

Microresistance and Ally Development: Powerful Antidotes to Microaggressions

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What are microaggressions?

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, Derald Wing, et al., "Racial Microaggressions in Everyday Life," *American Psychologist* 62.4 [2007], p. 271).

Think and Ink: Write down an example of a microaggression that you have observed or experienced?

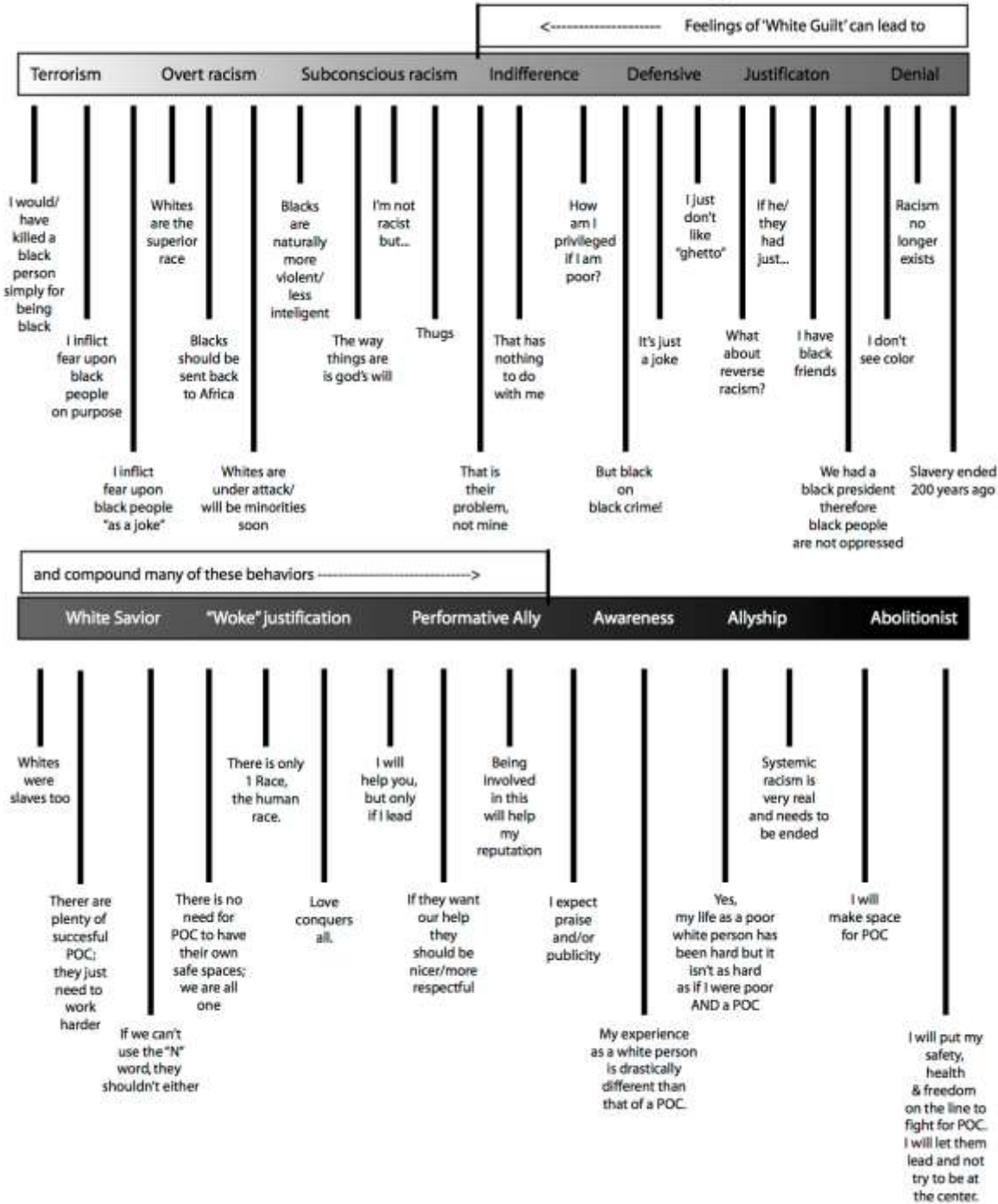
What is microresistance?

Microresistance is 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. (Irey, Sayumi, *How Asian American Women Perceive and Move toward Leadership Roles in Community Colleges: A Study of Insider Counter Narratives*, PhD Diss., University of Washington, 2013, p. 36; and Ganote, Cynthia, and Tasha Souza, and Floyd Cheung, “Microaggressions and Microresistance: Supporting and Empowering Students” in *Diversity and Inclusion in the College Classroom* [Madison: Magna, 2016])

Why does this matter?

- Research shows us that dismissiveness, invisibility, and subjugation of faculty of color, women of all races and ethnicities, and LGBTQ faculty is pervasive in higher education and leads to “microaggressive stress” (Sue, Derald Wing, *Microaggressions in Everyday Life* [Hoboken: Wiley, 2010], ch. 5), and
- Not intervening is akin to “standing still on the walkway” as Beverly Daniel Tatum puts it in *Defining Racism: Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* (New York: Basic, 1997), p. 11-12. “Passive racist, sexist, heteronormative behavior, for example, is equivalent to standing still on the walkway. No overt effort is being made (e.g., no specific racist acts), but the conveyor belt moves the bystanders along to the same privileged destination as those who are actively walking” (i.e., those being overtly racist). So acting as an ally is a way to walk in the opposite direction of the moving walkway, a way to interrupt the cycle of isms so that social justice can be achieved.
- But of course none of us is giving up on macro-resistance. Microresistance can aid in survival until the revolution dawns.

Racism Scale: Where do you fall?



***Note: It is common for many people to move back and forth along the scale regularly, especially the middle parts**
**** The term "blacks" is used to be more familiar to anyone of those mentalities**
*****"Blacks" can be substituted with people of any nationality/ethnicity other than european white**

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What can allies do to stand with colleagues who are facing microaggressions?

- Note that allied resistance is on a spectrum from less efficacious to more efficacious.
 - Visualized on The Racism Scale (C. Demnowicz, 2017), <http://racismscale.weebly.com/>
 - Anti-racist allied positions range from being a “white savior” to being a “performative ally” to true “allyship” with being an “abolitionist” at the high end
- Become more informed and empathetic by:
 - talking with and developing authentic relationships with your colleagues,
 - raising your awareness of macro- and microaggressions (Sue, 2007),
 - being open to mentoring your colleagues in your areas of strength. Some possibilities are introduce them to your networks around campus; advocate for them behind closed doors; provide a safe space for them to discuss their experiences; provide them with honest and direct feedback on teaching, scholarship, and service (areas on which they will be evaluated); etc. (Rockquomore, “Can I Mentor African-American Faculty?”, *Inside Higher Ed*, <https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2016/02/17/advice-white-professor-about-mentoring-scholars-color-essay>),
 - being on the lookout for your colleagues and offer resistance and/or affirmation if appropriate (Irey, 2013).
- Support targets of microaggressions by:
 - supporting your colleague’s efforts at microresistance and self-efficacy (Irey, 2013; Miller, William R., and Stephen Rollnick, *Motivational Interviewing: Helping People Change* [New York, NY: Guilford Press, 2013]),
 - giving microaffirmations--i.e., “tiny acts of opening doors to opportunity, gestures of inclusion and caring, and graceful acts of listening” (Scully, Maureen, and Mary Rowe, “Bystander Training within Organizations,” *Journal of the International Ombudsman Association* 2 [July 2009]: 89-95);
 - working behind-the-scenes on behalf of your colleagues (Irey, 2013).

What can targeted people do in the face of potential microaggressions?

- Increase your social resources by:
 - participating in mentoring programs,
 - building your network of mentors (Rockquomore, Kerry Ann, “When It Comes to Mentoring, the More the Merrier,” *Vitae*, <https://chroniclevitae.com/news/326-when-it-comes-to-mentoring-the-more-the-merrier>), and
 - practicing gratitude (Wood, Alex M., et al., “The Role of Gratitude in the Development of Social Support, Stress, and Depression,” *Journal of Research in Personality* 42 [2008]: 854-871).
- Increase your personal and psychic resources by:
 - ○ reminding yourself about what you value (Steele, Claude, *Whistling Vivaldi: How Stereotypes Affect Us and What We Can Do* [New York: Norton, 2011]),
 - ○ practicing self-care; as Audre Lorde wrote, “Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare” (*A Burst of Light: Essays* [New York: Firebrand, 1988], p. 131).

Both allies and targeted people can step in and speak up, depending on personal communication style and the situation, by using **OTFD, xyz, or ACTION** (or any other communication frameworks):

Speak up with communication strategies like:

- o **Open The Front Door to Communication (OTFD)** to make transparent the nature and effects of microaggressions: adapted from Learning Forum (communication steps)
 - Observe: Concrete, factual, and observable (not evaluative)
 - Think: Thoughts based on observation (yours and/or theirs)
 - Feel: Emotions- "I feel (emotion)."
 - Desire: Specific request or inquiries about desired outcome
- o *Example:* Let's pause. I noticed (Observe) that some people are interrupting others while they are speaking. I think (Think) we need to actively listen to all of our ideas so that we can learn from one another and maintain norms of respect at our meeting. I feel uncomfortable (Feeling) moving forward with the discussion. Can we please speak one at a time (Desire) and give others the chance to share their thoughts?"
- Speak up with other frameworks offered (such as A.C.T.I.O.N or XYZ).
- Speak up by using **XYZ**:
- I feel **X** when **Y** because **Z**.

Example: I feel uncomfortable when I hear comments about Claude, because he is not here to defend himself. • The steps below provide a guide on how to take **A.C.T.I.O.N.** rather than feeling frozen in the moment of a microaggression (Cheung, Ganote, and Souza, "Microaggressions and Microresistance: Supporting and Empowering Students," *Diversity and Inclusion in the College Classroom*, http://ww1.facultyfocus.com/register/free-reports/main.html?product_id=520).

A.C.T.I.O.N.

Ask clarifying questions to assist with understanding intentions.

- "I want to make sure that I understand what you were saying. Were you saying that...?"

Carefully listen to their response.

- If they disagree with your paraphrase and clarify a different meaning, you could end the conversation. If you suspect they are trying to "cover their tracks," you may consider making a statement about the initial comment.

"I'm glad to hear I misunderstood you, because, as you know, such comments can be..."
- If they agree with your paraphrase, explore their intent behind making the comment.

"Can you tell me what you were you hoping to communicate with that comment?"

"Can you please help me understand what you meant by that?"

Tell others what you observed as problematic in a factual manner.

- "I noticed that . . ."

Impact exploration: ask for, or state, the potential impact of such a statement or action on others.

- "What do you think people think when they hear that type of comment?"
- "As you know, everything speaks. What message do you think such a comment sends?"
- "What impact do you think that comment could have on ..."

Own your own thoughts and feelings around the impact.

- "When I hear your comment I think/feel..."
- "Many people might take that comment to mean..."

- “That comment can perpetuate negative stereotypes and assumptions about...”
- “Such negative comments can cause division and defensiveness. I would like to think that is not your intent.”

Next steps: Request appropriate action be taken.

- “I’d like you to use Mustafa’s real name rather than calling him Mo. Can you do that please?”
- “Please listen to everyone’s comments without interruption.”
- “I’d appreciate it if you’d stop making these types of negative comments because...”

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