Approaches to Engaging Today’s Students in Conversations about Racialization, Microaggressions, & Societal Oppression

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Workshop Objectives

1. Consider background factors that influence students’ perspectives on and discussions about social identities & inequities

2. Discuss and identify prominent themes related to addressing race and racialization at UMass Amherst

3. Discuss over-arching principles to engaging these topics

4. Discuss concrete strategies and resources for use in engaging these topics
Caveats

A. This is only one workshop in a series
   1. Positionality & social location; Guidelines & process oriented
   2. Tasha Souza – Difficult Dialogues; OTFD Framework

B. Range of teaching experience and student engagement experience here.

C. Principles might be applicable – but finding ones that “fit” for you are critical

D. Varying levels of course content demand
Guidelines/Touchstones/
Terms of Engagement

- Be respectful – in how we communicate & of others’ viewpoints
- Confidentiality
- Share the air & Take the air
- Practice both-and thinking
- Consider Intent vs. Impact
- Give the benefit of the doubt
- Others:
BACKGROUND & CONTEXTUAL FACTORS
Today’s (“typical”) Undergraduates

- Come from more racially segregated neighborhoods
- “Post-racial” era
- More stressed and anxious about jobs and financial resources
- Apart from those age 65 & up, highest levels of implicit bias (IAT Website)
- Believe that anti-White bias is an equal or bigger problem than anti-POC bias (Norton & Summers, 2011; MTv Millenial Survey, 2014)
Millenials & Bias

MTv Strategic Insights & David Binder Research
14-24 year olds; 3,000 surveys; 64 interviews
73% believe never considering race would improve society
70% disagree with preferential treatment for any race, regardless of historical inequalities (65% POC, 74% White)
37% from families that talked about race (30% White; 46% POC)
61% “target of bias”; LGBT 83%, POC 69%, women 64%
20% are comfortable having a conversation about bias
69% would love to discuss it – respectful & judgment free
65% “wish that they knew more about how to address bias when they see it”
80% would want to know if they had biases they were not aware of
Developmental Factors

- Late adolescence/emerging adulthood
  - Limited perspective-taking ability, depending on maturity

- Identity Development
  - Members of oppressed groups
  - Racialized and ethnic minority students (especially from suburban areas)
  - First and second generation immigrants
Resistance

A defense mechanism against new information that is deemed threatening to one’s worldview or core beliefs

- e.g., meritocracy, color-blindness, reverse racism, & ideologies that support institutional oppression

Largely subconscious & to reduce cognitive dissonance

Students often withdraw psychologically, if not physically
OVERARCHING PRINCIPLES FOR ENGAGING THESE ISSUES
Early Preparation

- Address discussions about “social attitudes and behaviors” in syllabi
- Student information sheets
- Guidelines/touchstones early in course
- Introductory readings & response questions
  - e.g., Demby & MTv Survey
- Introductory videos & response questions
  - Obama 2008 race speech, microaggressions sites
  - LGBTQ individuals
Effective Facilitation of Racial Dialogues

Sue et al. (2009-2011) 4-part series of studies

1. Acknowledge emotions and feelings
2. Acknowledge & self-disclose personal challenges and fears
3. Acknowledge the possibility of biased social upbringing and conditioning
4. Recognize and understand the manifestation and dynamics of difficult dialogues
   - White American students & faculty had difficulty describing triggers and events during difficult dialogues
   - Process these experiences

APA (2012). *Dual pathways to a better America*
Expectations

Focus on fostering cross-group empathy and perspective-taking ability.
- Not responsible for “changing” others’ beliefs
- Use narratives, blogs, videos

Expect to Experience Discomfort

Foster an environment of Openness and Risk-taking
- “In some ways it’s helpful that you shared that, because many people in our society hold this view…”
- “From your work, I know you care about and wish to help others…”
- “Is it possible for you to say more about…”
- “Can you tell me what you mean when you say…”

Expect and Accept a Lack of Closure

Accept that others may make assumptions about you
- Conservative perspectives
Manage Class Dynamics & Time

Small groups
Remember you can use more classes & assignments
Consider transitions from intense discussions
- Leave 10-15 minutes
- Acknowledge the intensity of these discussions
Takeaways
- Extra point response forums
- Anonymous “Minute Papers”
- “What is one thing you will do to take care of yourself this weekend?”
- Funny or cute videos
Explore Nuances of Oppression

Bias

- Generally, people are more comfortable exploring and acknowledging bias
- Implicit & explicit
- The “gateway” concept
- IAT
- Our brains tendency to categorize – schema

Institutional, Interpersonal, & Internalized Racism

- C. Jones – *Levels of racism*, APA (2012) *Dual Pathways*

Modern & aversive racism vs. Blatant & overt racism

Examine privilege & intersectionality
Provide Positive Examples: Ally

Describes someone who supports a group other than one's own (in terms of racial identity, gender, faith identity, sexual orientation, etc.)

- acknowledges disadvantage and oppression of groups other than their own
- takes risks and supportive action on their behalf
- commits to reducing their own complicity or collusion in oppression of those groups
- invests in strengthening their own knowledge and awareness of oppression

(Ayvazian, 1995).
Cracking the Codes

RESOURCES
Online Resources

Video: Racial Microaggressions in Everyday Life - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BJL2P0JsAS4

Video: Microaggressions: The Little Things People Say https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ScOA_tsi-Y

Video: Allegories on Race & Racism - Camara Jones https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GNhcY6fTyBM


21 Racial Microaggressions You Hear on a Daily Basis

19 LGBT Microaggressions You Hear on a Daily Basis

Microaggressions.tumblr.com
Online Resources


- “What Would You Do” videos
- Media that Matters Film Fest
- PBS Race – The Power of an Illusion
- TED Talk – Verna Myers: How to Overcome Our Biases
- IAT - https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html
Readings: 100 & 200 levels

Case Studies: *Adolescent Portraits* (2011); Ferrante & Browne (2001) – *Social Construction of Race & Ethnicity in the U.S.*


Clay, R. A. (2014). Double-whammy discrimination: Health-care providers’ biases and misunderstandings are keeping some older LGBT patients from getting the care they need. *Monitor on Psychology, 45*(10), 46-51. [Relevant in discussions about intersectionality]


Simulation Games

- Enhance student understanding about institutional oppression and unearned privilege
- Elements of the game represent or model social structures, which role players can experience or observe first-hand

Examples:
- Modified versions of games (e.g., Life, Jenga, Monopoly)
- Simulated disproportionate distribution of academic resources (e.g., time to take quizzes)
- Contests in which certain group members have distinct advantages over other members (e.g., puzzles, making words from a number of letters, making mobiles)
Communicate Clear Guidelines

Ensure that students understand the procedures before beginning.
- Improves efficacy if students enjoy uninterrupted participation.
- Frustration can arise with too many uncertainties.

Participation is voluntary
- Students can stop at any time
- Reference guidelines about respectful communication
Allot Time for Debriefing

- Make meaning of the activity and draw connections to power-related concepts
- Large group debriefing
- Small group conversations
Consider Follow Up Activities

- Follow up reflection papers
- Online discussion forums
- Tying in online videos or narratives of diverse community members
Online Exercises, Resources, & Videos

- Understandingprejudice.org
  - 35 activities & assignments and 1000s of resources
- Socialpsychology.org/teaching.htm
  - In-class and web-based activities

Other resources:

- Teaching of Psychology
- Teaching Sociology
- Paulkivel.com – Benefit of Being White – Spatial Exercise


MICROAGGRESSIONS
Microaggressions

- Brief, commonplace, verbal, behavioral, or environmental inequalities
- May be intentional or unintentional
- Communicate hostile, derogatory or negative slights and insults
- Often directed toward sociopolitically marginalized groups, including
  - LGBTQ individuals
  - People of color
  - Women
  - And others
Kinds of Microaggressions

- Excluding, Ignoring, Avoiding, Forgetting
  - You Don’t Belong Here
- There is no Difference – Leveling
- Over-Emphasis on Difference – Essentializing
- Over-Protecting/Holding Back
  - The Mythical Norm
  - Generalizing
- Expecting to be Taught
- Forcing Integration
- Absent at the Table or Added-On
Excluding, Ignoring, Avoiding, Forgetting

“... I’m not being homophobic, you’re just being too sensitive...”
You Don’t Belong Here

“No, Where are you REALLY FROM?”
There is no Difference – Leveling

“Courtney
I never
see you as
a black girl”

*survive
#OPEN YOUR EYES!
Over-Emphasis on Difference – Essentializing

"You don't act like a normal black person ya' know?"
The Mythical Norm

"Can you see as much as white people? You know, because of your EYES...?"
JUST because I like men, doesn't mean I "like" all men. I ACTUALLY have a type, and chances are... IT'S NOT YOU!!!
Expecting to be Taught

The limited representation of my race in your classroom does not make me the voice of all Black People.
I go nuts, I do....it hurts so much, so much, it's indescribable the way it makes you feel...your whole body becomes hot, and your eyes automatically become glassy, because you just feel so inferior, because of something like that. I'll try to just walk away, but if I walk away then I cry, then I feel bad for feeling weak about it... I would feel like I needed to say something in defense of myself, because it does cause a great, overwhelming emotion within me.

(Gladys, Latina, college senior)

Caplan, 2011
I have to stop and think sometimes, 'Are they being racist? Or, is that just how they act? Or, are they just not being friendly because they're having a bad day?' So I try not to let it get into my head and make me angry and things like that. I just try to think it through, like maybe there are other reasons why they're not friendly. So I try not to think about all the negative and try to think about the positive. I do speak and try to get them to speak, but if they don't want to, I just try to go on with my day. It makes me feel like I am not wanted.

(Raymond, African-American undergraduate)

Caplan, 2011
I don’t feel that there is anything I can do. If I do anything physical, I'm in trouble. I feel useless. I'm being hurt by this person. It's messing with me emotionally. I'm getting angry. ...I'm not stable, and the fact that I cannot do anything about it makes me feel even worse. ...sometimes you can walk away from situations, then it just eats at you for days, and you're like, "Man, I should have done this...." and in your head, you're going over and over what you would have done if you see this person again, what you would have said. And when you see this person again you're like, "You know what, I still can't do anything." Ever been in a situation when there's nothing you can do, and you felt so strong about something? I mean, it's crushing.

(Demonde, African-American undergraduate)

Caplan, 2011
How Do We Experience This?
Possible Responses

- Why is that funny?
- I don't think it's funny.
- That offends/hurts me.
- What do you mean by that?
- Tell me what you mean by that.
- Why would you say something like that?
- What point are you trying to make by saying that?
- Using that word as a put-down offends me.
- Using that word doesn't help others feel safe or accepted here.
- Do you realize how that might sound to others?
- That’s pretty hurtful.
Avoid

Making excuses or invalidating someone’s experience

- “Are you sure? Maybe they meant ________.”
- “It was just a joke! Lighten up!”
- “You’re so sensitive”
- “I think you’re overreacting”

Other examples?
Adaptive Responses to Racial Microaggressions

1. Identify key issues in deciding how to respond to a racial microaggression (n=24)
2. Self-care (n=24)
3. Spirituality (n=18)
4. Confronting the aggressor (n=16)
5. Seeking support from White allies (n=15)
6. Keeping records and document experiences of microaggression (n=16)
7. Mentoring (n=24)
8. Organizing public responses (n=22)

13 from US (4 Latinas, 1 Asian, 2 Asian American, 5 African Americans)
11 from Canada (4 African Canadian, 3 Asian Canadian, 3 Latina Canadian, 1 Kurdish Canadian)
54% women; 46% men

(Hernandez, Carranza, & Almeida, 2010)
Speaking up – especially if part of a privileged group

Step in when you hear or see something – particularly if you are a member of a privileged group.

- Cisgender speaking up for transgender
- Heterosexual speaking up for LGBQ
- White speaking up for person of color
- Christian speaking up for Muslim
- Man speaking up for woman
- Able-bodied speaking up for someone with disabilities
Intersectionality

Multiple social identity dimensions

- privileges and marginalization are often intertwined.
Thank You!

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