Microaggressions in the Teaching and Learning Environment
Center for Faculty Educators Workshop
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Definitions
• **Unconscious bias** - social stereotypes about certain groups of people that individuals form outside their own conscious awareness
• **Privilege** - operates on personal, interpersonal, cultural, and institutional levels and gives advantages, favors, and benefits to members of dominant groups at the expense of members of non-dominant groups
• **Intersectionality** - the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage
• **Microaggression** - brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral or environmental indignities (whether intentional or unintentional) that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative slights and insults against a particular group of people
• **Macroaggression** - Large-scale or overt aggression toward those of a certain group of people. In contrast to microaggressions, which are usually interpersonal/individual interactions, macroaggressions occur towards everyone in a particular group. Microaggressions may often feel like macroaggressions
• **Allyship** - a lifelong process of building relationships based on trust, consistency, and accountability with marginalized individuals and/or groups of people
• **Micro-affirmation** - subtle acknowledgements of a person’s value and accomplishments which create a sense of belonging

Examples:
- publicly giving credit to someone for saying or doing something
- telling somebody how much you value their perspective
- saying hello to someone in the elevator
- making a kind introduction to someone else
- listening to someone in distress
- paying attention to small things

Skills Practice

Before:
Here are some set up suggestions to use when creating expectations in a learning environment:

- “I want to acknowledge that microaggressions happen. How can we work together to make sure this is a positive learning environment?”
- “Microaggressions can be intentional or unintentional and have a negative impact. How will we address these as a team?”
- “We all have blindspots and will say things that could have an unintentional impact. I would like you to tell me if I say something that has a negative impact.”
- “I would like to create an agreement prior to working together, what thoughts do you have about addressing microaggressions when they happen…”
During:

Cool Down→ Slow Down→ Engage Constructively

- **INQUIRE**
  - “What is it that concerns you the most?”
  - “Say more about that.”
  - “So what do you believe in? Can you elaborate on your point?”
  - “Sounds like you have a strong opinion about this. Tell me why.”

- **REFRAME/RE-DIRECT**
  - “How would you feel if this happened to your ___”
  - “Could there be another way to look at this…”
  - “Let’s reframe this…”
  - “Let’s open up this conversation to others…”
  - Use a micro-affirmation!

- **PARAPHRASING/RESTATING FOR REFLECTION**
  - “So it sounds like you think…”
  - “Let me summarize what I’m hearing…”
  - “You’re saying that you believe…”

- **IMPACT STATEMENTS**
  - “I felt ___ when you said/did ____, and it _________”
  - Note the “I” statements

- **PREFERENCE STATEMENTS**
  - “What I’d like is…”
  - “It would be helpful to me if…”
  - “I need you to…”
  - “I’d like to focus on…”

After

**Acknowledge & Summarize** - what just happened? Name it and summarize

**Clarify Impact & Reflect** - ask questions to clarify impact and reflect upon the impact

**Next Steps** - make a followup plan and hold yourself accountable

“What was just said made me feel uncomfortable. Did anybody else feel uncomfortable?”
“How can I be most supportive to you in addressing what _________ said?”
“I would like to talk about what just happened.”
“I would like to go back to something I heard/I said yesterday, I worry that it may have had a harmful impact.”
Interrupting Bias: Calling Out vs. Calling In

Calling Out:
- When we need to let someone know that their words or actions are unacceptable and will not be tolerated
- When we need to interrupt in order to prevent further harm
- Will likely feel hard and uncomfortable, but necessary
- Allows us to hit the "pause" button and break the momentum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wow. Nope. Ouch. I need to stop you right there.</th>
<th>That word/comment is really triggering and offensive. Be mindful and pick a different word.</th>
<th>I need to push back against that. I disagree. I don’t see it that way.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Okay, I am having a strong reaction to that and I need to let you know why.</td>
<td>I don’t find that funny. Tell me why that’s funny to you.</td>
<td>I wonder if you’ve considered the impact of your words.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hmmmm... maybe you want to think this one through a bit more and speak about it later.</td>
<td>I need you to know how your comment just landed on me.</td>
<td>That’s not our culture here. Those aren’t our values.</td>
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<td>Is sex/gender/gender identity/gender expression/race/class/ethnicity/religion/ability/immigration status/body type/marital status/age/pregnancy relevant to your point? How?</td>
<td>It sounded like you just said __________. Is that really what you meant?</td>
<td>I feel obligated as your peer/colleague/co-worker/friend/supervisor to tell you that your comment wasn’t okay.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It sounds like you’re making some assumptions that we need to unpack a bit.</td>
<td>You may or may not realize this, but you’re talking about me/my story/my identity markers.</td>
<td>I need to leave the room if the conversation is going to continue down this road.</td>
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Remember, it is a powerful thing for the target of oppression to hear these words from the mouth of an ally!

Adapted from Oregon Center for Educational Equity: What Did You Just Say? Responses to Racist Comments Collected from the Field
Calling In:
- When there is an opportunity to explore deeper, make meaning together, and find a mutual sense of understanding across difference
- When we are seeking to understand or learn more
- When we want to help imagine different perspectives, possibilities, or outcomes
- Provides for multiple perspectives and encourages paradigm shifts
- Focused on reflection, not reaction
- Is not just a suggestion with an uptick (Don’t you think you should...?)

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<tr>
<th>I'm curious. What was your intention when you said that?</th>
<th>How might the impact of your words/actions differ from your intent?</th>
<th>What sort of impact do you think your decision/comment/action might have?</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How might someone else see this differently? Is it possible that someone might misinterpret your words/actions?</td>
<td>How might your own comfort level, assumptions, expectations, prior experiences be influencing your beliefs, decisions, process?</td>
<td>How is ____ different from ____? What is the connection between ____ and ____?</td>
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<td>What criteria are you using to measure/assess etc?</td>
<td>How did you decide, determine, conclude...</td>
<td>What would have to change in order for ____?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you assume to be true about ____?</td>
<td>Why is this the best way to proceed? What other approaches have you considered?</td>
<td>What is making you the most fearful, nervous, uncomfortable or worried?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Why do you think that is the case? Why do you believe that to be true?</td>
<td>Why do you think others have/haven't moved in that direction?</td>
<td>How do you know it's working?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why did the result or response cause a problem for you?</td>
<td>What would other stakeholders say/think/feel?</td>
<td>In your opinion, what is the best case scenario?</td>
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Think: How might we call out the behavior, while calling in the person?

Adapted from the School Reform Initiative Pocket Guide to Probing Questions

Additional Resources


Wheeler, DJ, J Zapata, D Davis and C Chou (2019) Twelve tips for responding to microaggressions and overt discrimination: When the patient offends the learner, Medical Teacher, 41:10, 1112-1117

**Impactful Videos**

Islamophobia Killed My Brother. Let’s End the Hate

Medical Training in the Closet

The Patient Called Me ‘Colored Girl.’” The Senior Doctor Training Me Said Nothing

**Campus Resources**

Differences Matter website- [https://differencesmatter.ucsf.edu](https://differencesmatter.ucsf.edu)

Anti-Racism Primer and Toolkit for Medical Educators

The Office of Diversity & Outreach [https://diversity.ucsf.edu](https://diversity.ucsf.edu)

LGBT Resource Center- [https://lgbt.ucsf.edu](https://lgbt.ucsf.edu)

Multicultural Resource Center- [https://mrc.ucsf.edu](https://mrc.ucsf.edu)

Diversity in GME- [https://meded.ucsf.edu/diversity-gme](https://meded.ucsf.edu/diversity-gme)

Office for the Prevention of Harassment & Discrimination-[http://ophd.ucsf.edu/](http://ophd.ucsf.edu/)

CARE Advocacy Resources & Education- [https://careadvocate.ucsf.edu/](https://careadvocate.ucsf.edu/)

Office of the OMBUDS- [https://ombuds.ucsf.edu/](https://ombuds.ucsf.edu/)