

## HOW TO CONFRONT MICRO AGGRESSIONS

I want to preface this by saying that I am going to speak from my own experience, I will not speak for anyone else except in the broadest of terms.

I was on the Sisters of Mercy Anti-racism team for 10 years. We were trained by one of the premier organizations “Crossroads”. The understanding of micro aggressions is a fairly new wrinkle in recognizing racism for a lot of people. We were introduced to it 10 years ago by Crossroads. It is what people of color have always recognized as death by a thousand cuts.

We also learned that these micro aggressions are so embedded in our world view and language that often times they go unnoticed by most. But the pain that they cause is no less than overt racism. Micro aggressions are steeped in history on both sides of the aisle.

Last evening we touched on a few examples. When a group speaks about racism as a black and white issue the other people of color become invisible. That invisibility comes with a history for Indigenous people. When we were not wiped out by war, removal and disease, boarding schools were established in order the “kill the Indian and save the man”. We were sent to reservations so that we were invisible, out of sight out of mind. That is a painful history.

If you look at the statistics for the covid deaths there in the columns are white, black, Hispanic and “others”. Guess who the “others” are. South Pacific Islanders, Alaskan Natives, and Indigenous people. Even though reservations in the south west lost 25% of their population they are still counted as “others”.

There is a history.

Last night a comment was made and I’ll quote it “Ginny, who “self identifies” as Native....” The history that one remark brings up is the governmental policy that says you cannot be registered Native unless you have a blood quantum. We are asked “how much Indian are you?” We are told “you don’t look Native”. We have the “new age” movement adulterating our sacred traditions. We have become a commodity. My whole generational history was erased in that one comment.

How we were trained to recognize, understand and confront micro aggressions by Crossroads was to have a conversation around unrecognized bias. We were given a question, and then around a table of mixed race we would discuss it. First the people of color would speak and the people of white would just listen and then tell us what they heard. Then it was switched and the people of white would discuss the same question and the people of color would listen then repeat what they heard. You would be amazed at the difference in perception. Words have power. They can be used for pain or healing.

The other thing we were taught was to stop the meeting in its tracks when we heard a micro aggression. It was discussed at length until everyone understood why what was said as an offhand remark by one held great pain for another. Weather you use an “ouch” or a time out signal doesn’t matter. As long as everything comes to a halt. It doesn’t matter how much time it

took. We put aside the agenda and had a much deeper meaningful discussion about the pain of racism. The only rules we had was that nobody could justify or dismiss what was said and nobody could ask the person who called out the micro aggression to explain or justify their pain.

A lot of people were very uncomfortable when tears and anger were present but those discussions turned out to be the most transformational sessions in those 10 years. We learned to remember and respect each story as sacred and to honor that experience.

There are so many more examples of micro aggressions that I hear constantly. Lumping all people of color in the same bucket. Black issues are not Native issues. Native issues are not Hispanic issues. Hispanic issues are not Asian issues. And poverty doesn't equate to communities of color.

It is a lot of interior work but it moved us in the direction of unity. Racism wasn't an issue that was out there somewhere. It became a personal internal issue.

Perhaps in planning a retreat we might work on really talking about why more people of color from more diverse backgrounds are not breaking down the door to join Roc Acts. Are we as welcoming as we could be and is there more internal work that needs to be done?

I hope that all this makes some sense to people. I welcome any comments or corrections you might want to pass on to the group.