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Experiencing Microaggressions: How Can I Respond?

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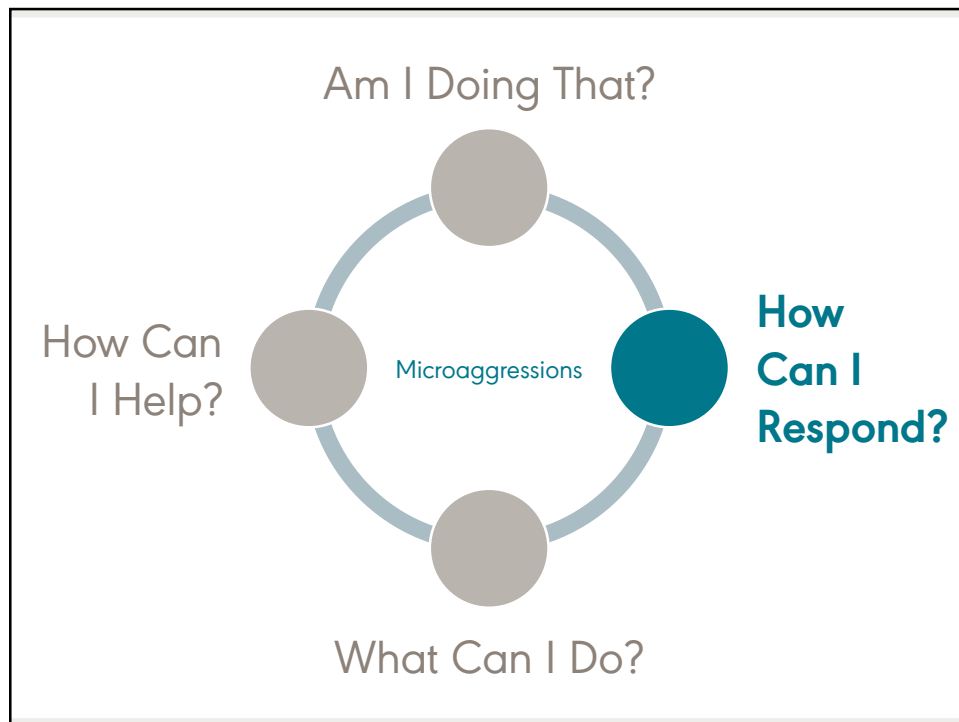
 ASHA
Professional Development

Speaker Disclosure

- Financial:
 - Dean of the College of Nursing and Health Sciences at the University of Vermont
 - Financial compensation from ASHA
- Nonfinancial:
 - ASHA SIG 14 affiliate
 - Member of National Black Association for Speech-Language and Hearing



Noma Anderson, PhD



Microaggressions are encountered everywhere.

Individually, they may seem minimally harmful, but exposure across a lifetime can be compared to a "slow death by a thousand cuts."

(Sue & Spanierman, 2020; Nadal, 2011)

A colleague says to you, "I don't see color. We are all one race, the human race."

But I am a person of color. Ignoring that minimizes the systemic racism that I, and other people of color, have experienced throughout our lives. It also overlooks the many wonderful aspects of my culture.

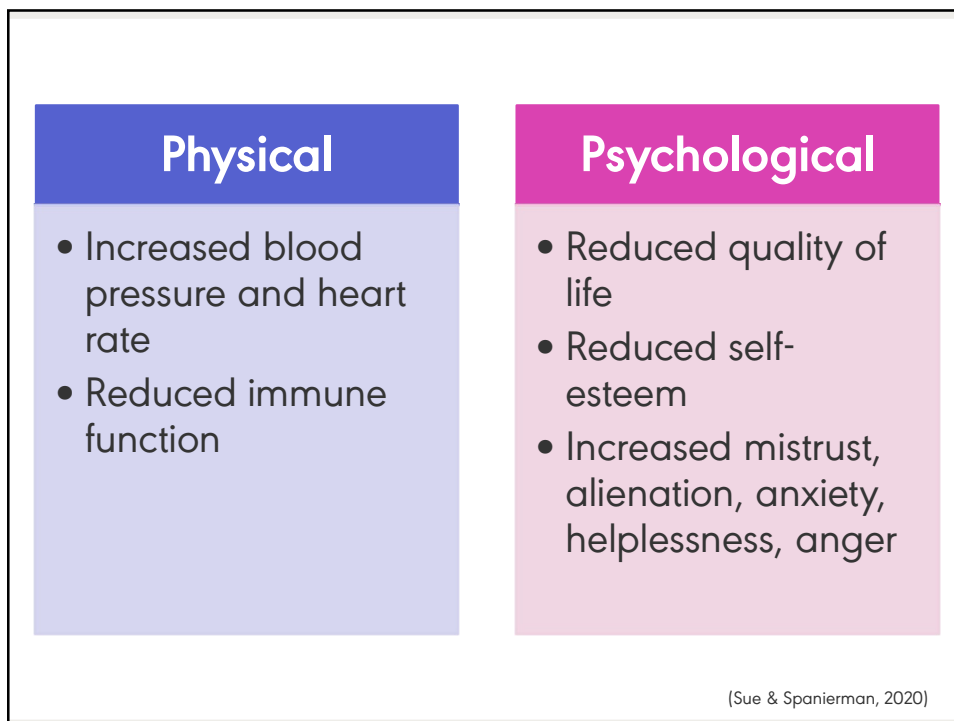
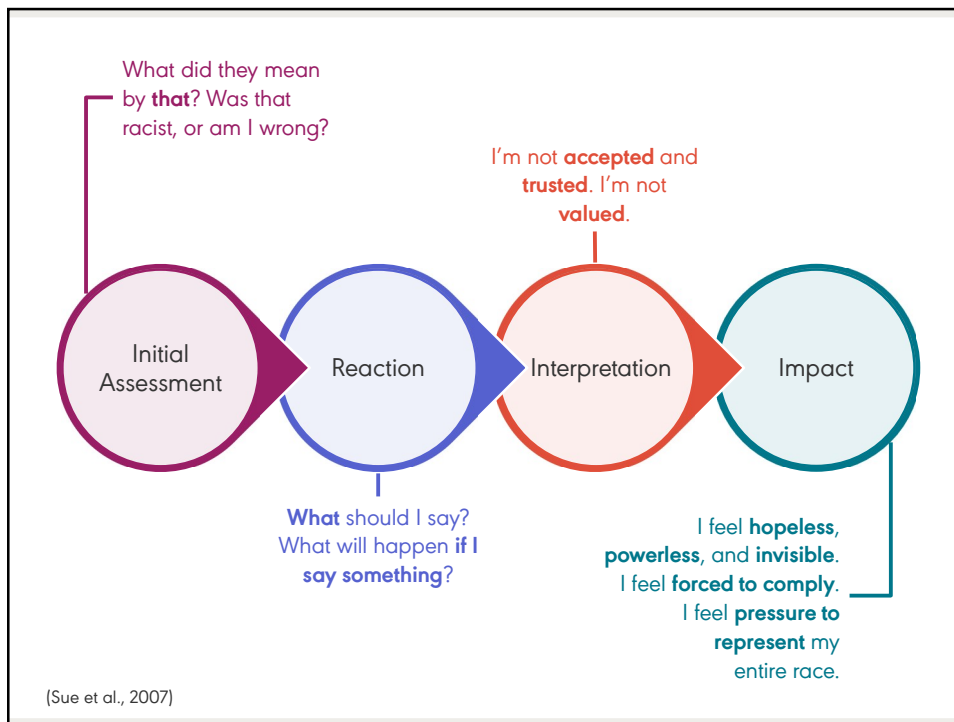
(Washington, Birch, & Roberts, 2020)

An administrator says to you, "everyone can succeed at our hospital if they work hard enough and have their priorities in order."

Why was it important to tell me that? Does he think people of color are prone to laziness?

(Washington, Birch, & Roberts, 2020)

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What do I do?

Strategies for reacting

When people are confronted with microaggressions, they must decide what they want to do.

(Washington, Birch, & Roberts, 2020)

1. Decide to let it go

- Since microaggressions are both pervasive and subtle, it can be emotionally draining to confront them all.
- Silence comes with a significant emotional toll.

2. Respond immediately

- Draw attention to it and the impact while the details are fresh in your minds.
- Ask for clarification.
 - “What you mean by that?”
- Separate intent from impact.
 - “You may not realize it, but when you say _____, it’s hurtful because _____.”
- The microaggressor may become defensive, dismissive, or even more aggressive (e.g., resorting to stereotypical tropes).

3. Respond later

- Talk privately, later, to note the incident and explain its impact.
- The delay requires recall and may come with the challenges of **both** the significant emotional toll and the person becoming defensive, dismissive, or even more aggressive.



D **DISCERN**

- How much of an investment do you want to make in addressing the microaggression?
- Don't feel pressured to respond to every incident; rather, feel empowered to do so when you decide you should.
- Is the issue or relationship important to you? If so, letting it go could be the wrong approach.

D DISCERN

- Allow yourself to feel what you feel.
 - Intense negative emotions (e.g., anger) may benefit from a delayed response.
 - If you're confused about what happened, an immediate response may be best.
 - If you're exhausted, it's okay to let it go.
- How do you want to be perceived?
 - Both speaking up and remaining silent come with their own consequences.

D DISARM

- Confrontation can neutralize aggressions.
- Explain that this may be a difficult conversation, but it needs to take place.
- Describe what you heard them say and how you feel.
- Create space for calm back-and-forth discussion.

D

DEFY

- Explain what you heard or understood by what they said or did.
- Explain how it **impacted** you.
- If they say, "I didn't mean it that way," ask them to clarify what impact they intended.

D

DECIDE

- Take control over what this incident means for your life and work.
 - What do you want to take from the comment and any response?
 - What will you allow it to take from you?
- Protecting and affirming your sense of self-worth can be a powerful act of resistance.

Self-care tools are critical

- A community of support is key for sharing experiences, validation, and effective strategies.
- Your heritage and culture are worthy of celebration.

(Sue & Spanierman, 2020)

Resources

- Harvard University: Anti-Racism Resources, Resources for Self-Care projects.iq.harvard.edu/antiracismresources/bipoc/selfcare
- *Microaggressions in Everyday Life*, by Sue & Spanierman (2020)
- Video: Emotionally Restorative Self-Care for People of Color www.youtube.com/watch?v=GuLT_YQLGF8
- Psychology Today: Radical Self-Care in the Face of Mounting Racial Stress www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/healing-through-social-justice/201911/radical-self-care-in-the-face-mounting-racial-stress
- National Museum of African American History & Culture, Talking About Race: Self-Care nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race/topics/self-care
- The Root, Tips for Self-Care: When Police Brutality Has You Questioning Humanity and Social Media Is Enough www.theroot.com/tips-for-self-care-when-police-brutality-has-you-quest-1790855952
- Vice: Self-Care Tips for Black People Who Are Really Going Through It Right Now www.vice.com/en/article/g5pgmq/self-care-tips-for-black-people-struggling-from-painful-week

Coming up next

We've explored the concept. In the *next activity*, we'll review some **examples**.



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Experiencing Microaggressions: How Can I Respond?

REVIEWING EXAMPLES



**The
Team-
mate**

A colleague asked what school I attended and expressed exaggerated surprise when I told her.

Later, clearly within earshot of me, she suggested to a close colleague that my being Black must have helped me get into school.

I didn't say anything, but ended up feeling uncomfortable all day, and today, I feel a sense of distance from the colleague.

**The
Team-
mate**

**How
Can I
Respond?**

Discern: I feel unjustly belittled and angry. I'm frustrated by how much effort it's going to take to deal with it. Why do people have to think and say that kind of thing? I really don't want this to hurt a close relationship.

**The
Team-
mate**

**How
Can I
Respond?**

Defied: I talked about the comment, other times I've heard it, how it felt, and its impact. We ended up talking for a long time. They understood my perspective and apologized for not saying something. They showed a lot of empathy. I think it made us closer.

Decided: I'm not going to let it get to me anymore, but instead use it to build and strengthen a close relationship.

**The
Boss**

Yesterday, I finally met a patient's mother for the first time. She smiled, but I noticed her talking with my supervisor shortly after. I thought I overheard her say "Mexican" as she looked in my direction. I'm from Ohio.

This morning, I noticed that the kid was switched to a White colleague and my supervisor hasn't said a word about it.

What happened?

**The
Boss**

**How
Can I
Respond?**

Discern: The comment sounded ugly and I'm guessing it was directed at me, which wouldn't be the first time. I'm not sure exactly what I feel because I don't even know what happened. I feel kind of sad because the kid was really sweet and we were making great progress.

Disarm: I told my supervisor that I noticed the change and was hoping to talk about it. She seemed relieved I brought it up.

**The
Boss**

**How
Can I
Respond?**

Defy: We talked and it went okay. She tried putting it all on the parent and got a little defensive, telling me she was looking out for me. I told her that it's happened before, said I'd prefer having a chance to talk about it, and that I'd like to continue working with the kid.

Decide: I can't say it's been easy, but I don't want to let a racist attitude slow down the progress we've made.

**The
IPP
Team**

Recently, someone on an interprofessional team I'm on has started commenting on my input. He's remarked several times that he thinks I'm "quiet" or "shy," but then frames it as a "cultural difference."

I'm an Asian American and I'm familiar with that stereotype, but it doesn't resonate with my experience at all.

I'm confident that I speak up when I have something useful to add.

**The
IPP
Team**

Discern: After a bit of reflection, I realize that I really don't care about the comments. I think I'm mostly just annoyed by the disruption. I find that colleague annoying in general.

**How
Can I
Respond?**

I don't feel the need to **disarm** or **defy**, because I've **decided** I'm not going to think about it or go out of my way to validate or invalidate his remarks.

Coming up next

We've explored the concept and reviewed some examples. The *next activities* are **your turn** to **plan, practice, and reflect**.



3

How
Can I
Respond?

Think about...

someone directing a microaggression at me.

How does it make me feel? Do I respond immediately, or wait? What are the challenges with responding or waiting?

What do I say? What could happen if I say something?

..... 's PLAN

Spend 5 minutes to create a plan to apply the course concepts

WHO DATE

WHAT

HOW

3

YOUR PLAN

What's the comment? How does it make you feel? When might you respond and why? Use the four Ds and create a plan to have a conversation. What would you say?

4

TRY IT

Practice the conversation out loud or with a friend. Practicing hard conversations can help you have them. Imagine how the conversation might unfold.

TRYING YOUR PLAN

Spend 5 minutes at work putting your plan into action

NOTES

's REFLECTIONS

.....

WHAT HAPPENED

WHAT WORKED WELL

IDEAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

5

SPEAKER TIPS

.....

How did the conversation go? What was easier or harder than you anticipated? What might you change next time?

Don't forget the importance of self-care. What resources can help you?

6

LEARNING ASSESSMENT

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Spend 5 minutes to complete your learning assessment in the ASHA Learning Center.

You'll have access to a certificate of completion immediately after you complete and submit your assessment.

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