

# Microaggressions and Microresistance in Community Engagement

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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



- 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),

# Rationale for Workshop



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
  - Respect and dignity of each person is the most important thing



# Microaggressions and Microresistance Work:

**Collaboratively done by**  
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**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 a community engagement setting.

# 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



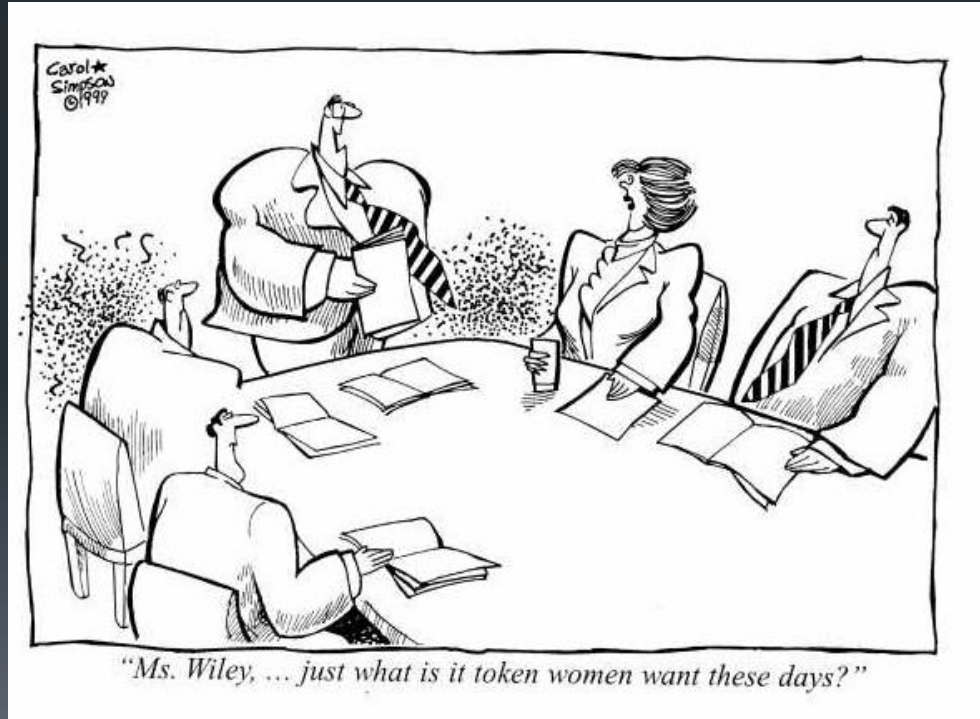
Micro: in terms of **perception by the aggressor** NOT in hurtful impact it can have.

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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?



# Microresistance

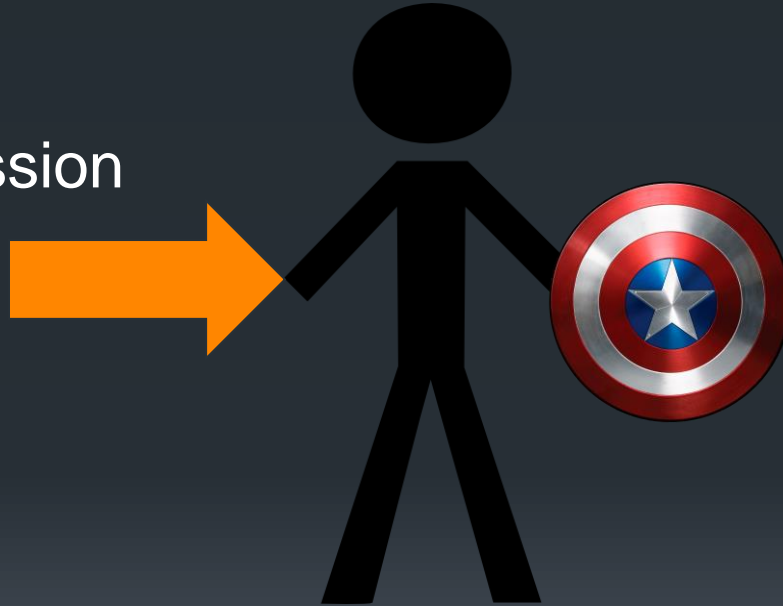
Small-scale individual and/or collaborative efforts that empower targeted people and allies to cope with, respond to, and/or challenge microaggressions to ultimately dismantle systems of oppression.



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

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

Microaggression



Microresistance:

- Microaffirmation
- OTFD
- xyz
- ACTION
- etc.

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

# Microaffirmations are:



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

(Scully and Rowe, 2009)

# Examples of Microaffirmations



In a group of 2, share examples of microaffirmations given, experienced or observed.

- When you received a microaffirmation, what (if anything) did it do for you?



# 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 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 Jeff 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?

Stand & Find New Pairs: Choose A & B



# Practice in Pairs:



Scenario 1: UNO students are in a community setting, and you observe Jane (a white student) interrupting Tanya (a community member and a woman of color) repeatedly. (You've noticed that this is a pattern of behavior for Jane.)  
What do you say?

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

# Practice in Pairs:



- Scenario 2: UNO students are reflecting as a group on their recent experiences in the community. Two of your students begin talking about the people they met in the community in disparaging ways. What do you say?
- *Once done: A give feedback to B on use of OTFD*

# How did it go?



- What was easy? Hard?
- How did it feel?
- Learn?
- Might you use it in the future? When/where/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 on OTFD, xyz, or ACTION?



# “In my work” Think & Ink



Write down 3 concrete ways in which you can use these skills in your own work.


# Closure



Something I learned today was. . .

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

A question I still have is...



*“I’ve learned that people will forget  
what you said, people will forget what  
you did, but people will never forget how  
you made them feel.”*

Maya Angelou

# Facilitating difficult dialogues



- Create a container for productive dialogue:
  - Establish community guidelines
  - Model the behaviors you want to encourage
  - Address the behaviors you want to curtail

# 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)



# Facilitating difficult dialogues



- Create good questions
- Structure questions to invite dialogue

# Facilitating difficult dialogues



- Can have a meta-discussion on how the dialogue is going and ask for reflection on ways to improve

# Facilitating difficult dialogues



- 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? Moving forward how might this inform how you prepare your lecture, course material, and assignments to ensure intersectionality is covered?

# Facilitating difficult dialogues



Scenario 2: The student newspapers are all reporting that a student on campus spat on a group of Black students, calling them “poor and here on scholarship.” As they enter class you hear your students discussing the event, and how these events keep happening on campus. Do you acknowledge the event and, if so, how? What do you say?



# 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: 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?

# Addressing “Hot Moments” in the Classroom

- Scenario 2: 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 an African American student, and the latter says, with emotion in her voice, “You have offended me again and again in this class.” What do you do or say?

# Addressing “Hot Moments” in the Classroom

- Scenario 3: In your class, a student speaks (seemingly with anger just below the surface) about how much she hates it when “people on welfare have smart phones, have their nails done, or are wearing nice clothes or shoes”. You notice other students in the room rolling their eyes and appear uncomfortable. What do you say?

# 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.