DEATH BY A THOUSAND PAPER CUTS:
Microaggressions
and Their Effects on the Learning Climate

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Objectives

1. Define microaggressions and describe their impact on the learning climate
2. Practice identifying and managing microaggressions within the learning environment
3. Create action plans to improve the learning climate
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hDd3bzA7450

(**Warning: ADULT LANGUAGE)**
Small Group Reflection

• Please break off into small groups of 3-5 people and discuss the following questions:
  - How did you feel watching the video?
  - Have you heard of microaggressions before this workshop?
  - Based on your experiences, how do you think this topic applies to the learning climate?
  - What do you think might be some barriers to combating microaggressions, as you see them, in the learning environment?
What Is A Microaggression?

“What is a microaggression? Brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults…”

Why Should We Care About Them?

• ACGME requirement to create a safe learning environment
• Those who experience microaggressions:
  – Disengagement
  – Dissatisfaction in the workplace/burnout
  – Can impact patient safety
• As faculty and program leaders, you have the opportunity to
  – Empower trainees
  – Foster environments where trainees feel safe and supported
  – Take Action
Learning Climate

4 BASIC HUMAN NEEDS FOR ENGAGEMENT

THE NEED FOR TRUST
At the heart of tapping passion & effort of people

THE NEED TO HAVE HOPE
Leaders are dealers of hope

THE NEED TO FEEL A SENSE OF WORTH
People derive tremendous sense of worth from work

THE NEED TO FEEL COMPETENT
Challenging work that helps people grow

https://leadingwithtrust.com/2016/09/04/the-4-unmet-needs-that-lead-to-disengaged-employees/
How It Usually Happens:

LEARNING IN PROGRESS
“You speak really good English for an immigrant.”

“Why haven’t you found a husband yet?”

“YOU were born in Canada?”

“You have a mental disability? You seem perfectly normal to me.”
So, Should I Say Something?

Attempt to make meaning of event + Activation of stereotype threat

Am I being too sensitive? Am I attacking someone as racist? If I don’t say something, will they do it again...

Is what they said true? Maybe I am...
BURNED OUT

Judged

Prejudice

Disappointment

Misunderstood

Excluded

Disengaged

Vulnerable

Unsafe

Disrespected

Toxic Environment
Gallery Walk

• Please fill out as many post-it notes as you would like with examples of microaggressions that you have either committed, experienced, or witnessed

• Place your post-it notes on the wall and then partake in an explorative gallery walk to learn about the experiences of others
Addressing Microaggressions

“Now that I know what a microaggression is, what can I do about it?”
SPEAK UP!

• The most important thing we can do is verbally **ACKNOWLEDGE** the microaggression that has been committed and **EMPOWER** the aggressor to think about his/her words in a different way
Approaches to Communication

- Inquire
- Impact/Preference Statements
- Reflect
- Reframe
- Revisit
Inquire

Purpose: To have the aggressor explain more his/her way of thinking

Example phrases: “Can you elaborate more on that idea?” “Can you tell me more about why you believe (insert idea here)”

How this helps: Gives the aggressor a chance to elaborate on specific feelings or emotions, occasionally allows the aggressor to realize the implications of his/her comment
Impact & Preference Statements

Purpose: Describe HOW you feel and WHAT you would prefer had happened instead

Example phrases: “I think ___ about what you said/did and would rather ____ was___” “It would be helpful if you said it this way in the future”

How this helps: Allows the aggressor to understand the impact he/she has had on another individual and gives that person a strategy for communicating differently in the future
Reflect

Purpose: To paraphrase (in your own words) what the aggressor has stated, giving him/her a chance to know that you understood the comment.

Example phrases: “To me it appears that you believe….” “I want to make sure I understood you correctly, in my own words what you said was _____”

How this helps: Enables the aggressor to feel as though you are listening and then gives him/her the chance to hear the way in which the statement is received.
Reframe

Purpose: To develop an awareness for alternative ways to looking at and understanding a situation

Example phrases: “How would you feel if this occurred to your …..” “What if we looked at the situation in this way…”

How this helps: Creates an environment open to alternatives
Revisit

Purpose: To discuss a prior microaggression after the fact

Example phrases: “I wanted to talk about something that was said the other day..” “Do you remember our conversation when you mentioned ____?”

How this helps: Albeit delayed, this can still show the microaggressor that prior actions/words/inactions actually were not well-received and accepted
Things To Consider

- Non-verbal cues
- Tone of voice/delivery of message
- Attempt to not place blame... i.e. saying things like “you’re sexist” and instead say “there are many people that would view that as a sexist comment”
Small Group Role Play:

• In small groups, act out the 2 provided scenarios utilizing strategies just reviewed.

• Reflect on:
  – How did the role play go?
  – What did you feel?
  – Did any particular strategies seem to work better than others?
  – Perceived barriers and solutions?
Summary

- Microaggressions are defined as “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults”
- Vicious cycle
- The first step is acknowledging that microaggressions exist
- Address the microaggression
  - Inquire
  - Reflect
  - Reframe
  - Revisit
Create Your Own Action Plan!

• Consider potential barriers to implementation and solutions
Set the stage
- Prior to rounds, set expectations for a safe learning environment
  - Team huddle
  - Tell trainees you’re open to all perspectives
  - Encourage trainees to speak up when they feel uncomfortable about a situation
- Don’t be afraid to initiate this as a trainee!
- Challenge yourself

Model the behavior
- If you experienced the MA before, share your story
- Keep an open mind
- Recommend tools based on your prior experience
- Don’t be defensive
Educate, Educate, Educate

• Create a lecture/curriculum for trainees at all levels about microaggressions

• Incorporate this topic into orientation for trainees at all levels
  – May be useful to tie into sexual harassment talks

• Offer a talk to allow all individuals in the health care setting to learn about microaggressions

• Conduct climate surveys at your institution
Build A Network

• Contact person at each institution
• Share your policy with trainees and other staff
• Sign up for our email thread!
• We’re all in this together
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Questions?
Resources
