

# Microaggressions, Microresistance, and Ally Development

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# Rationale for Workshop



- A Challenge:
  - Current socio-political environment and the need to stretch our practice

# 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),

# Community Guidelines for Today:



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



# Microaggressions and Microresistance Work:

**Collaboratively done by**  
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# 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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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).



# Microresistance

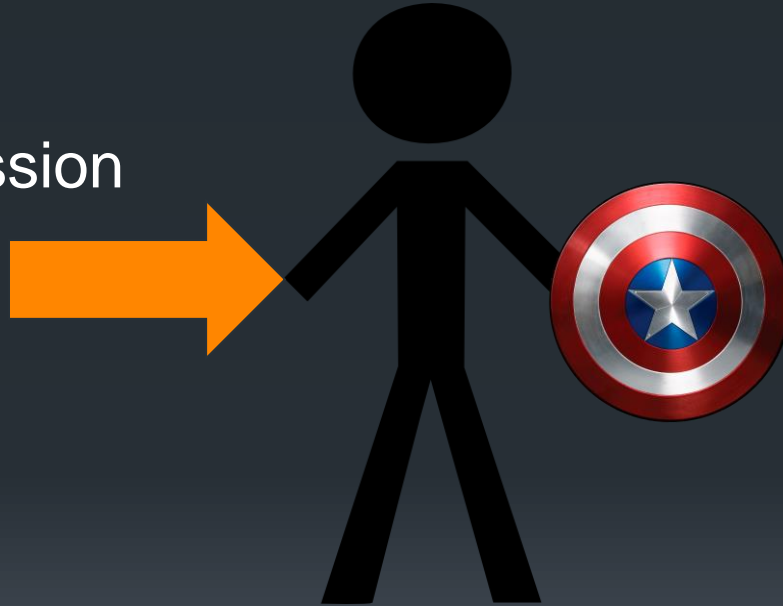
Small-scale individual and/or collaborative efforts that empower targeted people and allies to cope with, respond to, and/or challenge microaggressions to ultimately dismantle systems of oppression.



- 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)

# 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: You are at a meeting and you observe Jane (a white woman, Full Professor) interrupting Tanya (a woman of color, Assistant Professor) during the meeting 3 times (and you've noticed that this is a pattern at meetings).

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

# Practice in Pairs:



- Scenario 2: You are the most senior member at a committee meeting. A white male faculty member (Jim) chairs this high-profile committee, populated by both staff and faculty, mostly male. He routinely asks a female faculty member on the committee to perform tasks like taking notes on the meeting, bringing snacks to the next meeting, etc. (and he does not ask others to do these same tasks). In this meeting, he then says, “Maya, would you please plan our committee’s upcoming reception for us? This event needs to make a good impression for the whole campus, and I know you’ll do a better job planning it than I would.”
- *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?



# Case Study




- On-campus reception context: Several colleagues (including you), a mix of both staff and faculty, are having a conversation over wine and cheese. Marta says in a joking tone to a colleague in the group, “Hey, Jim! You never bring anyone to our events. Hope you can find a woman to bring to the Christmas party next month!” (The “Christmas party” is actually the College Holiday Party. Jim is gay and has a long-term partner. Jim’s religious status is unknown.) Previously, you have observed Marta making joking comments about Jim and his (seemingly) single status.
- What might you say?

# “In my work” Think & Ink



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



*“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

# Rationale for Workshop



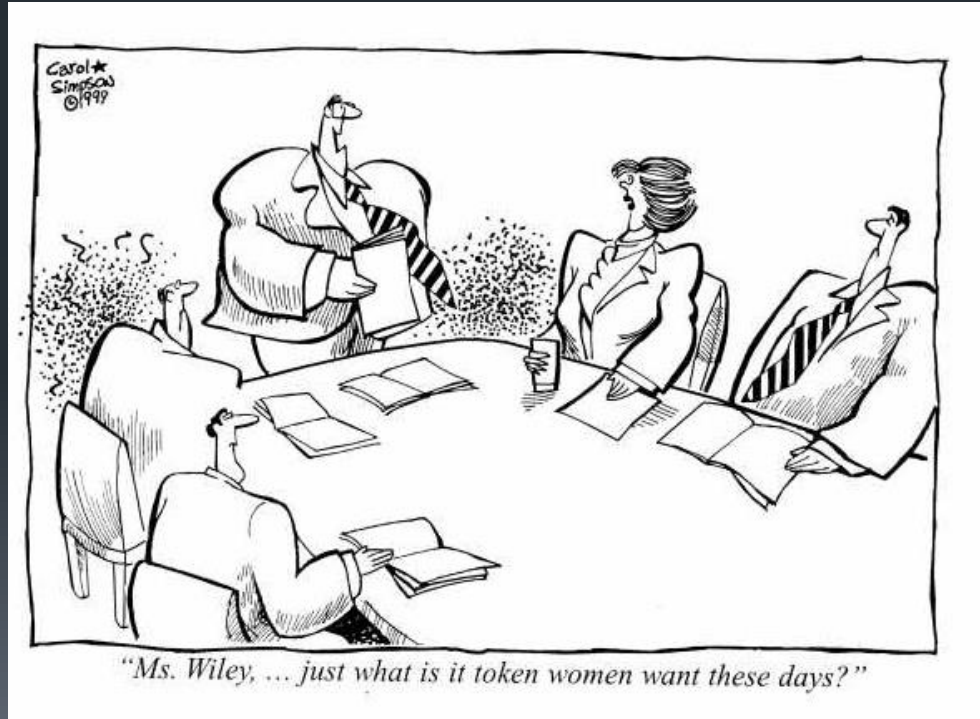
Cognitive resources for learning (“mental bandwidth”) of over half our young people have been diminished by the negative effects of economic insecurity, discrimination and hostility against non-majority groups based on race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or gender identity, and other aspects of difference.

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

# Microaggressions Example: Identity Blindness



# Microaggressions Example: Tokenism or Native Informant



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





# MR Mentoring Examples for Allies

Be open to mentoring your colleagues in your areas of strength:

- 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.

(Rockquemore, February 27, 2016, “Can I Mentor African-American Faculty?”,  
*Inside Higher Ed*)

# MR Examples that Increase Your Social and Personal Resources

- Participating in mentoring programs
- Building your network of mentors
- Practicing gratitude
- Practicing self-care

