



## Session FOUR: Racial Awareness/Microaggressions

*Note: should Black students/ students of color have the option of not attending this session? Too often, such sessions put the burden on them to educate their peers.*

### Advance Preparation

Before this session, students will have been asked to watch scenes 1.7 and 2.6 of **A Tale of Two Labs**.

**Scene 1.7:** *Jayna is struggling and feels time-pressured, so she suggests Ana Sofia seek to replicate previous work with the Heideberg lab as a preliminary project—and to keep her occupied. Ana Sofia cannot understand the lab notebooks, so consults Alex, who confirms that there is some disarray in the lab protocols. Alex makes a racist comment about Jayna. Ana Sofia voices her disapproval, modeling 'upstander' conduct. [5:40 long]*

**Scene 2.6:** *Jayna encounters racial microaggressions in the department mailroom. Loretta commiserates and provides support. Darren deflects any responsibility for problems with the compound. [6:37]*

### Session Goals (introduce just a few concepts)

1. Identify any microaggressions in the scenes; do you see them in your environment?
  - (a) Identify how unintentional communications can devalue others' sense of belonging
  - (b) Identify microaggressions in a working and learning environment
  - (c) Describe the benefits of diverse and inclusive working environments to intellectually productive, professionally exemplary, and personally rewarding research environments.
  - (d) Describe how to create and maintain an inclusive environment in your lab and prevent harassment, microaggressions, and cultural biases.
2. Tools and resources
  - (a) Dealing with trauma in yourself, and others in your environment
  - (b) Discuss whether and how to intervene when you experience or observe a microaggression.
  - (c) Chemistry Values and Expectations

### Approaches

*(awareness)*

1. Recognize and label all the microaggressions in the scenes
2. Connect to learning and working environment; own conduct

*(introduce or build on tools)*

3. Reinforce the usage of personal scripts that you discussed in Session Two
  - (a) Tie cultures in own/new labs to issues of harassment and bias
  - (b) personal scripts for bystanders/upstanders *has this already been covered enough?*

### Overview:

- A. Show videos (12 minutes)
- B. Full group discussion: awareness questions (5 minutes)
- C. Small group discussion: identify and awareness (10 minutes)
- D. 2MC discussion and debriefing (15 minutes)
- E. Chemistry values and expectations (10 minutes)
- F. Closing Discussion (15 minutes)



## A. Show Videos (12-14 minutes)

### B. Opening Class Questions (10 minutes)

What's a micro aggression? Can anyone define it?

“Microaggressions are the brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative slights and insults to a target person or group.” This can be because of a person’s race, gender (identity or role expression), sexual orientation, religious, age, ability status, and/or class. —Sue, Capodilupo, et al, 2007

Did you see any microaggressions in the scenes we just watched?

Have you seen any in social media or in the news recently? Or, seen any on campus?

Some possible examples of microaggressions in interactions:

- Getting people’s names wrong (or not even trying)
- Asking “Where are you really from? You speak good English”
- “You are so articulate.”
- “Who did the math /hard parts for you?”
- “Can I touch your hair?” (Or just doing it, and not asking.)
- “Please don’t bring your smelly food and heat it up in lab.”
- “X only got into the program because of (insert identity)” or, “It will be easier for you to get a fellowship because you’re (insert identity)”
- “don’t be so sensitive—it was just a joke!”

Categories:

- o Alien in One’s Own Land
- o Ascription of Intelligence of Color Blindness
- o Second-Class Citizen
- o Sexist/Heterosexist Language
- o Traditional Gender Role Prejudicing and Stereotyping

Reflection questions (personal notes):

- Have you endured a discriminatory incident or exchange? If so, think of one instance now, and write it down. How did it make you feel? What would have helped you handle this experience better?
- How do you deal with such occurrences when they happen? Do you talk to a friend, exercise, meditate, keep a journal, etc.? What helps you cope?
- How do these experiences undermine a culture of excellence, and what lab practices could help you or others better handle these situations?

### C. Small Group Discussions (10 minutes)

Last class, we talked about biases that may be present in your current environment— biases that lead to favoritism and those that lead to differential treatment that isn’t favorable. Consider the kinds of bias that may cause or result in exclusion in lab or research environments:



- cultural biases
- socioeconomic
- nationality
- language
- field of study
- age
- gender
- racial
- familial responsibilities
- educational background
- smell, voice, weight
- disability

Let's go back to the concept of cultures of excellence we started this module with:

- What characteristics would you expect in a workplace with a culture of excellence? Have your answers changed since we started this section of our course?
  - How do the Sorenson and Heideberg labs illustrate or not cultures of excellence?
  - How does your own lab institution illustrate or not cultures of excellence?

#### D. Chemistry Values and Expectations (10 minutes)

#### E. 2MC exploring microaggressions and “humor” (see attached) (15 minutes)

You are in a virtual meeting with your lab members. While you wait for the PI to arrive, one of your lab mates tells a joke about [group] in science. There is a smattering of laughter, but one of your lab members speaks up saying that they don't find that funny at all. The first lab member says, “whatever, it's just a joke.” Do you say or do anything?

Summary:

Dismissive reactions can occur when bringing up that a microaggression or other sort of discriminatory practice has taken place. Write down a personal script and discuss what you would say to the following statements after expressing upstander behavior against a microaggression:

- “You are too sensitive, it was only a joke.”
- “You are making too big a deal out of things.”
- ➔ What can—and will—you do to mitigate barriers to inclusivity in your own lab group or other workplace group?
- ➔ Would you have been able to respond in the moment as Ana Sofia did in the scene?
- ➔ What tools do you have to deal with issues you observe?

#### F. Closing Discussion





## Was that Meant to be Funny?

You are in a virtual meeting with your lab members. While you wait for the PI to arrive, one of your lab mates tells a joke about [*group*] in science. There is a smattering of laughter, but one of your lab members speaks up saying that they don't find that funny at all. The first lab member says, “whatever, it’s just a joke.”

### Takeaway Lessons:

- 1) Are you a bystander or an upstander?** When you stand by silently when a comment is made that is exclusionary or unkind, you may be seen as endorsing the comment. Even if you cannot challenge the comment head on because of power dynamics or because you fear retaliation, can you step in to help in some other way? Effective techniques include: prepared personal scripts, learning how to deflect, delay, or distract. [see handouts] What are the considerations about saying something, now, publicly, versus having a quiet word with the colleague later, in private?
- 2) Are others being included or excluded? Are messages being sent about who counts?** Humor that is about characteristics of other groups is often rooted in stereotypes—that’s what makes it recognizable. It is also divisive and often hurtful to others. How is “it’s just a joke” meant as an excuse? Is it ever a good excuse?
- 3) Preparing and practicing Personal Scripts in advance means they will be available to you when you need them.**

You may need advice before you take the next step. Are you on close enough terms with your Ph.D. advisor or any member of your committee to seek confidential advice from one person? Does your new campus have an ombudsperson who might be able to provide confidential advice?

### Issues

Inclusion/exclusion of group members  
Power dynamics in the group  
Diminishing the productivity, creativity, motivation of group members  
Hurting group members

### Rules and Regulations

Does the PI condone this kind of ‘humor’?  
Does your upbringing?  
Does the comment cross the line of the university’s guidelines on civility and collegiality?  
What do the Chemistry Values and Expectations say about this?

### Resources

PI/Mentor  
Colleagues / local support group  
Parents  
Other?

### Questions

Does the person making the comment have a history of being unkind or exclusionary?  
Is it possible this is a case of someone not understanding how the comment may land on others?  
Is this kind of comment generally condoned in the group, or it is an outlier?  
Is this a thoughtless act or part of a pattern?

### Options

Say nothing  
Use a personal script in the moment  
Talk to the PI  
Talk to adviser or other trusted mentor to prepare for the next time  
Start conversations about group norms