Recognizing and Addressing Microaggressions

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WORKSHOP GOAL

Learn to

Recognize, Interrupt, Repair

microaggressive behavior
So what is a microaggression?

Subtle, verbal and nonverbal slights, insults, indignities, and denigrating messages directed toward an individual due to their group identity, often automatically and unconsciously. Usually committed by well-intentioned folks who are unaware of the hidden messages being communicated.


Derald Wing Sue et al., 2009

- Focused on racial microaggressions & “difficult conversations” in the classroom
- Qualitative Study
- Methodology
  - Focus Groups (2)
    - Semi-structured
  - 14 Participants (Self-Identified as persons of color)
    - Recruited from the local community

Racial Microaggressions and Difficult Dialogues on Race in the Classroom
Sue, et al. 2009, American Psychological Association
Results

Three “domains”

1. Racial microaggressions as precipitators of difficult dialogues
2. Reactions to difficult dialogues
3. Strategies for facilitating difficult dialogues

Sue, et al. 2009, American Psychological Association
Domain 1: Racial Microaggressions as precipitators of difficult dialogues

Ascription of Intelligence

I started to explain, and the White girl said, “well, what she means is”—and she tried to talk for me. That I don’t know what I’m talking about. I can’t even articulate my own, my own idea. And I had to tell her, I can speak for myself, I can articulate my idea better than you can, you know? And only—I could not believe that she tried to speak for me.

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Several Asian students reported that they were often assumed to be intelligent in math and sciences and that they “study hard.”

Sue, et al. 2009, American Psychological Association
Domain 1: Racial Microaggressions as precipitators of difficult dialogues

Alien in own land

But she looked at me and spoke extra slow, like to explain what the professor had just said. And I was kind of like, okay. So when I spoke and I spoke in regular speech, she was kind of shocked . . . um like wondering if I actually speak English…

Sue, et al. 2009, American Psychological Association
Jonathan, a 4th year Latino, was perplexed when he walked into a professor’s office for the first time, and the professor remarked, “Wow, you’re Hispanic?”. Jonathan replied, “Yes, why do you ask?”-to which the professor offered, “On the phone, I didn’t hear your accent. I thought you were…”. Jonathan indicated that the professor trailed off without finishing the sentence.

Alien in own land

Mayes, 2014, Dissertation
Domain 1: Racial Microaggressions as precipitators of difficult dialogues

Denial of racial reality

Another informant describes how bringing up topics of race, culture, or ethnicity in the classroom is met with statements such as “not everything is racial, you know” or nonverbals (rolling of the eyeballs) that “scream at you, here we go again.” Another informant states, “When I share personal experiences of discrimination in class, they always want to find another reason for the behavior.”

Sue, et al. 2009, American Psychological Association
Denial of racial reality

Sean, a black male, 3rd year, electrical engineering student recalls a white male classmate during an ethnic studies course lecture raise his hand and ask “Why are we learning about black people, why isn’t there any white history?”. He recalled another student who he overheard asking a friend “why is there a center just for black students on campus…isn’t that segregation”.

Mayes, 2014, Dissertation
well I think that all lives matter

we should care exactly equally at all times about everything

all houses matter
Domain 1: Racial Microaggressions as precipitators of difficult dialogues

Assumption of criminality

Some of the students started to comment automatically on . . . Like, well, what if he gets violent? Like, it just was kind of like entertained by the professor, like, oh, well, you need to make sure where you sit is close to an exit, and you gotta do this and you gotta do that. But I thought to a larger picture as to like this man, he was older and he just was resistant, but he wasn’t violent.

Sue, et al. 2009, American Psychological Association
Domain 2: Reactions to difficult dialogues

**Cognitive** - Should I speak up?

[depending on] how you’re going to be perceived and who’s going to be there to support you . . . who wants to say something if it’s just going to be like just tossed away, you know?”

**Behavior**

Why do you have to put on—I’m not going to say a facade because that might be poise, might be a natural reaction that you want to do, but if I get emotional about something that I want to say, that’s not fair

**Emotional** – They just don’t get it

. . . We get too incensed, you know? I mean, I don’t think you have any room for sorrow and sympathy when it comes to issues like this [race]. I think . . . you get so worked up and so mad . . . it brings back all these memories . . . .

Sue, et al. 2009, American Psychological Association
A server handed me and my friend the wrong breakfast plates. Super nice lady and very lively.

I made a joke and said, “Holy crap people. It’s just an expression. Let it go.” I agree with you...

Not gonna lie, I was carrying around that phrase for the past hour, and it felt really good! The server offered to change the plate for me, but I declined, then asked about their day and how they were doing. I don’t know if I would have said that to anyone else, but I felt justified for not changing the plate.

I can’t stand all this safe space micro aggression bullshit. Grow up kids, life’s hard, get a fucking helmet.

Ppl have said the same expression to me joking around. I didn’t think twice about it.

Life is hard. Completely agree. I just thought it was a very interesting choice of words, didn’t feel appropriate. But I deal with inappropriate things daily so I keep it moving 😊

Yea prob not the best choice of words but I doubt there was any bad will behind it.
Domain 3: Instructor Strategies for Facilitating Difficult Dialogues

Four Strategies:

• Legitimizing the discussion on race
• Validating feelings of the participants in class
• Willingness to accept a different racial reality from students of color, comfort in addressing race and racism
• Using a direct approach in managing the discussion

Sue, et al. 2009, American Psychological Association
LIGHTNING CHAT

When people discuss microaggressions, a common response is that they are “innocent acts” and that the person who experiences them should “let go of the incident” and “not make a big deal out of it.” Do you agree or disagree with this point of view? Explain your reasoning.
EXERCISE

In the handout, draw a line connecting the statements in the first column with all the possible interpretations from the second column. Each statement from Column A may connect with more than one interpretation. Be ready to explain each choice. Think critically about how a person could interpret these statements as a “put down.”
LIGHTNING CHAT

If a person from a marginalized group pointed out to you that one of your comments was a microaggression, how would you respond at the time? Would it change the likelihood of your making a similar comment in the future? Why or why not?
ADDRESSING MICROAGGRESSION

Recognize

- “Why are you being so sensitive?”
- “You’re overreacting”
- “I don’t want to sound racist/homophobic/sexeist but….”

Interrupt

Repair (Educate)
ADDRESSING MICROAGGRESSION

Assess whether you should challenge the microaggression.

Diffuse the tension

- Echoing the microaggression. Wait, did you mean…?
- I don’t see it that way/That’s not my experience, or the experience of many others.

Have the difficult conversation.
EFFECTIVE ALLYSHIP

1. Understand our own privilege.
2. Listen, listen, listen (and do our homework).
3. Focus on those who share our identity.
4. Amplify, not overshadow.
5. Realize that we’re going to make mistakes, and apologize when we do.
6. Remember that to be an ally is an action.
Thanks!

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