



# **Microaggressions and Microresistance in the Classroom**

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# Rationale for Workshop



- Challenges we face:
  - Current socio-political environment and the need to stretch
  - Understandings of best practice in this changed context

# Rationale for Workshop



## Challenges, continued:

- Students who experience microaggressions in the classroom:
  - feel less connected to the institution,
  - are more likely to be depressed and isolated,
  - have decreased motivation for academic success (Solórzano, 2000, Sue et al, 2007),
  - and lower self-esteem (Nadal, Wong, Griffin, Davidoff, & Striken, 2014).

# Rationale for Workshop

## Challenges, continued:

Cognitive resources for learning (“mental bandwidth”) of over half our young people have been diminished by the negative effects of economic insecurity, discrimination and hostility against non-majority groups based on race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or gender identity, and other aspects of difference.

*(Verschelden, 2017, [Bandwidth Recovery: Helping Students Reclaim Cognitive Resources Lost to Poverty, Racism, and Social Marginalization](#))*

# Rationale for Workshop



## Challenges, continued:

- People who are operating with depleted mental bandwidth are less able to succeed in school, starting in childhood, and are much less likely to make it to college. For those who do make it, their bandwidth capacity often interferes with learning, and therefore, persisting and graduating from college. (Verschelden, 2017)

# Some Encouraging Findings:



- African American students (and, to some degree, white students) encouraged to view intelligence as malleable reported greater enjoyment of the academic process, greater academic engagement, and obtained higher grade point averages than their counterparts in two control groups (Aronson, Fried, and Good, 2002).

# Community Guidelines for the Day



- Creating a container for productive dialogue:
  - Proposal on confidentiality:
    - Conversations: who said what is confidential;
    - Individual stories are confidential;
    - Strategy/practice/policy recommendations are only confidential if explicitly made confidential
  - Asking for openness and the assumption of goodwill
  - Respect and dignity of each person is the most important thing



# Microaggressions and Microresistance Work:

**Collaboratively done by**  
**Dr. Cynthia Ganote, Saint Mary's College of CA**  
**Dr. Tasha Souza, Boise State University**  
**Dr. Floyd Cheung, Smith College**



# Workshop Goal:

To feel more empowered to respond with microresistance when a microaggression occurs in your classroom.

# Interlocking systems of oppression! a sociological framework

We live in a society where systemic racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, ableism, and American imperialism are pervasive...

And sadly, higher education is not immune.

# Microaggressions are

“brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative . . . slights and insults” (Sue, 2007, p. 271)

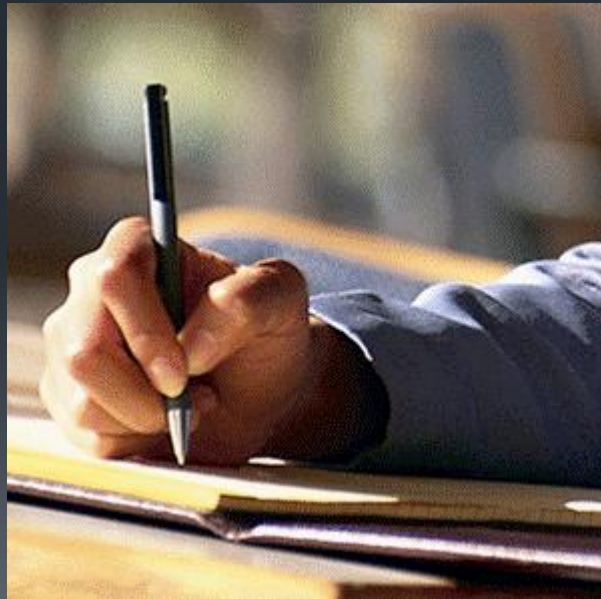
# A Distinction



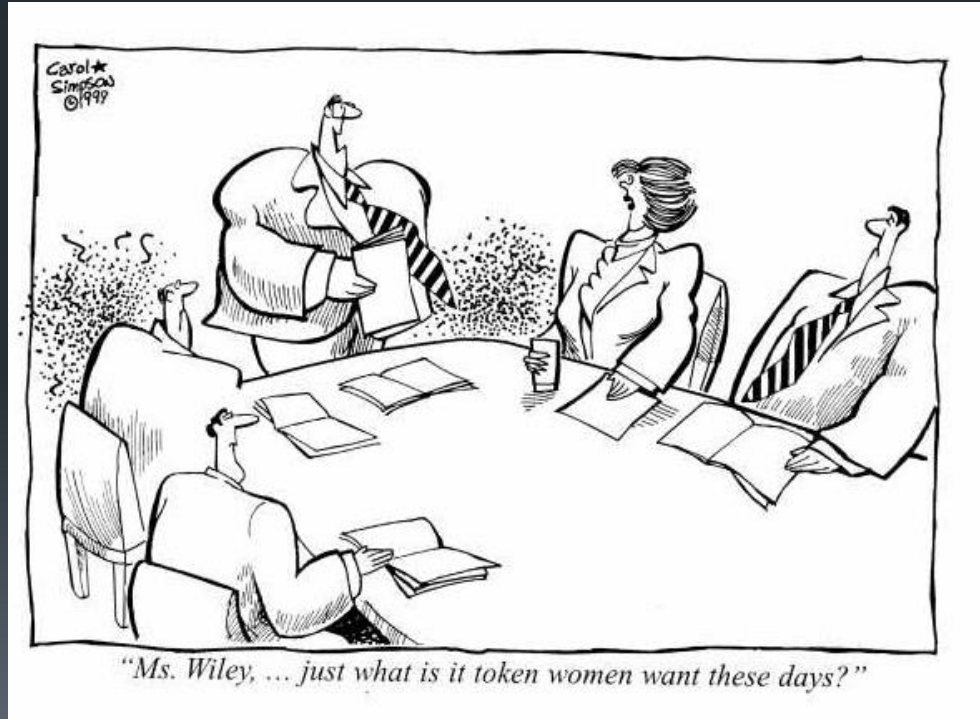
Micro: in terms of **perception by the aggressor** NOT in hurtful impact it can have.

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2 Minute Think & Ink: Write down an example of a microaggression you observed or experienced.



# Microaggressions Example: Tokenism or Native Informant



# Microaggressions Example: Identity Blindness



# Alien in Own Land: Assuming a person is not from “here.”





Each MA is a toxic raindrop that falls corrosively  
over time on its victim's well-being and into  
learning environments

(Suarez-Orozco, et al., 2015).



What stops us from intervening or responding to microaggressions in the classroom?



# Microresistance

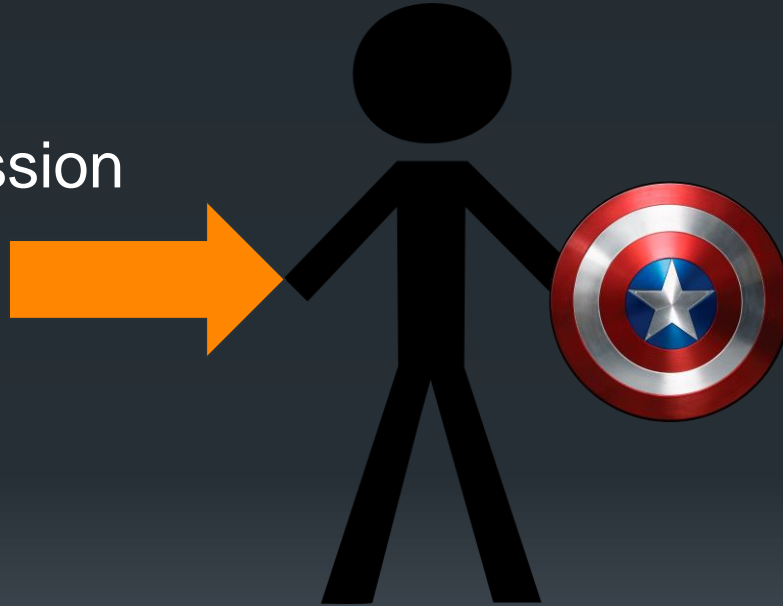
Small-scale individual and/or collaborative efforts that empower targeted people and allies to cope with, respond to, and/or challenge microaggressions to ultimately dismantle systems of oppression.



- in-the-moment intervention
- post-microaggression actions

(Irey, 2013;  
Ganote, Souza, Cheung, 2016)

Microaggression



Microresistance:

- Microaffirmation
- OTFD
- xyz
- ACTION
- etc.

# Microaffirmations are:



“tiny acts of opening doors to opportunity, gestures of inclusion and caring, and graceful acts of listening.”

(Scully and Rowe, 2009)

# Use OTFD or other Communication Frameworks



# OTFD: Open the Front Door to Communication

## **O = OBSERVE**

- concrete, objective, factual observations
- both be able to agree on observation(s) stated

## **T = THINK**

- thoughts based on observations
- DO NOT put other person on defense

## **F = FEEL**

- actual feelings/emotions you have as a result of observation

## **D = DESIRE**

- a statement of desired outcome



(adapted from Learning Forum)

# Example Indirect OTFD



“Let’s pause. I noticed (**Observe**) that there seems to be an expectation that an individual can speak for an entire group. I think (**Think**) we need to resist this temptation because it’s a lot to place on someone to ask them to speak for a whole community. I feel uncomfortable (**Feeling**) with this request and would like us all to simply ask others to speak for themselves (**Desire**).”



# Example Direct OTFD

“Let’s pause. I noticed (**Observe**) that Kim just asked Maria to speak for an entire group. I think (**Think**) you/we need to resist this temptation because it’s a lot to place on someone to ask them to speak for a whole community. I feel uncomfortable (**Feeling**) with this request and would like us all to simply ask others to speak for themselves (**Desire**).”

-- Your OWN communication style and personality can weave through any MR attempt!

Questions?

Find a Partner: Choose A & B



# Practice in Pairs:



Scenario 1: Your students are reading an article written by an African American woman. An African American female student begins to share her thoughts on the piece and its arguments, and a white female student interrupts her and says “I think you’re trying to say x here.” The first student stops talking entirely upon being interrupted. Using the OTFD framework, what might you say in this instance?

- *Once done: B give feedback to A on use of OTFD*

# Practice in Pairs:



Scenario 2: Prior to the beginning of class or lab, you hear two students disparaging a third student in the class because of the student's accent and national origin. How do you intervene? What do you say?

[Scenario written by Don Gillian-Daniel and Megan Schmid (the Collaborative for Advancing Teaching & Learning) and Mark Kueppers (the Center for Leadership & Involvement), University of Wisconsin-Madison]

- *Once done: A give feedback to B on use of OTFD*

# How did it go?



What was easy? Hard?

How did it feel?

What did you learn?

Might you use it in the future? In what situation(s)?

Questions?



# A Different Strategy to Choose: XYZ

I feel X  
when Y  
because Z.

# A.C.T.I.O.N. Framework (more interactive)



**A**sk clarifying questions to help you understand intentions.

**C**arefully listen.

**T**ell others what you ***observed*** in a factual manner.

**I**mpact exploration:

ask for, and/or state, potential impact of such a statement or action on others without putting target of microaggression, if someone else, on the spot.

**O**wn your own ***thoughts & feelings*** around microaggression's impact.

**N**ext steps: Request appropriate action be taken.

Questions or comments on OTFD, xyz, or ACTION?







- . Stretch or Coffee Break!

# Facilitating difficult dialogues



- Create a container for productive dialogue:
  - Establish community guidelines (or classroom norms, behavioral expectations, etc.)
  - Model the behaviors you want to encourage
  - Address the behaviors you want to curtail

# Facilitating difficult dialogues



Introduce the concepts of social location and standpoint theory

- Social location – a person's place in the social structure based on their placement in a combination of identity categories (such as race/class/gender/sexualities/abilities/nation of origin/languages spoken/political orientation/etc.)
- Standpoint theory – the assertion that a person's social location shapes what they see and experience in the world.

# Facilitating difficult dialogues



- Offer guidance to the class
- Consider giving feedback to students early and often on dialogue skills; this can be done as a whole class and/or individually (Souza, 2016)
- Can have a meta-discussion on how the dialogue is going and ask for reflection on ways to improve

# Facilitating difficult dialogues



- Create good questions
- Structure questions to invite open dialogue
  - For example: Instead of asking “Are LGBTQ+ families damaging for children?” rephrase to “Why do you think that LGBTQ+ families are still stigmatized today?”

# Facilitating difficult dialogues



- Think-Pair-Share: In what ways have you/might you prepare to engage students in difficult dialogues in your classroom? Are there subject areas you are particularly mindful about or that are suited to deeper discussion?

# Addressing “Hot Moments” in the Classroom



- “Hot moment” – a sudden eruption of tension or conflict in the classroom (University of Michigan Center for Research on Learning and Teaching, or CRLT)

# Addressing “Hot Moments” in the Classroom

Do we have to address it?

- Everything speaks.
- May breed silence or more incivility.
- 60-75% of students and faculty report classroom incivility.
- Students are more perceptive of incivility, and usually want faculty to address it.



# Addressing “Hot Moments” in the Classroom

- May draw students’ attention back to the community guidelines in the class.
- Can ask students to write individually on a topic when a hot moment occurs, before having the group discuss.
- If you need to, say that you are going to address the situation in the next class period. This gives you time to think. (University of Michigan Center for Research on Learning and Teaching)

# Addressing “Hot Moments” in the Classroom



- Scenario 1: In your class, you are facilitating a dialogue about race (related to the specific topic you are teaching). A white student says something that seems to visibly offend a Latino (sometimes called Latinx) student, and the latter says to the first student, with emotion in his voice, “You have offended me again and again in this class.” What do you do or say?

# Addressing “Hot Moments” in the Classroom

- Scenario 2: In your class, a student speaks (seemingly with anger just below the surface) about how much she hates it when “poor people have smart phones, have their nails done, or are wearing nice clothes or shoes.” You notice other students in the room shifting in their seats; several students appear to be uncomfortable. What do you say?

# Practice



- Scenario: You feel good about the way that dialogue is progressing in your class at mid-semester. A student who has been quiet in class over the semester approaches you one day after class, and timidly says, “I have very conservative beliefs, and I do not feel that I can speak in your class. I feel that the other students will judge me.” What do you say? How might you address this issue with the class?

# Practice



Scenario: During small group work time you circulate around the room and listen to discussions. In one group, you observe a majority student repeatedly dismissing comments from a student of color. How do you intervene? What do you say?

[Scenario written by Don Gillian-Daniel and Megan Schmid (the Collaborative for Advancing Teaching & Learning) and Mark Kueppers (the Center for Leadership & Involvement), University of Wisconsin-Madison]

# In Closing:

- What are 2-3 things discussed today that you can use in your own classroom?

Write about where, when, and how you plan to use them.

# Closure



Something I learned today was. . .

Something I will do as a result of today's session is . . .

Something I still wonder about is...

Microaggression



Macro-level  
responses:

- National
- Institutional

Meso-level  
response:

- Departmental





# Allied Resistance on a Spectrum

White Savior

"Woke" justification

Performative Ally

Awareness

Allyship

Abolitionist

- clearly don't want to be a white savior or performative ally
- spectrum of self-risk and action from being a good ally to being a full-on abolitionist
- allies commit themselves to ending systemic oppression, follow the lead of targets, and act accordingly
- abolitionists put their safety, health, and freedom on the line following targets in the fight against systemic oppression

# Practice



- Scenario 1: One of your students mentions in class that one identity is more important than all the rest, implying that it is more oppressed. How do you respond in the moment?