

Teaching & Learning Innovation Series

Building Inclusive Classrooms: Identifying & Addressing Subtle Acts of Exclusion

Erin Stevenson, PhD, MSW
Assistant Professor, BSW Program
Director
Department of Social Work
Erin.Stevenson@eku.edu

Chase Powell
MSW Graduate Student
Department of Social Work
Chase.Powell@eku.edu



FACULTY CENTER FOR
TEACHING & LEARNING

Introduction

The college student population is incredibly and wonderfully diverse. We see this among students in our classrooms as they work out how they want to be as young adults and what they want to contribute to the world.

Obstacles to identity development often come in the form of **subtle acts of exclusion** also known as **microaggressions**.

As faculty and staff, it is our responsibility to set the tone and model expectations for fruitful dialogue and respectful interaction with the students.

This presentation aims to increase awareness and understanding of ways to include all diverse identities equally in our classrooms.



Overview

- About Identity Development
- Definitions to Know
- Identifying Subtle Acts of Exclusion (SAE)
- Examples of Common SAE
- Addressing SAE (RAVEN technique)
- Suggestions for Building Inclusive Classroom Environment
- Questions and Comments

Identity Development

Young Adulthood

Identity development during young adulthood focuses on many big life questions.

They develop some of the core layers of personal identity during their college years that can have a lifetime impact.

Big Identity Questions

Where do I fit into society?

What are my values and beliefs? Are they separate from or the same as my family?

How will I contribute to the world?

Examples of Identity Layers

- Racial identity
- Cultural identity
- Gender identity
- Sexual orientation identity
- Religious or spiritual identity

Definitions

Microaggression

Indirect verbal and/or non-verbal insults directed at a marginalized group that are a result of implicit biases we all have

Implicit Bias

When a person is not consciously aware of the negative feelings or beliefs (biases) they hold about a certain group

Subtle Acts of Exclusion

Another term for microaggressions coined by Jana and Baran (2020)

Origin of the Term Microaggression

The term was first coined in the 70's by Chester M. Pierce. Pierce was attempting to describe insults African Americans commonly hear. The term was expanded to include other marginalized groups.

Identifying SAE

Types of SAE

Microassault

Intentionally acting in a discriminatory way toward a marginalized group

Microinsult

Communication and/or actions that unintentionally convey rude or demeaning ideas about a marginalized group

Microinvalidation

Denying or undermining the thoughts, feelings, and/or experiences of a person from a marginalized group

Forms of SAE:

Verbal

Comments or questions

Behavioral

Actions, gestures, conduct

Environmental

Conditions, policies, and circumstances

Can you spot the SAE?

1. An instructor is meeting a group of new students. As they share a little bit about themselves, one student who has a distinctly different accent than the local dialect states they are from Pikeville KY. Another student speaks up saying “But, where are you really from?”
2. A student is talking to the office administrator who has a “Happy 50th Birthday” card on their desk. The student says, “Hey you look pretty good for your age!”
3. You have been assigned to work on a group project. At the initial meeting, you notice that you are the only woman. As the group begins to discuss roles and work tasks, a student looks at you and says, “You should be the notetaker.”

- Read the examples of verbal SAEs.
- Identify the SAE.
- State one way the recipient or a witness to the SAE could address it.

Examples of Cultural, Ability & Religious Identity SAE

Theme	Example	Type
I am invisible	In the third week of class, the instructor calls out names of students to take attendance. A student named Alisheyha has politely explained how to pronounce their name every class. This time, the instructor says, "Whatever, I'll just call you Ali. Your name is just too weird,"	Microinsult
I am abnormal with limited intelligence	Kaycee uses a wheelchair for mobility. On the first day of class, he requests a spot near the front of the room explaining this makes it easier for him to get in/out of the classroom. The following week, there is not a space for Kaycee in the front row. No one moves to help. As Kaycee tries to maneuver a spot in the classroom, a student using a baby-voice says, "You got this little buddy."	Microassault
My culture and religions are not worthy	Tori is Muslim. She is preparing to celebrate Eid el Fitr which is the end of a month of fasting during Ramadan. The day of the celebration falls on a day that her major course is taking the midterm test. She speaks with the instructor about taking the test earlier or later so Tori can attend the religious events. The professor replies that Tori has to stick with the schedule like everyone else. Then adds, "Its not my fault you can't be Christian like the rest of us."	Microinvalidation

Addressing SAE Using RAVEN

Example: During a class discussion on gender roles a student shares they are transgender and explains their experience and ideas about gender roles as a transgender person.

Another student in class decides to ask them, "How far along are you in your transition?"

What is wrong with this Question?

Assumption of Universal LGBTQ experience
Denial of bodily privacy

How do I address this example of SAE?

R - Redirect

A - Ask

V - Values

E - Emphasize

N - Next Steps

Harris and Wood developed RAVEN.

<https://www.diverseeducation.com/opinion/article/15106837/how-to-respond-to-racial-microaggressions-when-they-occur>

RAVEN Framework

R - Redirect: Address the behavior by commenting on the question or by redirecting the class discussion and speaking with the student privately.

Assume good intentions and ask to clarify.

A - Ask: You may ask the student a question to help them think critically about their comment or questions. For example, asking, "Do you think there was anything inappropriate about that question?"

V - Values: Remind the student of the classroom's rules and expectations. You could say something like, "I understand that you are just curious, but your question made some pretty harmful assumptions and you are asking your classmate to share information that is deeply personal."

E - Emphasize: Express empathy and explain the impact the comment or question had. Like saying, "It's hard to imagine what it would be like to have people ask personal questions about your body all the time."

N - Next Steps: Direct the class to a resource to help them better understand what it means to be transgender.

Examples of SAE from LGBTQIA+ Focus Groups

Theme	Quote	Type
Discomfort or disapproval of LGBTQ experience	"I went to the Black Student Union one time to just be a part of that community on campus and they looked at me funny because I had on overalls....so like, we (queer people) can go into that space but that doesn't mean that people who also share this place aren't gonna look at us like <i>What are we doing?</i> "	Microinsult
Assumption of Sexual Pathology and Abnormality	"There are students like me who are Christian and LGBTQ. That's a hard stigma to carry, you know, because, I mean, I actually got called out by a member (of the church) for being queer..."	Microassault
Endorsement of heteronormative culture and behaviors	"They don't realize how certain language or teaching practices are not inclusive to certain groups of students. When you say, you know, "Good morning, ladies and gentlemen" That leaves out a whole group of students."	Microinvalidation

Importance of Teaching about SAE

Teaching about SAE can help prevent harm as well as support student wellbeing, learning, and success.

Stress from microaggressions can impact an individual in a variety of ways including:

Physically

- Fatigue
- Decreased immune function
- Elevated blood pressure

Emotionally

- Anger
- Anxiety
- Depression

Cognitively

- Diverted attention
- Learning blocks
- Stereotype threat

Behaviorally

- Hypervigilance
- Skepticism
- Forced compliance

Suggestions for Creating Inclusive Classrooms that Address SAE

1. Prioritize a Culture of Care

Implicit Bias leading to SAE are more likely to occur if:

- Information shared is ambiguous or unclear
- There are time constraints
- Students are struggling cognitively, dealing with lack of sleep, stress

Ways to Prioritize a Culture of Care

- Engage in self care
- Share resources
- Consider Flexible Policies
- Be open to different viewpoints
- Actively listen and assume positive intent

Suggestions for Creating Inclusive Classrooms that Address SAE

2. Establish Shared Expectations and Values

- Establish and explain expectations for student behavior early
- Model for students that you value their ideas
- Review regularly or when needed

3. Raise Sociopolitical and Racial Consciousness

- Engage in your own development around implicit bias
- Support students in raising consciousness of bias

Suggestions for Creating Inclusive Classrooms that Address SAE

4. Prepare for Difficult Conversations

You can help prepare yourself by:

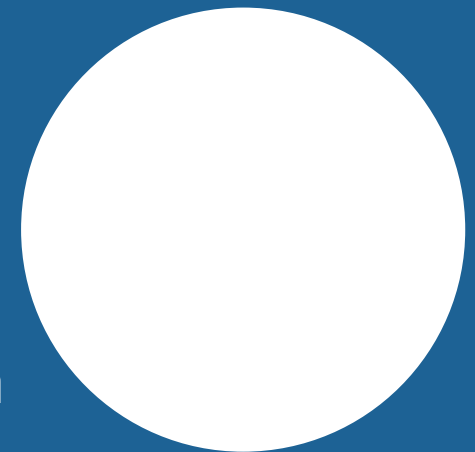
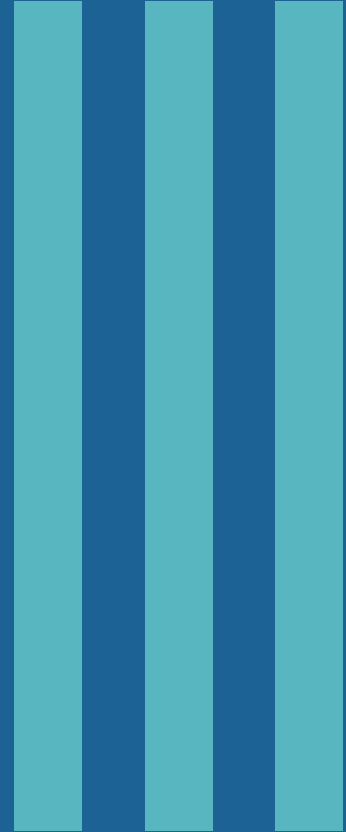
- Creating definitions
- Understanding your "lens"
- Managing bias
- Build up your comfort level with difficult topics

Conclusion

- SAEs or microaggressions occur in and out of the classroom.
- We need to learn to recognize SAEs and address them when appropriate.
- Students and faculty can work together to reduce implicit bias through self-awareness and willingness to listen to other viewpoints.

Classroom Tips

- Establish shared expectations and values for the classroom.
- Assume positive intent when you hear an SAE.
- Talk openly and honestly about SAEs and their negative impact on individuals.
- Find ways to practice recognizing and addressing SAEs with students.



Additional Resources

Examples of Microaggressions from National Education Association.

<https://www.nea.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/Examples%20of%20Microaggressions.pdf>

Tool: Recognizing microaggressions and the messages they send.

https://academicaffairs.ucsc.edu/events/documents/Microaggressions_Examples_Arial_2014_1_12.pdf

How microaggressions are like mosquito bites,

<https://youtu.be/hDd3bzA7450?si=HMy6PB7uUSNf1sfF>

Jana, T., & Baran, M. (2020). Subtle acts of exclusion: How to understand, identify, and stop microaggressions. Berrett-Koehler Publishers. <https://subtleactsofexclusion.com/>

Pittman, C. (2021, 15 September). 10 In the moment responses for addressing micro and macroaggressions in the classroom. <https://www.scholarlyteacher.com/post/10-in-the-moment-responses-for-addressing-micro-and-macroaggressions-in-the-classroom>

Teaching about and addressing microaggressions. Maverick Learning and Educational Applied Research Nexus (pressbooks.com). <https://mlpp.pressbooks.pub/mavlearn/chapter/teaching-about-and-addressing-microaggressions/>

Trans people answer the most googled questions about the trans experience. <https://youtu.be/htaprlsWWhs?si=4Y1i-xQTerWecMxJ>

Questions & Comments



Thank you for your attention!

Erin.Stevenson@eku.edu

Chase.Powell@eku.edu