROINSULTS

Verbal and nonverbal communications that subtly conveys rudeness and insensitivity as well as demeans a person.

- Microinsults are rude, unintentional actions or comments that demean a person’s race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, ability or religious identity. They can be insensitive or inconsiderate, sometimes masked as compliments.

Example: As the only black person in my department, my supervisor once told me: “I just want to let you know that I like you. You’re not like the others…in the Mailroom, and IT, and Security. You don’t blast your music, talk loud, and leave early. I see you reading books and bringing your own lunch…I just think that’s really good…Keep it up. You might even get to move up a bit.”
MICROINVALIDATIONS

Communications that subtly exclude, negate or nullify the thoughts, feelings or experiential reality of a marginalized person.

- Microinvalidations are often unconscious acts. They are comments or behaviors that discount, question or diminish the thoughts, feelings or worldview/reality of the recipient.

Example: An physicist of color expresses hesitancy in discussing racial discrimination at work with his White female colleague. She replied, “I completely understand. As a women, I also face discrimination.”
COLORBLINDNESS

Attempt to minimize, distort, or deny the existence of racism

- Insistence that race does not matter or should not be talked about (e.g., ‘we’re all the same’). Usually an attempt used by persons to be perceived as nonbiased.
- Denial that racism benefits Whites.

Example: When a engineer of color attempts to talk with his supervisor about being the only person of color in his department and feeling alienated and dismissed by his colleagues, the supervisor says, “I think you’re being too paranoid. We should emphasize similarities, not people’s differences. When I look at you, I don’t see color.”
DYSCONSCIOUS RACISM

A form of racism that tacitly accepts dominant White norms and privileges. Limited and distorted understanding about inequity and cultural diversity.

- Reflected in a person’s acceptance, approval, and support of the status quo
- Results in blaming the victim
- Denies present-day racism (individual or systemic)

**Example:** A young Hispanic physicist shares with his colleague that he is concerned about not being promoted at work despite being qualified. The colleague replies, “Maybe if you work harder you can succeed like your peers”. “Besides, our boss is not racist, he has hired several Mexican employees.”
MICROAGGRESSIONS AGAINST WHITE PEOPLE?
HARMFUL IMPACT OF MICROAGGRESSIONS

- Anxiety
- Paranoia
- Depression
- Sleep Difficulties
- Lack of Confidence
- Worthlessness
- Intrusive Thoughts
- Helplessness
- Loss of Drive
- False Positives

(e.g., Clark, Anderson, Clark, & Williams, 1999; Dovidio, 2001; Salvatore & Shelton, 2007 Sue, 2010; Sue, Capodilupo, & Holder, 2008)
Cumulative effects of microaggressions at work:

- Increases turnover
- Fosters a non-inclusive work environment
- May lead to a less diverse workforce
- Lowers work productivity and problem-solving abilities
- Loss of work time avoiding the instigator
- Loss of work time worrying about the incident/future interactions;
- Decreases commitment at work
- Creates a hostile and invalidating work environment
- Perpetuates stereotype threat

(Dovidio, 2001; Purdie-Vaughns, Steele, Davies, & Ditlmann, 2008; Salvatore & Shelton, 2007; Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002; Solo’ranzo, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000)
IS IT RACIST?

- yes
- no
- maybe
1. Review all statements and determine,
2. Whether or not a statement is a microaggression.
3. Match the card to a corresponding poster board/chair.
   - Microassaults
   - Microinsults
   - Microinvalidations
   - Colorblindness
   - Dysconscious Racism
   - “Not Racist”
4. Consider the implicit or implied meaning of each comment.
5. Consider the historical and contextual connotations of statements.
RACIAL MICROAGGRESSIONS

1. **Microassaults:** are usually conscious, direct, and intended acts. Usually done through name-calling, avoidant behavior, or purposeful discriminatory actions.

2. **Microinsults:** are rude, unintentional actions or comments that demean a person’s race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, ability or religious identity. They can be insensitive or inconsiderate, sometimes masked as compliments.

3. **Microinvalidations:** are often unconscious acts. They are comments or behaviors that discount, question or diminish the thoughts, feelings or worldview/reality of the recipient.

4. **Colorblindness:** attempt to minimize or distort existence of racism, insistence that race does not matter or should not be talked about (e.g., ‘we’re all the same’), hence, racism is taboo (usually used by persons in an attempt to be perceived as unbiased).

5. **Dysconscious Racism:** a form of racism that tacitly accepts dominant White norms and privileges.

6. **Not Racist:**
1. How was the experience?
2. What feelings came up for you in reviewing these statements?
3. What came up in dialogue with your peers about these statements?
4. Which ones were difficult, and why?
5. Are there statements that you still have questions re: why they fall into a particular category?
6. What comes up for you, when you realize you might have enacted microaggressions with students, families, co-workers, friends, or acquaintances?
7. How, if at all, might you apply this activity or lessons learned to your school?
SPEAK UP ACTIVITY

Identify one or two microaggressions (verbal or non-verbal) that you’ve commonly observe from colleagues or adults in your work setting, etc.

Write it down on the blank note card at your table.

Exchange cards with a person who is not standing next to you. Repeat this process three more times.
SPEAK UP ACTIVITY (CONT.)

Consider the following questions:

How might this incident affect the person(s) directly involved – the target, the perpetrator, and any witnesses?

How might this incident affect the health/culture of the work environment where it happened?

What are the emotional, social, physical and financial cost of incidents like these?
SPEAK UP ACTIVITY (BARRIERS)

Read two or three examples from the index cards:

As you read them, rate your comfort level in responding to each:
- (1) Extremely Uncomfortable Responding
- (2) Uncomfortable Responding
- (3) Comfortable Responding
- (4) Extremely Comfortable Responding

Share why you selected your “comfort number”, identifying the personal (self-imposed) and external barriers that might make it difficult to respond.
HANDLING MICROAGGRESSIONS WHEN THEY OCCUR
PRODUCTIVE RESPONSES (CONT.)

Simple questions also are a good way to interrupt everyday microaggressions.

- “What do you mean by that?”
- “What makes you say that?”
- “What point are you trying to make by saying that?”
- “It seems you feel strongly about this issue, tell me more.”
- “Who are you referring to when you say that?” “what do you mean?”
- “You know, I hear that a lot. Why do you think people are surprised that (student’s name) _______ (fill in the blank. Ex: articulate)?”
- “Could you tell me more about that?”
- “Can you elaborate on your point?”
- “I’m just curious. What makes you ask/say that?”
PRODUCTIVE RESPONSES (CONT.)

Explain how the slight may be interpreted by others or you.

- “I don’t think you realize how that came across…”
- “That offends me.”
- “I don’t find that funny.”
- “I was so upset by that remark, I shut down and couldn’t hear anything else.”
- “I felt….when you said/did….and it....(describe the impact on you).”
- When I hear that remark, I’m offended too, because I feel that it marginalizes an entire group of adults/colleagues I work with.”
Develop ready responses that will work in a variety of moments:

- I’m surprised to hear you say that.
- Did you mean to say something hurtful when you said that?
- Using that word as a put-down offends me.
- Using that word doesn’t help others feel safe or accepted here.
- “I know you mean well, but that hurts.” (Intent vs Impact)
- “I think that applies to everyone.” (Broaden to Universal Human Behavior)
- “Are you speaking of someone in particular?” (Make it individual)
- “OUCH!” (Say Ouch)
PRODUCTIVE RESPONSES (CONT.)

Be direct and say that you are not comfortable with the word said or statement made.
- “That term really makes me feel uncomfortable.”
- “I don’t think you should be using that word.”
- “That’s a pretty offensive word.”
- “Sorry, I’m not all right with that,” or
- “Ouch,” or “Whoa,” or “Oooh . . . I don’t want to hear that.”

Redirect
- “Let’s shift the conversation …”
- “Let’s open up this question to others….?”
- “I’d like to invite others to weigh in …?”
CONSIDERATIONS

Assess the risk of speaking up.
- Is now the best time?
- Could I handle this in a different way, later, that would be safer?
- Is there someone I trust—a colleague, a peer, a mentor—to whom I can speak about this, to help me prepare for the next time it happens?

Don’t undermine your efforts.
- If changed behavior is what you are after, keep that goal in mind—and let it shape your response.

Understand the dynamics of change.
- It happens slowly, and sometimes not at all.

Educate

Echo
CONSIDERATIONS

Separate the person from their action or behavior.
Instead of saying “you’re being racist” try saying “that could be perceived as a racist remark”

Avoid starting questions with “Why” – it puts people on the defensive
Instead try “how” or “what made you …” etc.

Avoid using the pronoun “you” – it can leave people feeling defensive and blamed.
Instead use “I” statements

How you say something is as critical as what you say.
Pay attention to tone of voice, body language, etc.
Pay attention to intent
Do you want the person to understand the impact of their action; to stop their behavior, or to make the person feel guilt?
WHAT CAN YOU DO? (SAMPLE)

Someone who has committed an microaggression or insult

1. Remember the conversation
2. Manage your feelings of defensiveness/be open to hearing difficult feedback
3. Listen intently to what happened
4. Reflect on what you heard
5. Take responsibility
6. Don’t try to prove your view or how much of a ______ist you are not
7. Share how you can make it different (if possible)
8. Follow up
WHAT CAN YOU DO? (SAMPLE)

Someone who has been a receiver of or witnesses a microaggression

- CPR (Content, Pattern, Relationship)
  - Content (a one-time incident),
  - Pattern (a series of incidents), or
  - Relationship (the impact of a pattern on your ability to work productively with others).
- Be open to their input and expression of their feelings.
HASSLE LINES
1. Identify one or two microaggression that you commonly observe in your life (as either the target or witness).

2. Form two hassle lines at your table, whereby you pair up and face one someone in a line.

3. Participants from one line will assume the role of the speaker, the individual making the microaggressive remark, with the person facing him or her will be the respondent, or the individual who is refuting or responding to the microaggression.
PROCESSING QUESTIONS

1. How was this activity for you?,

2. Which response was experienced by the ‘microaggressor’ as convincing, and what made him or her so?

3. What kept you from speaking up in the way you wanted to?,

4. How to attend to those fears or cognitions?,

5. How, if at all, might you apply this activity or lessons learned to your work environment?
CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Seek Additional Training

- What we know about one time trainings is that they are ineffective! - At best they may increase knowledge and intent – but not behavior.

Be aware, microaggressions are a constant reality in the lives of culturally diverse students, families, and colleagues

Understand intent doesn’t equal impact

Try not to invalidate others’ experiential reality

Seek to limit defensiveness, and embrace inquiry into what may have been behind your remark/behavior
CLOSING ACTIVITY

Write your full name and email address on one side of the index card,

On the other side, write down one thing you will do in the next four weeks to respond to microaggression at your job/place of employment.

I will collect these cards and email them to everyone (individually) three weeks from today.
SELECTED REFERENCES AND SOURCES

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sYQVDik69Nw

https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/selectatest.html


THANK YOU!

Please direct questions/comments to:
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