



University
of Windsor

Helper as a Cultural Being: Addressing Implicit Biases & Microaggressions

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Land Acknowledgment: The University of Windsor sits on the traditional territory of the Three Fires Confederacy of First Nations, which includes the Ojibwa, the Odawa, and the Potawatomi. We respect the longstanding relationships with First Nations people in this place in the 100-mile Windsor-Essex peninsula and the straits – les détroits – of Detroit.



Three Opening Scenarios

A Canadian-born, native English-speaking biracial (Chinese + German) 4th grader was one of the three students who won the speech competition at her school. These other two students were foreign-born immigrants. During the award ceremony at the school's weekly assembly, the principal praised her along with the other two kids in front of the entire school audience how incredible it was to see immigrants who came to Canada recently but excelled in school despite having to learn a new language.

An African American man and a woman were walking pass each other on a sidewalk of a street. As they were approaching each other, without even paying attention the woman instinctively swung her handbag from one side of her arm to the other, away from the side for which the man walked passed.

A psychology professor of South Asian descent was once hosting an international academic conference in Hawaii. One morning during breakfast he stood by the food bar at the hotel where he stayed, deciding on the selection of the food items. Another attendee of the conference, who was white male from Australia, was also at the food bar. The two men did not know each other. The man from Australia wanted bread but it was out. Seeing the professor at the corner of his eyes, the Australian man muttered: *"Well, can you see that the bread is out. Aren't you going to get more from the kitchen?!"*

At the core of these scenarios, what common thread do they share?

- *Reflections of underlying assumptions about groups & individuals*
- *Consequence of either implicit or explicit bias*
- *Subtle or covert*
- *Ambiguous to the recipients*

Define Implicit Biases

Learned automatic association (a cognitive shortcut) that we use as a tool to interact with others & our environment

Formation of Implicit Bias



Kirwan's Institute,
Ohio State University

► Reflection & Discussion:

What is your experience with implicit bias or microaggression, either through your own encounter or through those whom you know, in personal life or professional life?

How was the person involved impacted by the experience?

Person-Level Strategies to Challenge Implicit Biases

MODULE 4: LESSON 3

Individual Interventions



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Strategies to Combat Implicit Biases

- ▶ **Awareness** - being aware of our bias
- ▶ **Mindfulness** – use meditation to bring out our unconscious association
- ▶ **Intergroup contact** – based on meaningful cooperation & equity
- ▶ **Stereotype Replacement** - substitution
- ▶ **Counterstereotype** – use counter example
- ▶ **Individualism** – see target as a person first
- ▶ **Perspective Taking** – nurture cross-cultural understanding empathy
- ▶ **Experiential Encounter** – first-hand cultural exposure-contact

Devine, P. G., Forscher, P. S., Austin, A. J., & Cox, W. T. L. (2012). "Long-term reduction in implicit bias: A prejudice habit-breaking intervention". *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 48(6), 1267-1278. [doi:10.1016/j.jesp.2012.06.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2012.06.003)

Define Microaggressions

Microaggression was first proposed in 1970s by Dr. Chester Pierce, an African American professor and psychiatrist at Harvard University in the 1970s. It referred to “*subtle, stunning, often automatic, and nonverbal exchanges which are 'put downs' of Blacks by offenders*” (Pierce et al. 1978; p. 66) – originally for Black Americans

Contemporary definition of microaggression is: “***brief, commonplace, daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color***” (Sue et al., 2007; p. 273). – applicable more broadly to all groups.

Features of Microaggressions

Capodilupo (2019) observed that micro. often is:

- subtle, unintentional & indirect
- occurring when alternative explanations exist
- unconscious & ingrained biased beliefs & attitudes
- more likely to occur when people pretend not to see or notice cultural/group difference (pretended colour-blindness e.g., *I don't see you as _____.*)

Discussion

Can you recall any experiences of microaggression that you have either personally experienced or that you know of which occurred to someone else? What was it like?

Have you ever unknowingly or knowingly engaged in microaggression as a giver/contributor to someone else, either in a personal or professional sphere?

Types of Microaggressions

Microassault - a blatant verbal, nonverbal or environmental attack intended to convey discriminatory & biased sentiment (i.e., overt 'ism', such as calling names) - intentionally

Microinsult –unintentional behaviours or verbal comments conveying rudeness or insensitivity or demeaning comments about one's heritage or identity (e.g., Automatically assuming someone is a foreigner by asking: “Where are you from?”)

Often unintentionally & unaware by the perpetrators

Microinvalidation – verbal comments or behaviours that exclude, negate, or dismiss the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a target group (e.g., colour-blindness)

Often unintentionally & unaware by the perpetrators

Micro. Impacts Therapeutic Relationships

- Microaggression in therapy = therapeutic rupture
- Evidence shows racial, gender, & sexual orientation micro. To be detrimental to therapy (Owen et al., 2010, 2014; Shelton et al. 2011, 2013)
- Owen et al. (2015) found not addressing micro. in therapy worsened client-therapy alliance than when no micro was committed & when micro. was unresolved

Tackling Micro.: Some Suggestions

(Capodilupo, 2019)

- Practice Cultural Humility (The Multicultural Orientation Framework (MCO) by Davis et al., [2018])
- Being aware that microaggressions are a reality for culturally diverse groups & individuals
- Being aware everyone has engaged in and continues to engage in unintentional microaggressions. However, they can impede effective therapy & therapy relationship

- Be open to the possibility that culturally diverse individuals/clients may have a more accurate perception of reality than you the helper/clinician when it comes to different 'isms'.

Work to listen & acknowledge clients' sociopolitical reality & experiences

- When the client notices microaggressions you, as the helper/clinician has committed, be open & ready to talk & address the issue. It's how a helper/clinician recovers from the rupture that accounts!!