

Navigating Microaggressions in the Classroom

Dialogue led by

Tyrone A. Forman, PhD
Professor
Associate Chancellor and
Vice Provost for Diversity,
Office of Diversity
tyforman@uic.edu

Mark R. Martell, PhD
Director, Asian American Resource and Cultural
Center (AARCC)
Co-Principal Investigator, Asian American and Native
American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions
(AANAPISI) Initiative
Faculty, UIC Honors College
mmartell@uic.edu

What are
microaggressions?



**Brief indignities that
communicate negative
slights that have harmful
psychological impact on the
target person or group.**

- Sue, et al. (2007)



Why are microaggressions important to be recognized in the classroom?

- On college campuses, students have been made to feel unequal, unwelcomed, and discriminated
- Experiences are an everyday reality and have led to stereotypes
- Mask the growth of a new form of racism which has been likened to carbon monoxide--- invisible, but potentially lethal
- Has detrimental sociological and psychological impact

How do microaggressions manifest in the classroom or workplace? What can we do? (Group discussion.)

Examples from Martell (2016):

- 1) Noise from the Asian American Awareness Month celebration could be heard from the Quad:

Our professor was extremely confused and she asked what the noise was. I said, 'I think it was triple A month, the Asian American Awareness Month, they're having their events in the Quad.' Then she commented 'Oh, aren't Asians supposed to be the quiet ones?' That took me aback, and the classroom went silent. Right then, I think she realized that she said something wrong, but she didn't take any . . . she didn't care or bother to apologize. That was unintentional, but I think an apology was due.

- 2) The professor, who was talking about the pollution in China, made a generalized statement about China's One Child policy: "'They would prevent women from having a second child because that's the kind of people that the Chinese people are.' He said it very much aware that half the class was Asian people, students."

Recommendations:

- Recognize that microaggressions are not exclusive to any specific group.
- Educate yourself about the topic or take a course
- Assess the situation and remove yourself if needed
- If comfortable, address the statement: "That's insensitive." or "That makes me uncomfortable."
- Share your concerns with a peer, staff, or faculty

Suggestions for Faculty and Staff (Martell, 2016)

- Be more be culturally sensitive
- Cease assumptions and break norms
- Equal treatment with respect
- Be approachable

Resources:

- Racial Microaggressions in the Classroom Report: <http://www.racialmicroaggressions.illinois.edu/>
- Sue, D. W., Bucceri, J., Lin, A. I., Nadal, K. L., & Torino, G. C. (2007). *Racial microaggressions and the Asian American experience*.
- Martell, M. R. (2016). *Invisible Me: A narrative study on the racialized experiences of Asian American students*. <http://bit.ly/martell2016>
- The Centers for Cultural Understanding and Social Change: African-American Cultural Center, Asian American Resource and Cultural Center, Disability Resource Center, Gender and Sexuality Center, Latino Cultural Center, Women's Leadership and Resource Center. <http://diversity.uic.edu/who-we-are/centers-for-cultural-understanding-and-social-change/>
- The Office of Diversity <http://diversity.uic.edu/>
- Office of Access and Equity <http://oae.uic.edu/>