

# Macro Impact of Microaggression: Exploring Microaggressions in Higher Education

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# Agenda

1. Presentation: Microaggressions & Microactivism
2. Ground Rules
3. Roundtable discussion
4. Debrief



Microaggressions  
on college  
campuses...

## Microaggression and Changing Moral Cultures

Occidental Faculty Weighs System for Reports  
of Microaggressions

## **Universities Are Trying To Teach Faculty How To Spot Microaggressions**

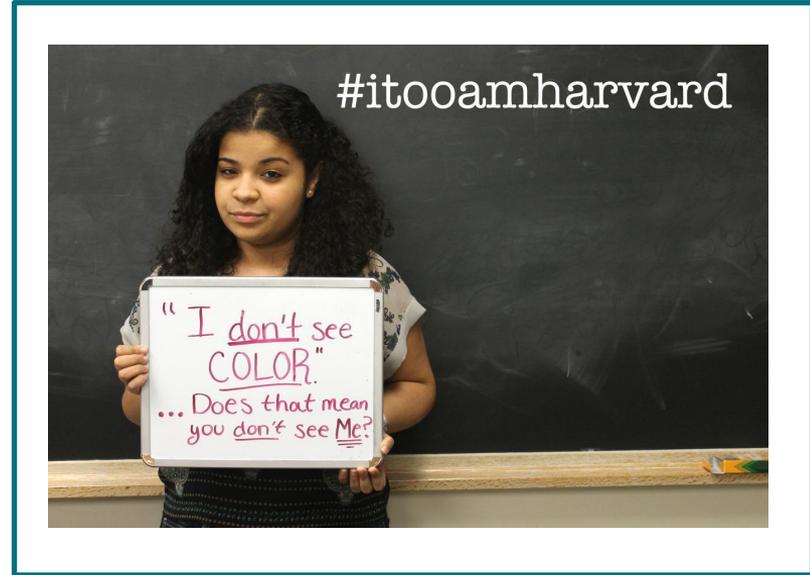
**Campaigns Against Microaggressions  
Prompt Big Concerns About Free  
Speech**

My reaction when I discovered the word "microaggression"



# LIS Microaggressions Project

- Documentation project/website on tumblr since Spring 2014, inspired by student organized documentation such as *I, Too, Am Harvard*
- Storytelling to highlight untold/undertold experiences of marginalized persons in LIS
- Those working/studying in LIS can anonymously submit their experiences with microaggressions
- Has mainly focused on verbal/nonverbal microaggressions – how we interact with one another and/or our patrons
- Less focus on environmental microaggressions to date



# Microaggressions defined

“Microaggressions are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial, gender, sexual-orientation, and religious slights and insults to the target person or group. Perpetrators of microaggressions are often unaware that they engage in such communications when they interact with...minorities”

-Derald Wing Sue, *Racial Microaggressions in Everyday Life*

\*\*Microaggressions can be expressed toward any marginalized group in society

# Microaggressions defined

*this project is a response to “it’s not a big deal” - “it” is a big deal. “it” is in the everyday. “it” is shoved in your face when you are least expecting it. “it” happens when you expect it the most. “it” is a reminder of your difference. “it” enforces difference. “it” can be painful. “it” can be laughed off. “it” can slide unnoticed by either the speaker, listener or both. “it” can silence people. “it” reminds us of the ways in which we and people like us continue to be excluded and oppressed. “it” matters because these relate to a bigger “it”: a society where social difference has systematic consequences for the “others.”*

*but “it” can create or force moments of dialogue.*

-Microaggressions.com

# Social Identities & Intersectionality

Race

Ethnicity

Gender

Sexual  
Orientation

Religion

Ability  
(Physical &  
Mental)

Age

Class

National  
Origin

Geographic  
Background

Language

# Effects of microaggressions

## Impact: Why does this matter?

- At the individual level:
  - Feelings of powerlessness, invisibility
  - Sap the spiritual energies of recipients
  - Lead to low self-esteem
  - Deplete or divert energy for adaptive functioning and problem solving
- At the institutional & societal level
  - Affect team morale and productivity
  - Denying equal access and opportunity in education and employment

## Theme: Alien in One's Own Land

Belief that visible racial/ethnic minority citizens are foreigners.

Examples:

- “Where are you from?”
- “You speak English so well!”
- “Can you teach me words in your native language?”
- Continued mispronunciation of students’ names after correcting the person repeatedly

Co-worker asked me ‘what are you?’  
(ethnicity/heritage).

Didn’t expect that from a person who has been vocal about her dislike for being judged by her own physical appearance.

Answer: I’m American, from the United States.

“Spanish last  
name, three  
syllables”

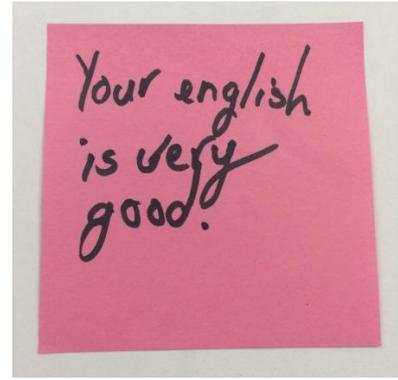
I was on a panel and the moderator asked me to pronounce my last name. After I told her, she told me how hard it was to pronounce (it isn't) and asked me to repeat it three more times before the session got started. When she went up to introduce the panel, she told me, “I'm going to introduce you first or else I'm going to forget how to say your name.” Then she proceeded to butcher my name.

## Theme: Ascription of Intelligence

Assigning intelligence to a POC based on their race.

Examples:

- "You are a credit to your race."
- "You are so articulate"



"You're so articulate! I couldn't believe you wrote something so poignant and beautiful!"

I'm glad that you expected me to be inarticulate and incompetent but I had to fulfill the same requirements to get into college and grad school.

# Theme: Denial of Individual Racism / Sexism / etc.

Denial of personal racism  
or one's role in its  
perpetuation.

Examples:

- "I'm not racist. I have several black friends."
- "As a woman, I know what you go through as a racial minority."

I once joked that the library should give all Children's Librarians free coffee because we run around so much. A coworker said, "Oh, they'd never do that here, they're all Jews."

I asked what she meant by that (though I already knew) and she said that they weren't actual Jews, but they were all cheap.

I informed her that I was Jewish (hoping to get her to apologize), and she said that she could tell by looking at me.

It was OK, though, she said, because she has some Jewish friends, and they joke about this stuff all the time.

## Theme: Myth of Meritocracy

Statements that assert that race does not play a role in life successes.

Examples:

- “I believe the most qualified person should get the job”
- “Everyone can succeed in society, if they work hard enough.”

When encouraged to hire students who have federal work study awards (for part-time student positions), a library supervisor responded that they didn't think they would receive any qualified applicants.

“You don't need a PhD to be a library director, you're young and Latino.”

## Theme: Second-Class Citizen

Treated as a lesser person or group.

Examples:

- POC is mistaken for a service worker
- Being ignored at the library reference desk as attention is given to the white student behind you
- The only elevator in a two-story building is out of service...for 6 months
- Professor tending to call on male students more than female students
- Female professor being mistaken for a student
- Speaking louder or slower when addressing a blind student

# Theme: Sexist / Hetero-sexist or Transphobic Language

Terms that are exclusionary or derogatory towards women and LGBTQ individuals

Examples:

- Using incorrect pronouns
- Being forced to choose between Male or Female when filling out forms
- Two options for relationship status: married or single

A senior colleague in his 70s never uses my correct pronouns (they, not she) despite knowing what they are. This is in marked contrast to the rest of my department, including his boss of the same age, all of whom who put in a good faith effort. I'd say something (or ask his boss to say something) as it's really starting to bother me but I know that he'd just double down on using the wrong pronouns.

Then again I don't think any of the female members of our staff will be very heartbroken when he finally retires..

# Theme: Traditional Gender Role Prejudicing & Stereotyping

Expectations of traditional roles or stereotypes.

Examples:

- Labeling an assertive female director as overly aggressive while describing a male counterpart of equal assertion to be a “strong leader”

So I work in a large supposedly liberal/progressive city and keep running into shit about being queer.

One coworker told me privately that everyone sins so she doesn't really have a problem with me.

Another started a conversation with “now don't get offended” and proceeded to ask several extremely personal questions about “which one of us was going to be the mom.” We aren't having kids and we both have severe fertility issues but this woman was intent on knowing whose uterus was going to use.

My boss regularly calls my wife “your uh, you know, your partner.” Wife. Or spouse. Legally married spouse.

I'm also closeted about my gender identity and our second in command used the t-slur after work hours while we were both en route to a library sponsored LGBT event.

Theme:  
Environmental  
Microaggressions

Macro-level microaggressions which are more apparent on systemic and environmental levels.

Examples:

- An all white, male campus administration
- Hostile and invalidating campus climate; threatening work environments
- Representation in curriculum, textbooks, library collections
- Overcrowding of public schools in communities of color

## Other Themes

- **Color blindness:** Denial or pretense that a white person does not see color or race
  - Ex: “I don’t care if they’re black, white, purple, or green!”
- **Assumption of universal experience**
  - Ex: Assuming all LGBTQ persons have the same experience
- **Denial of privacy**
  - Ex: Asking a PWD “What happened to you?”

## Other Themes

- **Pathologizing Cultural Values/ Communication Styles:**  
Values and communication styles of POC are abnormal
  - Ex: Asking an Asian person, “Why are you so quiet? We want to know what you think. Be more verbal. Speak up more.”
- **Secondary Gain:** A person expects to feel good or be praised for doing something for a PWD
  - Ex: News article about a “hero” for helping a PWD without any quotes from the actual PWD
- **Denial of experience**
  - Ex: “Everyone has SOME sort of disability!”

Interpretation &  
Meaning Behind  
Microaggressions

You do not belong.

You are abnormal.

You are intellectually inferior.

You are not trustworthy.

You are all the same.

# Ground Rules

- Listen actively, without interruption, and respect others when they are talking. Allow everyone the chance to speak.
- Speak from your own experience, don't generalize.
- Do not be afraid to ask questions but refrain from personal attacks; criticize ideas, not individuals.
- This is a learning experience, not a debate. Comment to share information.
- Avoid blame, speculation, and inflammatory language.
- Be conscious of body language and nonverbal responses.
- Our ultimate goal is not to agree but rather to gain a deeper understanding and take personal and institutional action.

# Scenarios

In groups of 4-5, review your scenarios:

- Identify: Why is this problematic?
- Immediate action: As a LBCC employee, how could/should you address this?
  - As an individual/department/college....
- Proactive action: How can we prevent this kind of behavior in the future?

# Scenario 1

You are having a conversation with a colleague who is recounting a conversation they had with a different coworker. As they are telling you about the conversation, they begin to mock and imitate that person's accent.

## Scenario 2

You have been asked to give a campus tour to a group of students. One of the students asks a question and you mistakenly call them a young man, and they correct you right away.

# Scenario 3

You have a meeting with an administrator from another campus with a faculty member who is a person of color. They look at the faculty member and ask “what’s your major?” and you notice that they do not make eye contact with the faculty member the entire meeting.

## Scenario 4

At a campus wide diversity meeting, discussion turns to undocumented students and another staff member stands up and makes a comment about how all undocumented students need materials in Spanish because they all speak Spanish.

# Scenario 5

A job candidate who self-identifies queer, bi-racial, and early career interviews for a position at the college. When asked about their experience working with diverse populations, they use their personal, lived experience as an example. The search committee disregards these comments when it comes time to discuss their candidacy because it was just their personal experience and ultimately decides that they don't have enough experience working with diverse populations.

# Scenario 6

Student group on campus complains and makes a statement against racist comments from a professor. Things escalate and the complaint ends up going to the campus administration, but ends up being discounted and disregarded. The administration happens to be predominantly white and male.

# Post-Scenario Reflections

- What strategies can you employ when dealing with microaggressions?
- What can you do to actively address your own biases?
- How can you apply microactivism to your work?
- What practical steps can you take to make your workplace more inclusive?

<p>Diversity Model</p> 	<p>Defecit Model</p> 	<p>Equity Model</p> 
<p>Focuses on increasing representation across a variety of dimensions (race, gender, ability, sexual orientation, age, etc.). Enhancing access, engagement, &amp; measuring the benefits.</p>	<p>Focuses on stereotypical disadvantages associated with lack of personal resources and preparation and assumes a need to compensate for those.</p>	<p>Focuses on changing individuals' cognitive frames, developing new accountability metrics, and changing the organization structure itself.</p>

DJA. "Breakthrough Diversity In The Workplace Requires a Mindset Shift," October 20, 2017.  
<http://www.deettajones.com/diversity-in-the-workplace-mindset-shift/>.

## Microactivism defined

- Small-scale actions that undermine or prevent microaggressions **and** dismantle systems of oppression
- Can be public-facing, intralibrary, architectural, etc.
- Works across silos of academic/public
- “Gateway drug to greater librarian involvement in progressive change.”

-Lockman (2015). <http://bit.ly/2aXU1ba>

## Microactivism - Examples with a trans lens

- Gender neutral restrooms
- Avoiding gendered language
  - Y'all > "you guys"
  - ~~Sir/ma'am~~
- Avoid gendered compliments and assumptions **with children**
- Local cataloging
- Programs and displays outside the token month "box"
- Model introductions with pronouns
  - "I'm Ray, and I use they/them pronouns. And you are?"

-Lockman (2016). <http://bit.ly/2b4UB8u>

Microactivism is  
only a start

- Higher education is not neutral and neither are educators--and that's a good thing!
- The world doesn't stop at the college's door
- Social justice is an issue in higher education

# Strategies: For the Microaggressor

## Don't...☹️

- Fake apologize #sorrynotsorry, e.g. “I’m sorry you were offended” or “I’m sorry you feel that way”
- Dismiss
- Ignore
- Rely on the microaggressed to teach you

# Strategies: For the Microaggressor

## Do... 😊

- Check yourself: Call yourself out and apologize immediately...or whenever you realize it
- Acknowledge your biases and be intentional about overcoming them
- Listen & reflect
- Research & learn!

## Strategies: For the Microaggressed

### In general...

- Find allies and support groups – in your department, on your campus, and/or in online spaces
- Practice self-care

### In (or after) the moment...

- Take a step back and decide how you want to respond
- Turn the situation into a teaching/learning moment (ONLY if you're up for it!)

## Strategies: For the Microaggressed

### Sample Responses:

- “I don’t think that comment was inclusive.”
- “What do you mean by that?”
- “This makes me feel uncomfortable.”
- “I’m offended by that.”
- “Can I give you some feedback?”

## The Catch-22 of Responding to Microaggressions

*Did that just happen? Did they do that on purpose or was it unintentional? How should I respond? Should I try to let it go, or, more likely, let it ruin my day? Or should I confront the person? If I bring it up, how do I prove it? Is it worth the effort? Should I just drop it?*

-Adapted from Sue, Capodilupo, et al., 2007

## Strategies: For the Bystander

# Acknowledge power dynamics!

(without speaking FOR the microaggressed)

### Sample Responses:

- “I don’t think that comment was inclusive.”
- “What do you mean by that?”
- “This makes me feel uncomfortable.”
- “I’m offended by that.”
- “Can I give you some feedback?”

Thank you!



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## Interpretation & Meaning Behind Microaggressions

~~You do not belong.~~

~~You are abnormal.~~

~~You are intellectually inferior.~~

~~You are not trustworthy.~~

~~You are all the same.~~



You belong!

You are normal!

You are intellectual!

You are trustworthy!

You are unique and celebrated!

**You are a valued & respected member of our campus and our community!**