



Cultural Fluency 2.0

Microaggressions

Presenter: Jennifer Doucette, M.Ed

Examples of Microaggressions in the Classroom

Microaggressions: everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership.

- Derald Wing Sue, Ph.D.

Microaggressions may be based on socioeconomic status, disability, gender, gender expression or identify, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, nationality, or religion. These insults or insensitivities may be exhibited by students or adults within the school community – keep that in mind when considering each example. As reported and documented by students, the following are offered as examples for reflection in an effort to raise awareness and sensitivity toward creating more inclusive and supportive classroom and school environments.

- L Failing to learn to pronounce or continuing to mispronounce the names of students after they have corrected you.
- L Scheduling tests and project due dates on religious or cultural holidays.
- L Disregarding religious traditions or their details. (Ex. Impacts of fasting)
- L Setting low expectations for students from particular groups, neighborhoods, or feeder patterns.
- L Calling on, engaging and validating one gender, class, or race of students while ignoring other students during class.
- L Assigning student tasks or roles that reinforce particular gender roles or don't allow all students flexibility across roles and responses.
- L Anticipating students' emotional responses based on gender, sexual orientation, race or ethnicity.
- L Using inappropriate humor in class that degrades students from different groups.
- L Expressing racially charged political opinions in class assuming that the targets of those opinions do not exist in class.
- L Using the term "illegals" to reference undocumented students.
- L Hosting debates in class that place students from groups who may represent a minority opinion in class in a difficult position.
- L Singling students out in class because of their backgrounds.
- L Expecting students of any particular group to 'represent' the perspectives of others of their race, gender, etc. in class discussions or debates.
- L Denying the experiences of students by questioning the credibility and validity of their stories.
- L Assigning class projects or creating classroom or school procedures that are heterosexist, sexist, racist, or promote other oppressions, even inadvertently.
- L Using sexist language.
- L Using heteronormative metaphors or examples in class.
- L Assuming the gender of any student.
- L Continuing to misuse pronouns even after a student, transgender or not, indicates their preferred gender pronoun.

- Assigning projects that ignore differences in socioeconomic class status and inadvertently penalize students with fewer financial resources.
- Excluding students from accessing student activities due to high financial costs.
- Assuming all students have access to and are proficient in the use of computers and applications for communications about school activities and academic work.
- Assuming that students of particular ethnicities must speak another language or must not speak English.
- Complimenting non-white students on their use of "good English."
- Discouraging students from working on projects that explore their own social identities.
- Asking people with hidden disabilities to identify themselves in class.
- Forcing students with non-obvious disabilities to "out" themselves or discuss them publicly.
- Ignoring student-to-student microaggressions, even when the interaction is not course-related.
- Making assumptions about students and their backgrounds.
- Featuring pictures of students of only one ethnicity or gender on the school website.
- Having students engage in required reading where the protagonists are always white.

Most examples taken, with slight adaptations, from *Microaggressions in the Classroom*,
University of Denver, Center for Multicultural Excellence,
by former students Joel Portman, Tuyen Trisa Bui and Javier Ogaz; and Dr Jesús Treviño, former Associate Provost for
Multicultural Excellence

Additional examples from recommended resource:
Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation,
by Derald Wing Sue, Ph.D.

Remember: This is a personal reflection exercise. There are no right or wrong answers. The goal is to gain a deeper understanding of yourself and how your identity shapes your experiences and interactions with the world.

Adapted from Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion for Trainers: Fostering DEI in the Workplace by Maria Morukian, 2022.

Surface 	<p>What are some of the most visible aspects of your identity? (e.g., race, gender, age, visible disabilities)</p> <p>How do these aspects impact how you are perceived by others?</p> <p>What assumptions might people make about you based solely on these visible traits?</p>
Snorkel 	<p>What are some aspects of your identity that are not immediately obvious but are relatively easy to share? (e.g., hobbies, interests, cultural background)</p> <p>How do these aspects contribute to your overall identity and how you see yourself?</p> <p>How might these aspects influence your interactions with others?</p>

<p>Scuba</p> 	<p>What are some deeply personal aspects of your identity that are significant to your core being and values? (e.g., personal experiences, traumas, deeply held beliefs)</p> <p>How do these aspects shape your worldview and how you navigate the world?</p> <p>How might these aspects impact your relationships with others?</p>
<p>Overall Reflection</p>	<p>What are some key insights or realizations you gained about yourself through this exploration?</p> <p>How might these insights impact how you interact with others and build relationships within your school community (students, colleagues, families)?</p>

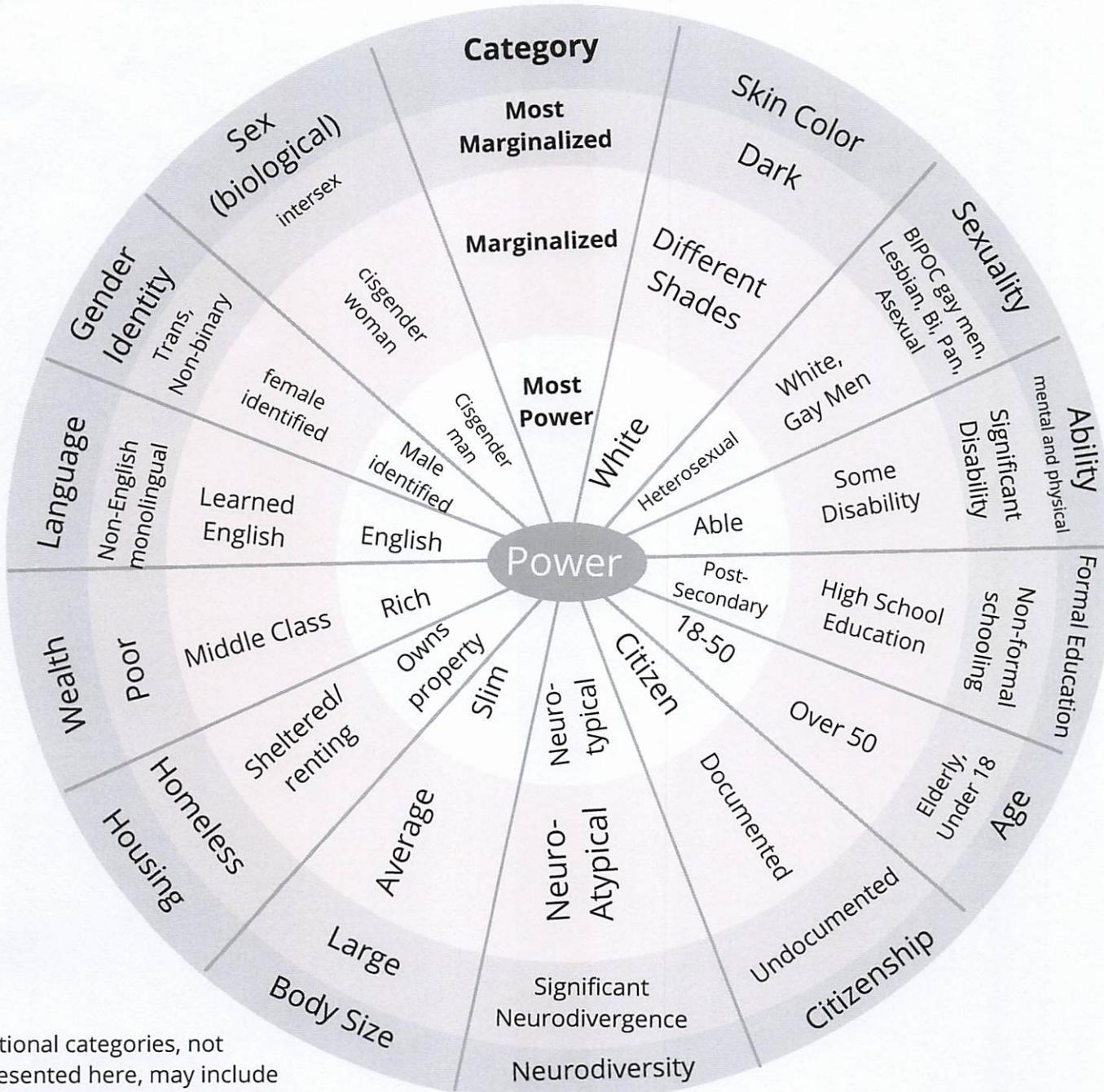
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How can you use this understanding of your own identity to foster greater empathy and understanding for others?
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Additional Prompts (Optional):

- How might your identity impact your role?
- How can you use this understanding of your own identity to better connect with and support staff and students of diverse backgrounds?
- What are some ways you can continue to explore and deepen your understanding of your own identity?

The Wheel of Power and Privilege

Adapted from a range of sources, including the Canadian Council for Refugees and Sylvia Duckworth, this wheel includes a range of some of the most commonly addressed cultural identifiers and the degree of power and privilege associated with each identifier. The outer part of the circle includes a broad range of identifying markers (we recognize this list can be non-exhaustive) with more specific descriptors from the outer part of the circle to the inner part. The outer rings include descriptors for more marginalized and less privileged groups whereas the innermost circle represents the most powerful and privileged groups. As you review this graphic, note the places where you identify and what this reveals about your relationship to power and privilege. We also have included some additional identifiers not represented on this wheel. You may think of more as well.



Additional categories, not represented here, may include

- family status
- experiences of trauma
- incarceration status
- religion
- other markers of power and marginalization

The Wheel of Power and Privilege Reflection Questions

1.) As you review this wheel, what do you learn about yourself?

2,) What's most surprising for you?

3.) Any other reflections? (e.g. what's missing from this tool, questions you have)

Tool: Recognizing Microaggressions and the Messages They Send

Microaggressions are the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership (from *Diversity in the Classroom*, UCLA Diversity & Faculty Development, 2014). The first step in addressing microaggressions is to recognize when a microaggression has occurred and what message it may be sending. The context of the relationship and situation is critical. Below are common themes to which microaggressions attach.

THEMES	MICROAGGRESSION EXAMPLES	MESSAGE
Alien in One's Own Land When Asian Americans, Latino Americans and others who look different or are named differently from the dominant culture are assumed to be foreign-born	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>"Where are you from or where were you born?"</i> • <i>"You speak English very well."</i> • <i>"What are you? You're so interesting looking!"</i> • A person asking an Asian American or Latino American to teach them words in their native language. • Continuing to mispronounce the names of students after students have corrected the person time and time again. Not willing to listen closely and learn the pronunciation of a non-English based name. 	<p>You are not a true American.</p> <p>You are a perpetual foreigner in your own country.</p> <p>Your ethnic/racial identity makes you exotic.</p>
Ascription of Intelligence Assigning intelligence to a person of color or a woman based on his/her race/gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>"You are a credit to your race."</i> • <i>"Wow! How did you become so good in math?"</i> • To an Asian person, <i>"You must be good in math, can you help me with this problem?"</i> • To a woman of color: <i>"I would have never guessed that you were a scientist."</i> 	<p>People of color are generally not as intelligent as Whites.</p> <p>All Asians are intelligent and good in math/science.</p> <p>It is unusual for a woman to have strong mathematical skills.</p>
Color Blindness Statements that indicate that a White person does not want to or need to acknowledge race.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>"When I look at you, I don't see color."</i> • <i>"There is only one race, the human race."</i> • <i>"America is a melting pot."</i> • <i>"I don't believe in race."</i> • Denying the experiences of students by questioning the credibility /validity of their stories. 	<p>Assimilate to the dominant culture.</p> <p>Denying the significance of a person of color's racial/ethnic experience and history.</p> <p>Denying the individual as a racial/cultural being.</p>
Criminality/Assumption of Criminal Status A person of color is presumed to be dangerous, criminal, or deviant based on his/her race.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A White man or woman clutches his/her purse or checks wallet as a Black or Latino person approaches. • A store owner following a customer of color around the store. • Someone crosses to the other side of the street to avoid a person of color. • While walking through the halls of the Chemistry building, a professor approaches a post-doctoral student of color to ask if she/he is lost, making the assumption that the person is trying to break into one of the labs. 	<p>You are a criminal.</p> <p>You are going to steal/you are poor, you do not belong.</p> <p>You are dangerous.</p>
Denial of Individual Racism/Sexism/Heterosexism A statement made when bias is denied.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>"I'm not racist. I have several Black friends."</i> • <i>"As a woman, I know what you go through as a racial minority."</i> • To a person of color: <i>"Are you sure you were being followed in the store? I can't believe it."</i> 	<p>I could never be racist because I have friends of color.</p> <p>Your racial oppression is no different than my gender oppression. I can't be a racist. I'm like you.</p> <p>Denying the personal experience of individuals who experience bias.</p>
Myth of Meritocracy Statements which assert that race or gender does not play a role in life successes, for example in issues like faculty demographics.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>"I believe the most qualified person should get the job."</i> • <i>"Of course he'll get tenure, even though he hasn't published much—he's Black!"</i> • <i>"Men and women have equal opportunities for achievement."</i> • <i>"Gender plays no part in who we hire."</i> • <i>"America is the land of opportunity."</i> • <i>"Everyone can succeed in this society, if they work hard enough."</i> • <i>"Affirmative action is racist."</i> 	<p>People of color are given extra unfair benefits because of their race.</p> <p>The playing field is even so if women cannot make it, the problem is with them.</p> <p>People of color are lazy and/or incompetent and need to work harder.</p>

Adapted from Sue, Derald Wing, *Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender and Sexual Orientation*, Wiley & Sons, 2010.

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THEMES	MICROAGGRESSION	MESSAGE
Pathologizing Cultural Values/Communication Styles The notion that the values and communication styles of the dominant/White culture are ideal/"normal".	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To an Asian, Latino or Native American: "Why are you so quiet? We want to know what you think. Be more verbal." "Speak up more." Asking a Black person: "Why do you have to be so loud/animated? Just calm down." "Why are you always angry?" anytime race is brought up in the classroom discussion. Dismissing an individual who brings up race/culture in work/school setting. 	<p>Assimilate to dominant culture.</p> <p>Leave your cultural baggage outside.</p> <p>There is no room for difference.</p>
Second-Class Citizen Occurs when a target group member receives differential treatment from the power group; for example, being given preferential treatment as a consumer over a person of color.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Faculty of color mistaken for a service worker. Not wanting to sit by someone because of his/her color. Female doctor mistaken for a nurse. Being ignored at a store counter as attention is given to the White customer. Saying "You people..." An advisor assigns a Black post-doctoral student to escort a visiting scientist of the same race even though there are other non-Black scientists in this person's specific area of research. An advisor sends an email to another work colleague describing another individual as a "good Black scientist." Raising your voice or speaking slowly when addressing a blind student. In class, an instructor tends to call on male students more frequently than female ones. 	<p>People of color are servants to Whites. They couldn't possibly occupy high status positions.</p> <p>Women occupy nurturing positions.</p> <p>Whites are more valued customers than people of color.</p> <p>You don't belong. You are a lesser being.</p>
Sexist/Heterosexist Language Terms that exclude or degrade women and LGBT persons.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use of the pronoun "he" to refer to all people. Being constantly reminded by a coworker that "we are only women." Being forced to choose Male or Female when completing basic forms. Two options for relationship status: married or single. A heterosexual man who often hangs out with his female friends more than his male friends is labeled as gay. 	<p>Male experience is universal.</p> <p>Female experience is invisible.</p> <p>LGBT categories are not recognized.</p> <p>LGBT partnerships are invisible.</p> <p>Men who do not fit male stereotypes are inferior.</p>
Traditional Gender Role Prejudicing and Stereotyping Occurs when expectations of traditional roles or stereotypes are conveyed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When a female student asks a male professor for extra help on an engineering assignment, he asks "What do you need to work on this for anyway?" "You're a girl, you don't have to be good at math." A person asks a woman her age and, upon hearing she is 31, looks quickly at her ring finger. An advisor asks a female student if she is planning on having children while in postdoctoral training. Shows surprise when a feminine woman turns out to be a lesbian. Labeling an assertive female committee chair/dean as a "b_____" while describing a male counterpart as a "forceful leader." 	<p>Women are less capable in math and science.</p> <p>Women should be married during child-bearing ages because that is their primary purpose.</p> <p>Women are out of line when they are aggressive.</p>

Tool: Interrupting Microaggressions

MICROAGGRESSION EXAMPLE AND THEME	THIRD PARTY INTERVENTION EXAMPLE	COMMUNICATION APPROACH
Alien in One's Own Land To a Latino American: "Where are you from?"	"I'm just curious. What makes you ask that?"	INQUIRE Ask the speaker to elaborate. This will give you more information about where s/he is coming from, and may also help the speaker to become aware of what s/he is saying. KEY PHRASES: "Say more about that." "Can you elaborate on your point?" "It sounds like you have a strong opinion about this. Tell me why." "What is it about this that concerns you the most?"
Ascription of Intelligence To an Asian person, "You're all good in math, can you help me with this problem?"	"I heard you say that all Asians are good in math. What makes you believe that?"	
Color Blindness "I don't believe in race."	"So, what do you believe in? Can you elaborate?"	
Myth of Meritocracy "Everyone can succeed in this society, if they work hard enough."	"So you feel that everyone can succeed in this society if they work hard enough. Can you give me some examples?"	PARAPHRASE/REFLECT Reflecting in one's own words the essence of what the speaker has said. Paraphrasing demonstrates understanding and reduces defensiveness of both you and the speaker. Restate briefly in your own words, rather than simply parroting the speaker. Reflect both content and feeling whenever possible. KEY PHRASES: "So, it sounds like you think..." "You're saying... You believe..."
Pathologizing Cultural Values/Communication Styles Asking a Black person: "Why do you have to be so loud/animated? Just calm down."	"It appears you were uncomfortable when _____ said that. I'm thinking that there are many styles to express ourselves. How we can honor all styles of expression—can we talk about that?"	
Second-Class Citizen You notice that your female colleague is being frequently interrupted during a committee meeting.	Responder addressing the group: "_____ brings up a good point. I didn't get a chance to hear all of it. Can _____ repeat it?"	REFRAME Create a different way to look at a situation. KEY PHRASES: "What would happen if...." "Could there be another way to look at this..." "Let's reframe this..." "How would you feel if this happened to your_____?"
Pathologizing Cultural Values/Communication Styles To a woman of color: "I would have never guessed that you were a scientist."	"I'm wondering what message this is sending her. Do you think you would have said this to a white male?"	
Second-Class Citizen Saying "You people...."	"I was so upset by that remark that I shut down and couldn't hear anything else."	USE IMPACT AND "I" STATEMENTS A clear, nonthreatening way to directly address these issues is to focus on oneself rather than on the person. It communicates the impact of a situation while avoiding blaming or accusing the other and reduces defensiveness. KEY PHRASES: "I felt _____ (feelings) when you said or did _____ (comment or behavior), and it _____ (describe the impact on you)."
Use of Heterosexist Language Saying "That's so gay."	"When I hear that remark, I'm offended too, because I feel that it marginalizes an entire group of people that I work with."	
Second-Class Citizen A woman who is talked over.	She responds: "I would like to participate, but I need you to let me finish my thought."	USE PREFERENCE STATEMENTS Clearly communicating one's preferences rather than stating them as demands or having others guess what is needed. KEY PHRASES: "What I'd like is..." "It would be helpful to me if...."
Making a racist, sexist or homophobic joke.	"I didn't think this was funny. I would like you to stop."	

Adapted from Kenney, G. (2014). *Interrupting Microaggressions*, College of the Holy Cross, Diversity Leadership & Education. Accessed on-line, October 2014. Kraybill, R. (2008). "Cooperation Skills," in Amster, M. and Amstutz, L., (Eds.), *Conflict Transformation and Restorative Justice Manual*, 5th Edition, pp. 116-117. LeBaron, M. (2008). "The Open Question," in Amster, M. and Amstutz, L., (Eds.), *Conflict Transformation and Restorative Justice Manual*, 5th Edition, pp. 123-124. Peavey, F. (2003). "Strategic Questions as a Tool for Rebellion," in Brady, M., (Ed.), *The Wisdom of Listening*, Boston: Wisdom Publ., pp. 168-189.

Tool: Interrupting Microaggressions

MICROAGGRESSION EXAMPLE AND THEME	THIRD PARTY INTERVENTION EXAMPLE	COMMUNICATION APPROACH
Color Blindness "When I look at you, I don't see color."	"So you don't see color. Tell me more about your perspective. I'd also like to invite others to weigh in."	RE-DIRECT Shift the focus to a different person or topic. (Particularly helpful when someone is asked to speak for his/her entire race, cultural group, etc.) KEY PHRASES: "Let's shift the conversation..." "Let's open up this question to others...."
Myth of Meritocracy "Of course he'll get tenure, even though he hasn't published much—he's Black!"	"So you believe that _____ will get tenure just because of his race. Let's open this up to see what others think."	
Myth of Meritocracy In a committee meeting: "Gender plays no part in who we hire." "Of course she'll get tenure, even though she hasn't published much—she's Native American!"	"How might we examine our implicit bias to ensure that gender plays no part in this and we have a fair process? What do we need to be aware of?" "How does what you just said honor our colleague?" "What impact do you think this has on the class dynamics? What would you need to approach this situation differently next time?"	USE STRATEGIC QUESTIONS It is the skill of asking questions that will make a difference. A strategic question creates motion and options, avoids "why" and "yes or no" answers, is empowering to the receiver, and allows for difficult questions to be considered. Because of these qualities, a strategic question can lead to transformation. Useful in problem-solving, difficult situations, and change efforts. KEY PHRASES: "What would allow you..." "What could you do differently..." "What would happen if you considered the impact on...""
Traditional Gender Role Prejudicing and Stereotyping In the lab, an adviser asks a female student if she is planning to have children while in postdoctoral training.	To the adviser: "I wanted to go back to a question you asked _____ yesterday about her plans for a family. I'm wondering what made you ask that question and what message it might have sent to her." To the student: "I heard what your advisor said to you yesterday. I thought it was inappropriate and I just wanted to check in with you."	REVISIT Even if the moment of a microaggression has passed, go back and address it. Research indicates that an unaddressed microaggression can leave just as much of a negative impact as the microaggression itself. KEY PHRASES: "I want to go back to something that was brought up in our conversation/meeting/class" "Let's rewind _____ minutes..."
CONSIDERATIONS: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The communication approaches are most effective when used in combination with one another, e.g., using impact and preference statements, using inquiry and paraphrasing together, etc. Separate the person from the action or behavior. Instead of saying "you're racist", try saying "that could be perceived as a racist remark." Being called a racist puts someone on the defensive and can be considered "fighting words." Avoid starting questions with "Why"—it puts people on the defensive. Instead try "how" "what made you" When addressing a microaggression, try to avoid using the pronoun "you" too often—it can leave people feeling defensive and blamed. Use "I" statements describing the impact on you instead or refer to the action indirectly, e.g., "when _____ was said..." or "when _____ happened..." How you say it is as critical as what you say, e.g., tone of voice, body language, etc. The message has to be conveyed with respect for the other person, even if one is having a strong negative reaction to what's been said. So it is helpful to think about your intention when interrupting a microaggression—e.g., do you want that person to understand the impact of his/her action, or stop his/her behavior, or make the person feel guilty, etc. Your intention and the manner in which you execute your intention make a difference. Sometimes humor can defuse a tense situation. 		

Adapted from Kenney, G. (2014). *Interrupting Microaggressions*, College of the Holy Cross, Diversity Leadership & Education. Accessed on-line, October 2014. Kraybill, R. (2008). "Cooperation Skills," in Armster, M. and Amstutz, L., (Eds.), *Conflict Transformation and Restorative Justice Manual*, 5th Edition, pp. 116-117. LeBaron, M. (2008). "The Open Question," in Armster, M. and Amstutz, L., (Eds.), *Conflict Transformation and Restorative Justice Manual*, 5th Edition, pp. 123-124. Peavey, F. (2003). "Strategic Questions as a Tool for Rebellion," in Brady, M., (Ed.), *The Wisdom of Listening*, Boston: Wisdom Publ., pp. 188-189.

Microaggression Scenarios Note Catcher

How could you respond? What could you say? What could you do?	Situation: A teacher repeatedly mispronounces a colleague's non-Western name, despite being corrected multiple times. When the colleague expresses frustration, the teacher responds, "It's just too hard for me to say—do you have a nickname?"	What are some things to consider in your response?
What resources and/or people would help you in interrupting this situation?		Why might someone lean towards a non-action response?

How could you respond? What could you say? What could you do?	Situation: You are in the hallway during the time classes go to and come back from lunch. You overhear a student tell another student, "Those earrings, I don't know about those. They are so big, and well, they are ghetto."	What are some things to consider in your response?
What resources and/or people would help you in interrupting this situation?		Why might someone lean towards a non-action response?

RESPONDING TO MICROAGGRESSIONS AND BIAS

(Can be used alone or in combination)

► **RESTATE OR PARAPHRASE.**

"I think I heard you saying _____ (paraphrase their comments). Is that correct?"

► **ASK FOR CLARIFICATION OR MORE INFORMATION.**

"Could you say more about what you mean by that?"

"How have you come to think that?"

► **ACKNOWLEDGE THE FEELINGS BEHIND THE STATEMENT.** Express empathy and compassion.

"It sounds like you're really frustrated/nervous/angry....."

"I can understand that you're upset when you feel disrespected."

► **SEPARATE INTENT FROM IMPACT.**

"I know you didn't realize this, but when you _____ (comment/behavior), it was hurtful/offensive because_____. Instead you could_____ (different language or behavior.)"

► **SHARE YOUR OWN PROCESS.**

"I noticed that you _____ (comment/behavior). I used to do/say that too, but then I learned_____."

► **EXPRESS YOUR FEELINGS.**

"When you _____ (comment/behavior), I felt _____ (feeling) and I would like you to_____."

► **CHALLENGE THE STEREOTYPE.** Give information, share your own experience and/or offer alternative perspectives.

"Actually, in my experience_____."

"I think that's a stereotype. I've learned that_____."

"Another way to look at it is _____."

► **APPEAL TO VALUES AND PRINCIPLES.**

"I know you really care about _____. Acting in this way really undermines those intentions."