

## Recognizing and Eliminating Micro-Inequities

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## Honoring Differences Celebrating Cultures

- Ramadan (Aug 22-Sept 20, 2010)
- Month of Fasting (Islam)
- 9<sup>th</sup> lunar month
- Qur'am revelation



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## Acts of Overt Discrimination versus Microaggressions

- Microaggressions (that result in micro-inequities) are often well intentioned
- “Perpetrators” act in good faith
- The actions and their meanings invisible to the actors

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## Multicultural scholars have found

- It is easier to deal with overt and deliberate forms of bigotry since no guesswork is involved

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# ["Micro-Inequities"]

- Term coined in 1973 by Professor Mary Rowe, Sloan School of Management at MIT, while studying issues of racial and gender exclusion



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# ["Micro-Inequities"]

- Stephen Young, Insight Educational Systems, built on Rowe's work while Senior VP/CDO at JP Morgan Chase developing *Micro-Inequities: The Power of Small*



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## “Microaggressions”

- Derald Wing Sue, professor of psychology and education at Columbia University, has spent his career studying the effects of microaggressions related to race, gender and sexual orientation.



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## “Micro-Inequities”

- “Death by a thousand cuts”
- Subtle, seemingly harmless messages of devaluation
- Subtle discrimination that fiendishly perpetuates unequal opportunity
- May have a negative Pygmalion quality – the expectation of poor performance or the lack of expectation of good performance

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## Micro-Inequities – Usually Automatic and not Conscious

- Familiarity is comfortable
- Different is dangerous
  - Gender
  - Looks, attractiveness, height, weight
  - Skin color
  - Dress
  - Perceived sexual orientation, religion, political affiliation or beliefs



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## “Micro-Inequities”

- negative micro-messages
- small, subtle messages
  - looks, gestures, or tones
  - nuance, inflection, inference
  - even absence of a message
- frequently unconscious
- devalue, discourage, and ultimately impair performance



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[ Focusing on something  
intently, not present ... ]



- Perceived as arrogant and elitist (while not acknowledging another while walking down the hall)

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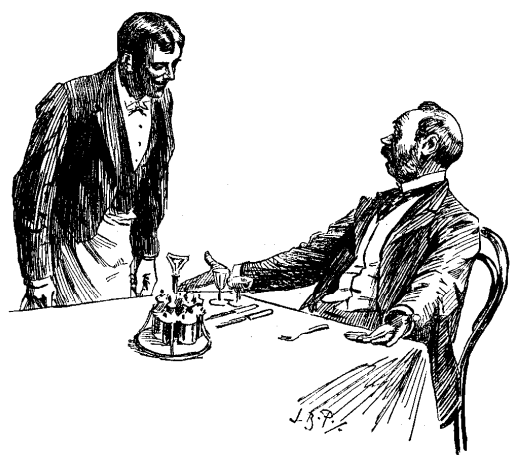
[ Focusing intently on  
something, not present ... ]



- Confused when someone mentions something that seemingly came out of no where

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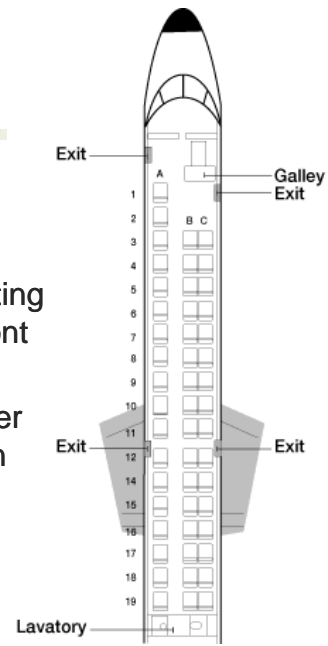
# [ Hot Chocolate and the Waiter ]




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# [

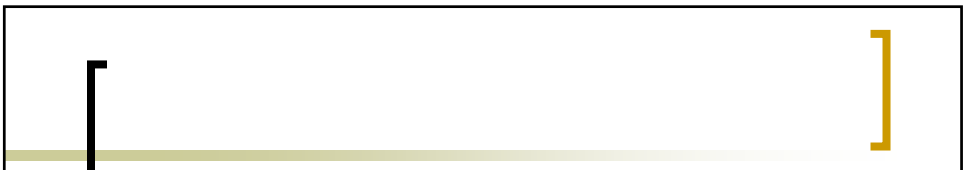
- Problem: weight needed to be distributed throughout cabin
- Asian and African-American sitting across from each other near front
- Three white men board at last minute, tells them to sit wherever they wish – row in front of Asian and African-American
- Flight attendant asks Asian and African-American to move



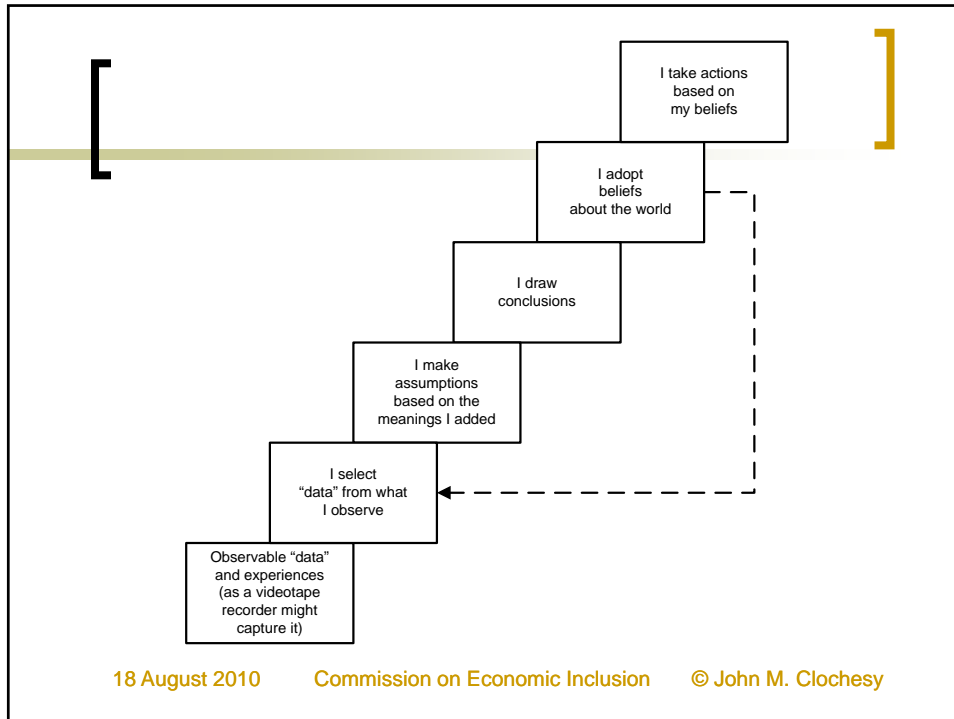
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- None of us are immune to conveying micro-messages
  - Micro-messages are universal. All cultures have their unique forms of sending and receiving these messages
    - Using your own filters or lenses can lead to faulty conclusions
    - Become aware of the culture in which you are immersed (when in Rome, ...)

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- 
- We believe the micro-messages more than the words we hear

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## [ Slow Down ]

- PAUSE
  - What I saw and heard
- REFLECT
  - The story I make about what I saw and heard
  - The feelings evoked by the story I make
- CHOOSE
  - Clarify what I saw and heard and the intention before making a story



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## [ Occurrence of Micro-Inequities ]

- Everyone experiences micro-inequities to some extent
- Experienced more often by those who are “different” (women, minorities)
- Effects are cumulative – hence differential impact (straw that broke the camel’s back)

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## [ “It’s okay. It happens all the time.” ]



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## [ Micro-Messaging ]

- Foundation of mammalian communication.
  - Pet guardians know this: cats, dogs, horses
- Long before infants are able to speak, they are fully interactive through micro-messages.

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## [ Pervasiveness ]

- Individuals send anywhere from 40 to 150 micro-messages to each other in an average 10-minute conversation
- 2,000 to 4,000 micro-messages/day



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## Levels of System Where Micro-Inequities Occur

- Organizational level
  - Institutional policies
  - Procedures, and
  - Practices
- Interpersonal level
  - Individual micro-aggressions

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## Recognizing Micro-Inequities

- Awareness
  - “I can’t quite put my finger on it”
  - “It just doesn’t feel right” or “there’s something wrong with ...”
  - “We just have a personality conflict” or “...different approaches/styles”



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## [ Recognizing: the STEM model ]

- Space abuse
- Time abuse
- Energy abuse
- Mobility abuse

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## [ Space abuse ]

- When your privacy is not respected
- When you are walled out of important meetings or conversations
- When you are excluded from activities

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## [ Examples of Space Abuse ]

- Where business is conducted:
  - Not accessible for physically disabled
  - Where smoking is allowed and occurs
  - An exclusive country club
  - On the golf course
  - Cocktail parties
  - A “gentleman’s” club
  - Restroom, locker room



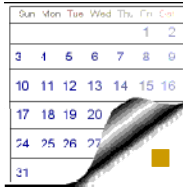
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## [ Time Abuse ]

- When you spend time dealing with your boss who believes that you may be innately unable to perform
- When you must spend more time on projects because you know you will be judged more harshly
- When you find others don't appreciate or accept that your time is valuable

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## Examples of Time Abuse



- When business is conducted
  - After regular business hours
  - Friday, Saturday, Sunday
  - According to the Christian calendar
  - On Jewish and Islamic holy days

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## Examples of Time Abuse

- While talking or meeting with another
  - taking cell phone calls
  - sending text messages
  - checking e-mail



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## [ Energy Abuse ]

- When you must donate your energy to someone else so that they can conserve theirs
- Your energy is regularly siphoned away to other projects not at your own choosing
- Your energy is sapped by invisible barriers, subtle comments, or conflicting messages

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## [ Examples of Energy Abuse ]

- Can you help me with ... ? (you dig in and then notice that the person making the request is taking a break while you work)



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# [ Mobility Abuse ]

- When you are expected routinely to bring things or get things
- When you are required to travel (or remain behind) while others are not
- When you are expected to provide transportation to others

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# [ Examples of Mobility Abuse ]



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## Examples of Mobility Abuse



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- Examining policies, procedures and practices
  - Space?
  - Time?
  - Energy?
  - Mobility?

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## [ Impact ]

- “Fiendishly efficient in perpetuating unequal opportunity”
- Cumulatively marginalize minorities
- Perpetuate hierarchies of social inequity
- Considerable amount of energy and emotion dealing with a perceived hostile environment

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## [ Impact ]

- Invisibility
- Forced compliance
- Pressure to represent one’s group

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## [ Organizational Level Impact ]

- Inhibiting the growth and development of the organization
- Restraining competition
- Misusing resources
- Creating unnecessary vulnerabilities
- Producing inefficiencies

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## [ Interpersonal Level Impact ]

- Dissipating energy
- Draining resources
- Lowering morale
- Impeding performance

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## [ Action ]

- Recognize when we experience micro-inequities
- Recognize when we may be sending negative micro-messages
- Eliminate infrastructure that perpetuates micro-inequities
- Practice remaining authentically present

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## [ Eliminating Micro-Inequities ]

- Verbalize and validate
  - Staying authentically present
  - Being choiceful
  - Pay attention to what we see and hear
  - Remaining curious
  - Seeking clarification
- The sender must confirm or modify the message

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## [ Eliminating Micro-Inequities ]

- Honoring differences and making choices

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## [ Starting Team Dialogue ]

- Do you feel...included...respected...valued?
- What behaviors wall people out?
- What behaviors encourage contributions?
- What can we start, stop, do more of?

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## [ Team Dialogue (continued) ]

- What can I do differently?
- What can the team do differently?
- What can senior management do differently?

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## [ Micro-Advantages ]

- Actively solicit opinions
- Connect on a personal level
- Constantly ask questions
- Attribute/credit ideas
- Monitor facial expressions
- Actively listen to all
- Draw in participation

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## [ Micro-Advantages (continued) ]

- Monitor personal greetings
- Respond constructively to disagreements
- Limit interruptions

## [ Non-Verbal Language of Animals and Humans ]

- Trust
- Authenticity
- Confidence
- Intention
- Intuition
- Curiosity
- Mind, Body and Spirit



## How Does Micro-Inequities fit into Diversity and Inclusion?

- Not Compliance, but
- The Business Case – Improved Performance



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## References

- Mary P. Rowe, PhD (1990)
- Wesley E. Profit, PhD, JD
- Derald Wing Sue, PhD (2010)
- Stephen Young (2007)

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# [ Questions and Reactions ]

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