



# Feeling Empowered to Act – Action Steps to Feeling Comfortable Addressing the Uncomfortable

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# Rules and Agreements

We are all learners,  
we are all teachers

Assume positive  
intent. Address  
impact.

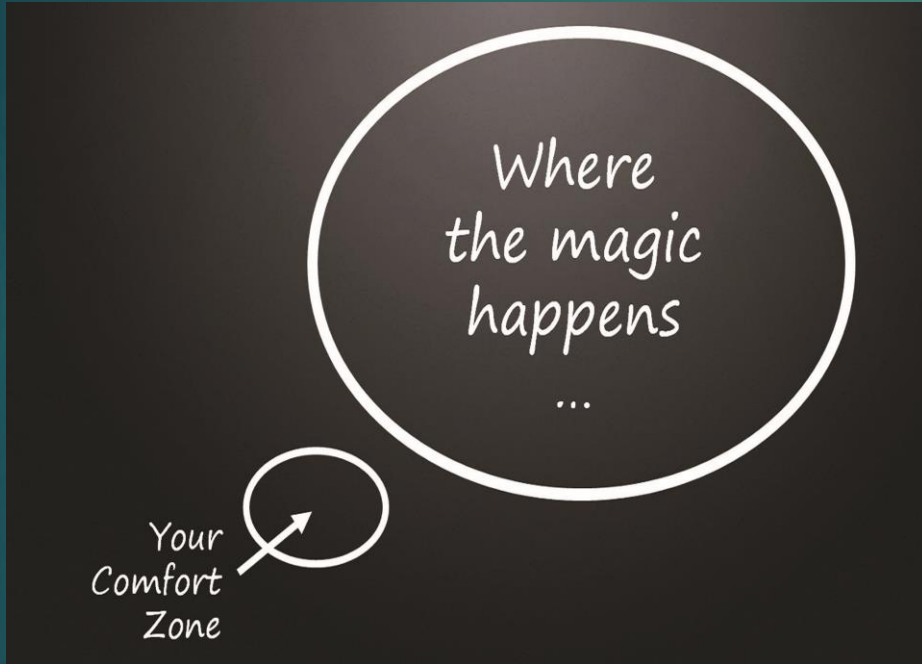
Think and speak  
from the “I”  
perspective

None of us are the  
SOLE POSSESSOR of  
knowledge

“Platinum rule  
applies” – Treat  
others as they  
want to be treated

Ask for clarification  
before offering  
solutions

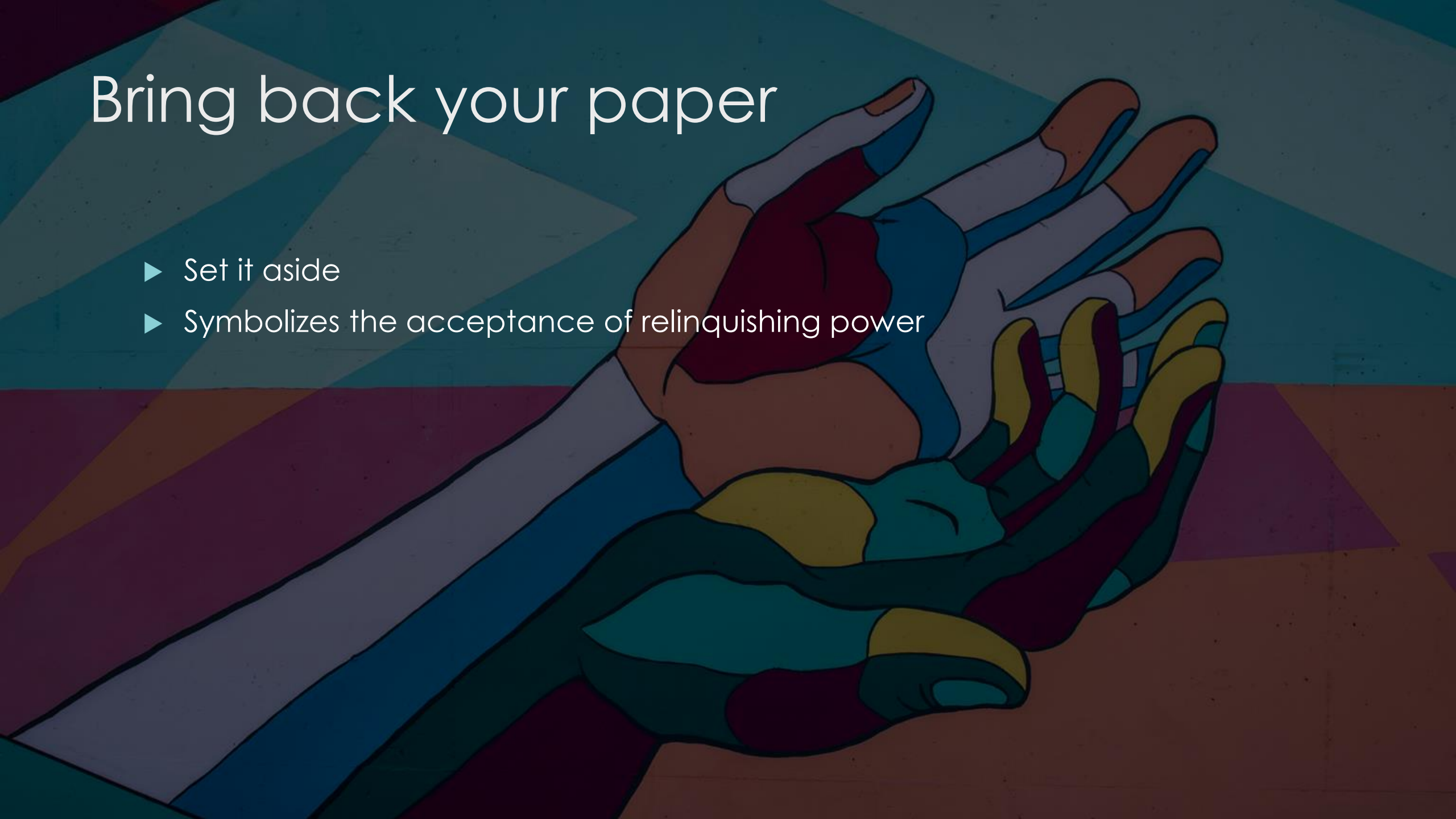
# Objective of the conversation



- ▶ Become more comfortable being uncomfortable
- ▶ Gain confidence to enter difficult conversations
- ▶ Embrace the courage inside to challenge and confront bias and bigotry

# Bring back your paper

- ▶ Set it aside
- ▶ Symbolizes the acceptance of relinquishing power



# Achieving our objective



Create awareness through discomfort and reflection



Improved recognition through challenge and reflection



Empowerment through responsibility and connection

# Priming Questions



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What do you need to feel comfortable engaging in difficult conversations with people who identify differently than you about their experiences?

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Are you prepared to explore your personal barriers that keep you from engaging in difficult conversations?

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What feeling do you experience when you are expected to challenge the status quo or have conversations with individuals receiving services or colleagues about identity?

# Quick Review:

- ▶ What is an Empowered Bystander?
  - ▶ “Empowered bystanders are people whose behaviors intervene in ways that impact the outcome positively.”
- ▶ Why it is important to become one?
  - ▶ We believe intervening as our responsibility.

# Agenda

- ▶ **Techniques of Intervention**
  - ▶ **Interrupting Bias**
    - ▶ Calling In
    - ▶ Calling Out
  - ▶ **Internal Accountability**



# Verbal microaggressions

- ▶ A comment or question that disparages members of a marginalized group or maintains a stereotype.
- ▶ For example, telling a Black co-worker, “You’re so articulate” or asking an Asian provider, “How long have you been in the United States?”

# Nonverbal microaggressions

- ▶ Nonverbal microaggressions are expressed through body language, facial expressions or gestures that convey hurtful or discriminatory messages to a certain group of people. For example, eye rolling at older co-workers' stories or holding a handbag closer to one's body when a person of color approaches.

# Environmental microaggressions



- ▶ Microaggressions occurring on a systemic level,
- ▶ For example; A work environment that pigeonholes women into certain roles or makes pays marginalized providers less than their white counterparts.

# How microaggressions present themselves

- Always asking a co-worker or PRS with a disability if they need help.
- Using offensive terminology such as, “That’s so \_\_\_\_\_.”
- Disparaging remarks or gestures about ethnic food.
- Criticizing the gender identity of a transgender person.
- Always assigning women the task of taking meeting notes.
- Failing to give credit or downplaying the ideas and work of marginalized individuals.

# Intervention can look different for us all... that is okay

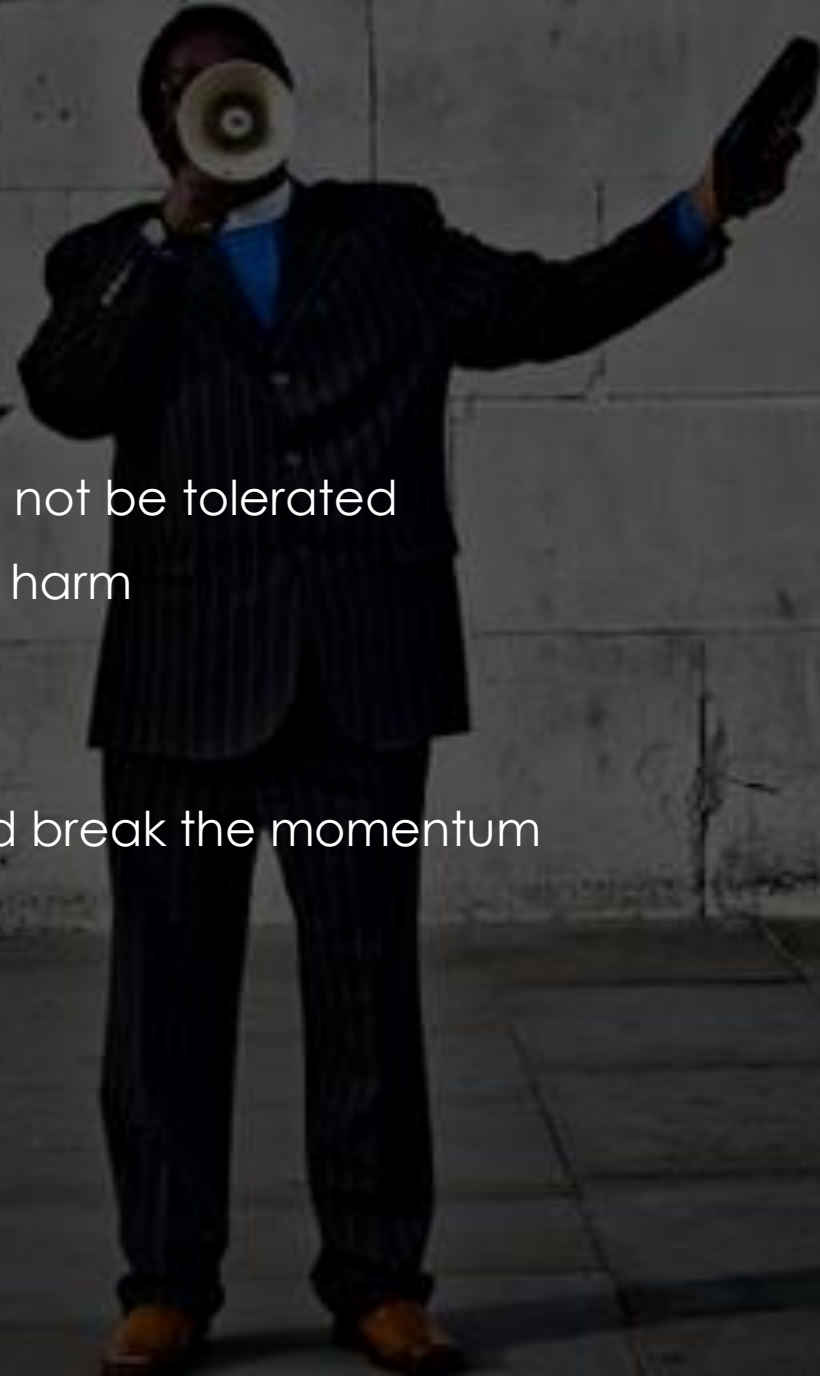
- ▶ Choosing not to laugh at a 'joke' that is racist or undermines someone,
- ▶ Not liking a friends post that is offensive and even challenging their view in a public forum
- ▶ Offering support to someone after an incident you witness or heard about.

# Why we need to intervene...

- ▶ Intervening is a clear message about what is acceptable and what is not.
- ▶ We signal to the perpetrator their actions are unacceptable
- ▶ Show observers that if such messages will be challenged
- ▶ Reinforced within our communities, we can shift the boundaries of what is considered acceptable behavior.

# Interrupting Bias

- ▶ Calling Out
  - ▶ Actions are unacceptable and will not be tolerated
  - ▶ Interrupt in order to prevent further harm
  - ▶ Feels hard and uncomfortable
    - ▶ But necessary
  - ▶ We can hit the “pause” button and break the momentum



# Examples of Calling Out

<b>Wow. Nope. Ouch. I need to stop you right there.</b>	<b>That word/comment is really triggering and offensive. Be mindful and pick a different word.</b>	<b>I need to push back against that. I disagree. I don't see it that way.</b>
Okay, I am having a strong reaction to that, and I need to let you know why.	I don't find that funny. Tell me why that's funny to you.	I wonder if you've considered the impact of your words.
Hmmm.. maybe you want to think this one through a bit more and speak about it later.	I need you to know how your comment just landed on me.	That's not our culture here. Those aren't our values.
Is sex/gender/gender identity/gender expression/race/class/ethnicity/religion/ability/immigration status/body type/marital status/age/pregnancy relevant to your point? How?	It sounded like you just said _____. Is that really what you meant?	I feel obligated as your peer/colleague/co-worker/friend/supervisor to tell you that your comment wasn't okay.
It sounds like you're making some assumptions that we need to unpack a bit.	You may or may not realize this, but you're talking about me/my story/my identity markers.	I need to leave the room if the conversation is going to continue down this road.

Remember, it is a powerful thing for the target of oppression to hear these words from the mouth of an ally!

Adapted from the School Reform Initiative *Pocket Guide to Probing Questions*  
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# Interrupting Bias

A stylized illustration of diverse people's profiles in various colors (blue, orange, yellow, red, black, white) against a dark background. The profiles are shown in profile, facing right, and are rendered in a flat, graphic style.

## ▶ Calling In:

- ▶ Explore deeper, make meaning together, and find a mutual sense of understanding across differences
- ▶ Seek to understand or learn
- ▶ Help imagine different perspectives, possibilities, or outcomes
- ▶ Provides for multiple perspectives and encourages paradigm shifts •  
Focused on reflection, not reaction

# Examples of Calling In

I'm curious. What was your intention when you said that?	How might the impact of your words/actions differ from your intent?	What sort of impact do you think your decisions/comment/action might have?
How might someone else see this differently? Is it possible that someone might misinterpret your words/actions?	How might your own comfort level, assumptions, expectations, prior experiences be influencing your beliefs, decisions, process?	How is ___ different from ___?  What is the connection between ___ and ___?
What criteria are you using to measure/assess etc.?	How did you decide, determine, conclude...	What would have to change for ___?
What do you assume to be true about ___?	Why is this the best way to proceed? What other approaches have you considered?	What is making you the most fearful, nervous, uncomfortable or worried?
Why do you think that is the case? Why do you believe that to be true?	Why do you think others have/haven't moved in that direction?	How do you know it's working?

Think: How might we call out the behavior, while calling in the person?

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# What if we miss our window?

- ▶ Response can occur in the moment
- ▶ We can respond after processing the incident
- ▶ “The time is always right to do what is right” Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

# Microresistances

- ▶ Incremental daily efforts to challenge privilege and status quo”
  - ▶ Help targeted people **cope with microaggressions**
  - ▶ (Irey, 2013)
- ▶ Microresistances are moderate single and/or collaborative efforts that empower targeted victims and allies to cope with, respond to, and/or challenge microaggressions with a goal of ultimately dismantling systems of oppression
  - ▶ (Irey, 2013; Souza, Ganote, & Cheung, 2017)

# Microresistances continued...

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# Creating an Action Plan

NOW WE KNOW MORE, SO NOW WHAT?

Before we understand what to do, we must acknowledge the difficulties of our work



Health and human service workers are exposed to high psychosocial working stressors and high emotional demands

Health and human services workers experience threats to our safety

Health and human service workers experience high job demands with low job control

(Milner, King, & Kavanagh, 2019)

# Step One – Check in



- ▶ Before you start your conversation, prepare your mind to clear out various thoughts, focus and refresh.
- ▶ Your time is valuable and will impact how others process their experiences.
- ▶ What is your power, privilege entering the room? What do we do with that knowledge?



## Step Two – Understand the pitfalls



- ▶ You are bringing “baggage” (experiences, mood, etc.) into the conversations, and so are they

Pushing off the experiences of others

Creates insecurities

Assume our students, supervisees, or co-workers need to use “self care” instead of receiving support from us

## Step Three – Lean in



- ▶ They are not names on a roster, they are people with experiences
- ▶ You have the skill set already, use it
- ▶ Recognize you are not responsible for more than your responses

# How do I engage in tough conversations?

- ▶ Do your homework
  - ▶ Staff, co-workers, clients, community members
- ▶ Challenge yourself to go outside of your comfort zone
  - ▶ People from disenfranchised populations should not have to teach us about their culture. When we have power, we must give some back to create equity. Simply apply effort...
- ▶ You are not the sole possessor of knowledge
  - ▶ Allow yourself to put down the pressure of having to know the answer → listen and validate



# What if I am the perpetrator of a microaggression?

- ▶ You threw a comment out, seemingly harmless
- ▶ But now that a colleague has brought the slight to your attention, you realize what you said was offensive.
- ▶ As a person who wants to be a good ally to your colleagues of color and members of underrepresented groups, how do you address the situation after you are the one who committed a microaggression?
- ▶ How and when should you try to make amends?
- ▶ What's the best way to ensure that you do better in the future?

# Breathe

- ▶ You may experience a range of emotions —
  - ▶ Being called out raises stress, creates embarrassment, brings in defensiveness, and our heart rate may even go up,” says Zheng.
  - ▶ This is normal and we must internalize the feedback, breathe, and reach a sense of calmness before responding.
- ▶ Validate by reminding ourselves that while you may have made a mistake, it doesn't mean you're a bad person
- ▶ Upside to being called out for a microaggression:
  - ▶ Indicates trust

# Not about you.

- ▶ Every callout is a verbalization of someone's entire history's worth of unsaid context
- ▶ When you hear, "what you said hurt me", they are telling you that this action is like many others in their past.
- ▶ In some instances, it carried centuries' worth of discrimination, cruelty, and oppression.
- ▶ Historical oppression is very heavy

▶ Fogarty & Zheng, 2018

# Listen

- ▶ Sit with the uncomfortable and listen
- ▶ They are offering grace by sharing with you their deepest emotion
- ▶ Gives you a lesson to change

▶ Fogarty & Zheng, 2018

# Be sincere

- ▶ Be genuine
- ▶ “Thank you for being transparent and sharing your experience with me. It sure can be hard to hear when my actions cause \_\_\_\_\_ experience for someone else. I appreciate your trust to share and provide me with feedback.” Then say, “I regret the impact of my comments and next time I can/will \_\_\_\_\_.”

▶ Fogarty & Zheng, 2018



# Don't overdo it

- ▶ We can cause harm by saying, “I am so sorry. I feel so terrible. I am not a racist/sexist/homophobic. What must you think of me?”
- ▶ These histrionics do not help, they contribute to the insult.
- ▶ “You are flexing your power and privilege by having the victim take care of you”
- ▶ Fogarty & Zheng, 2018

# Privilege

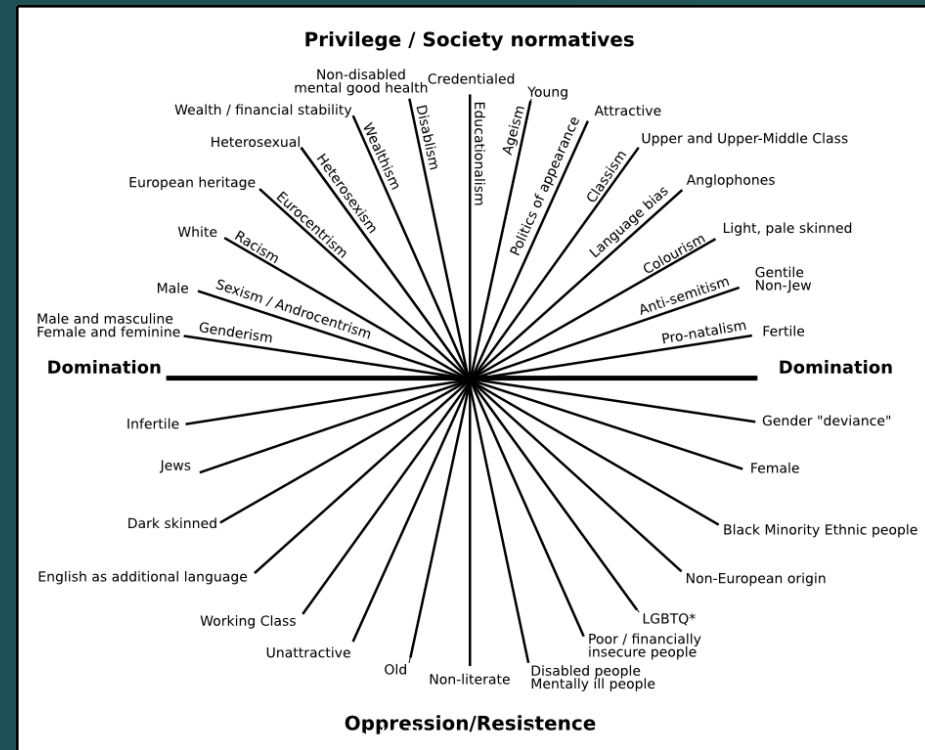
- ▶ Everyone has times in their lives when they feel different, uncomfortable, even the subject of prejudice. Everyone is capable of prejudice or of being the target of prejudice.
- ▶ Oppression, racism, sexism, etc. is
  - ▶ Prejudice + Power



# Privilege is on an axis

Your privilege status changes no matter what room you are in

You can never truly understand all identities, even when we identify as a minority ourselves



nality

intersectio

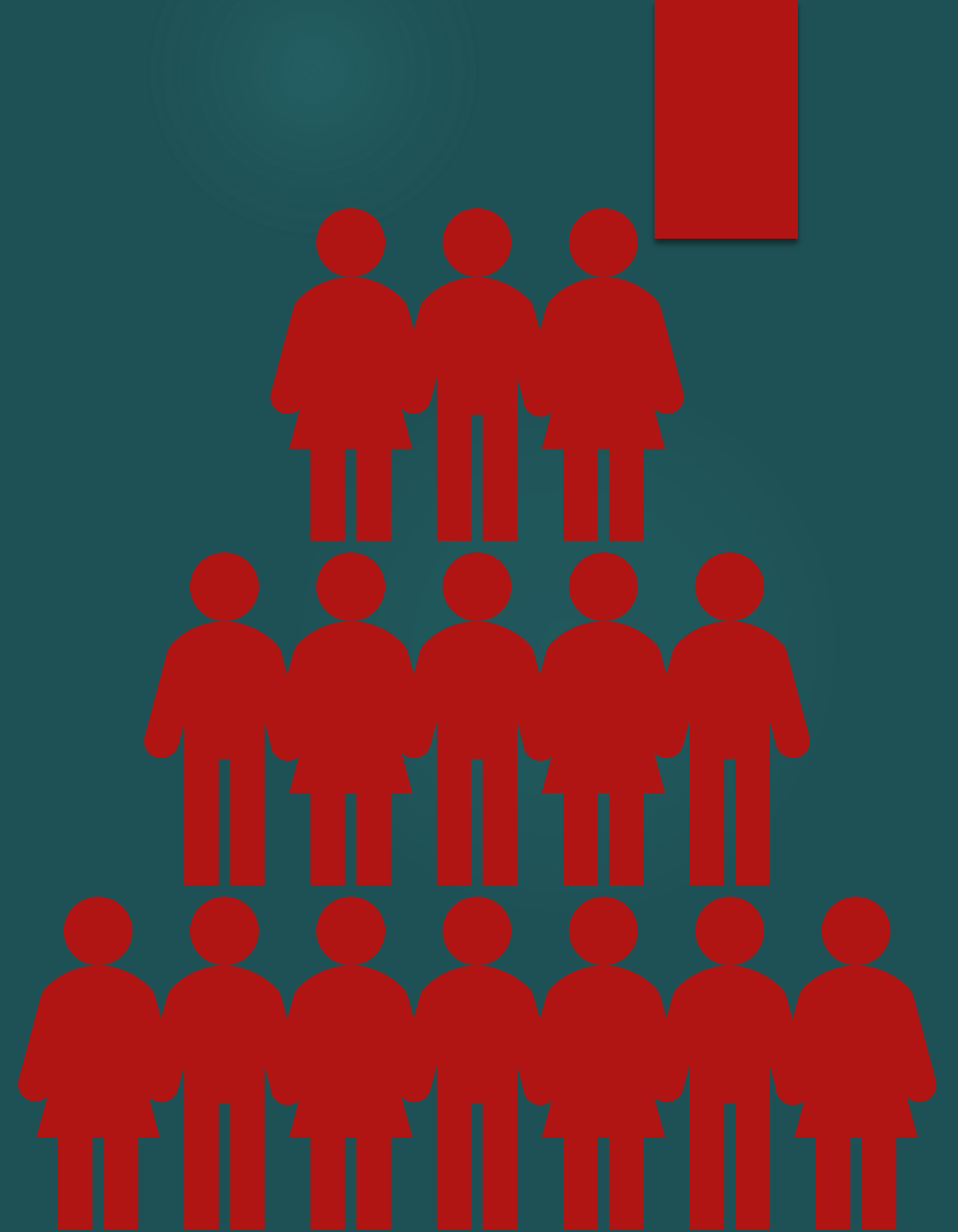
Understanding  
how your  
privilege and  
power creates a  
barrier from  
those who lack it

Those experiencing systemic and chronic barriers to achievement may not always be able to voice those barriers to people in power.

It is important for those in power to anticipate and get curious about the lived experience of those from marginalized identities. Don't wait for them to say what is needed, by then it might be too late.

# Power dynamics at play all around us in our industry

- ▶ Power dynamics inherent as a result of the hierarchical structures.
- ▶ Failure to adequately attend to issues of power continued (Cook, McKibben, & Wind, 2018).
- ▶ Supervisors to Employees → Staff to Providers → Providers to PRS





# People feel it...

- ▶ “... there [is] a power differential in addition to an age and experience gap,” a participant says. “But the more I avoided these conversations, the more I became hyper aware of that power differential, and the number of things I wanted to talk about started to accumulate.” (Gibson et al., 2014)

# Pulse Questions

- ▶ What do you need to feel comfortable engaging in difficult conversations with people who identify differently than you about their experiences?
- ▶ Are you prepared to explore your personal barriers that keep you from engaging in difficult conversations?
- ▶ What feeling do you experience when you are expected to challenge the status quo or have conversations with individuals receiving services or colleagues about identify?



# What can we do to take action?

## Self Reflection

Continue to examine your own power and privilege.

## Be involved

Get to know those outside of your sphere (students, supervisees, co-workers)

## Empower

Choose to empower yourself, especially when you are a bystander



References upon request

