Workshop Goal: To feel more empowered to respond when confronted with a microaggression.

Learning Outcomes: By the end of this session, you should be able to:
- Describe microaggressions and their impact (MA)
- Weigh key considerations when faced with a MA
- Apply concrete strategies in response to microaggressions

Definition of microaggression: subtle verbal or nonverbal communication, intentional or not, resulting in harmful consequences to members of marginalized groups (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000).

1. What is an example of a microaggression (MA)?

   Other examples?

2. What are some agreements that can guide our interaction today?
- Listen actively
- Participate and allow participation-- community growth depends on the inclusion of every individual voice
- Speak from your own unique experience and allow others to do the same
- Come from curiosity not judgment
- Lean into discomfort

3. Why do microaggressions matter?

4. What are some things one should consider when faced with a MA?
- Contextual considerations: aggressor characteristics, relational conditions, personal conditions, environmental conditions
- Nature of MA, potential intent, and possible outcomes
• Choices based on considerations: private/public, direct/indirect, valence

5. **How can we mitigate, or minimize the impact of, microaggressions?**
   • Establish agreements for interacting in meetings
   • Don’t ask people to represent perspective of an entire identity group
   • Acknowledge, and become informed about, oppression of groups other than your own
   • Be aware that your identity impacts others
   • Be aware of your own biases
   • Address microaggressions through microresistance

6. **Microresistance:** Small-scale (daily, individual/collaborative, doable) efforts that empower targeted people and allies to cope with, respond to, and/or challenge microaggressions to ultimately dismantle systems of oppression (Souza, Cheung, & Ganote, 2017; Irey; 2013).

   One way to engage in microresistance is to increase personal and emotional strength, as well as social resources, by:
   • reminding yourself what you value (Steele, 2010, p. 174-75)
   • 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” (Lorde, 1988, p. 131)
   • building your network of mentors
   • practicing gratitude and offering microaffirmations to others

7. **What are some communication frameworks that can be useful in responding to a MA?**

   **Open The Front Door to Communication (OTFD)** Adapted from Learning Forum (2016)

   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

   **Example:** “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 **(Feel)** with this request and would like us all to simply ask others to speak for themselves **(Desire).”

   **OTFD Practice**

   Written OTFD response notes
   O:
   T:
   F:
   D:
Take A.C.T.I.O.N.: To speak up when MAs occur, the steps below provide a guide on how to take A.C.T.I.O.N. rather than feeling frozen (Souza, 2018; Chueng, Ganote, & Souza, 2016).

Ask clarifying questions to assist with understanding intentions.

“I want to make sure that I understand what you were saying. Were you saying that . . .?”

Come from curiosity not judgment.

- Listen actively and openly to their response.
- Tell what you observed as problematic in a factual manner.

“I noticed that . . . .”

- 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 to encourage learning.

“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 help me understand what you meant by that?”

Impact exploration: ask for, and/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 . . . .”

“In my experience, that comment can perpetuate negative stereotypes and assumptions about . . . I would like to think that is not your intent.”

Next steps: Request appropriate action be taken.

“Such comments make it difficult for us to focus on our work because people feel offended. So I’d like to ask you to state your thoughts differently in the future. Can you do that please?”

“I’d appreciate it if you’d consider using a different term because it is inconsistent with our group agreement regarding X . . . .”

Sources & Resources


Caplan, P. J., & Ford, J. C. (2014). The voices of diversity: What students of diverse races/ethnicities and both sexes tell us about their college experiences and their perceptions about their institutions’ progress toward diversity. APOREA, 8(3), 30-69.


