



**NO YOU CAN'T
TOUCH MY HAIR**

Microaggressions -- Learning What They Are
and How to Address Them



What are microaggressions?

“Commonplace verbal or behavioral indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults” (Sue, *Implications* 278). These messages may be sent verbally ("Your English is so good!"), nonverbally (clutching one's purse more tightly) or environmentally (symbols like the confederate flag or using American Indian mascots).

Types of Microaggressions

Microinsults

Often unconscious, demeaning verbal, nonverbal, or environmental communications.

Ex. Ascription of Intelligence, Second Class Citizen, Pathologizing, & Assumption of Criminal Status.

Microassaults

Conscious and intentional harm.

Ex. Hate speech, avoidant behavior, purposefully discriminatory actions, & name calling.

Microinvalidations

Often unconscious, remarks that diminish, dismiss, or negate the realities of a group.

Ex. Alien in Own Land, Color Blindness, Myth of Meritocracy, & Denial of Individual Racism.

Environmental Microaggressions (Macro-level)

Assaults, insults and invalidations manifested on systemic and environmental levels.

Breakout Questions

Break into groups to discuss questions. Record your thoughts as you discuss. Think fast, time is limited!

Question #1 -- What do I do if someone tells me that I microaggressed them or if someone takes something I said as an insult?

Question #2 -- What do I do if I witness, or a student shares, a microaggression (in or out of the classroom), and/or is it fair to charge faculty with “being responsible for the climate in the classroom, for being responsible for every person’s sense of belonging”? Explain.

Question #3 -- Is it fair to assume students will speak up or to expect them to let us know when they’ve been microaggressed by us or someone else in a position of authority? Explain.

Round One Breakouts

#1 on card -> Question #1

#2 on card -> Question #2

#3 on card -> Question #3

Round Two Breakouts

Hamburger Stamp -> Question #1

Ice Cream Chill Stamp -> Question #2

Cupcake Stamp -> Question #3

Round Three Breakouts

Green Card -> Question #1

Orange Card -> Question #2

Yellow Card -> Question #3

Breakout Results -- Question #1

1. What do I do if someone tells me that I microaggressed them or if someone takes something I've said as an insult?

- get clarification on what was said that was offensive - one-on-one conversation (unqualified)
- **APOLOGIZE** (independent of intention) ↑ try to reveal unconscious bias
- have a conversation with that person
- validate their feelings - give them time & space
- Don't say "I'm sorry you took it that way."
- Don't do/say it again ↑ invalidates them & feelings
- research/educate yourself
- Don't get defensive

- o Acknowledge "I just learned something about myself. Thank you" 
- o Assess context to determine follow-up

Breakout Results -- Question #2

2. What do I do if I witness, or a student shares, a microaggression, and/or is it fair to charge faculty/staff for every person's sense of belonging? Explain

Classroom setting → teaching opportunity!

* have a sensitivity note in syllabus.
* no staff to establish rapport.
* stay calm

Acknowledge talk about it/make it real

Office hour → must say something (push away?)

Shared w/

Acknowledge/validate

discuss w/ student further

problems? = unanticipated, disbelief

belonging = yes to try/part of mission
↳ especially in classroom

- Make it a topic of discussion.

- Some so afraid of offending they remain silent so must have discussion.

- turn it into a question & discuss

- can't learn if you don't feel safe
microaggressions → unsafe wellness

yes belonging SAFETY

Better? = How do we create a sense of belonging?

- everyone must have idea of how to behave in community

- validate w/invalidating perpetrators? two sides as faculty

- don't add to shame/model compassion.

Breakout Results -- Question #3

3. Is it fair to assume students will speak up or to expect them to let us know when they've been microaggressed by us or someone else in a position of authority? Explain.

- No -

- Hard to speak up anyway; this is harder
- Vulnerable; may invalidate -
- Feel shame blame for not speaking up
- May not know how to name it
- Instructors need awareness + self-correct
- Be brave as instructor - ok to make mistakes, own it, fix
- Build courage + skill to speak up
to be an ally

Instructor (person in authority)
can raise the awareness
of microaggressions

Anonymous communication
(index cards)

Tools to create inclusive,
supportive environment

- syllabus
- "check ins"

Impact

- Encourages feelings of self-doubt, frustration, and isolation
- Affects the mental and physical health of recipients,
- Creates a negative campus or work climate,
- Perpetuates stereotype threat,
- Signals devaluation of social group identities,
- Contributes to broader social inequities.





Dilemmas

1. Differing Racial Realities
2. The Invisibility of Unintentional Expressions of Bias
3. Perceived Minimal Harm of Racial Microaggressions
4. The Catch-22 of Responding to Microaggressions

Addressing Microaggressions

1. Be educated.
2. Listen.
3. Acknowledge.
4. Do better.



Sources

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