The Power of Action
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In November of 2023, I was hanging out as usual with my friends, Kaylee and Teddy. We chatted as we always did—Kaylee is my roommate, and Teddy is our mutual friend. He visits us often. (Their names have been changed “to protect the innocent.”) We spoke naturally and freely until one of us committed a microaggression. The comment was subtle, casual, and seemed as though very normal coming out of this person's mouth, yet it left the other two feeling a bit awkward. At first, you wonder what you should make of the comment. You wonder if a comment like this should ever be discussed, or even addressed. But in this moment, I thought quickly enough to steer it into a constructive conversation I had heard about in conversation analysis—what perfect timing. In this paper, I will present and try to sort out this conversation. First, here is the initial conversation:

979126616 Fioretti RecordingH 1-1.mp3.mp3

Time: (1:14-1:58)

01 G: Do you think someone else would like(.)react
differently or think your intentions were;
02 T: >I wouldn't say it in front of a gay person.<
03 G: Okay,
04 T: I said it in my room; in front of you; and
05 both of us are straight(.)but I know like I I
06 assume it could be hurtful to(.)to somebody who is gay
07 however I don't I don't have many gay friends,
08 I don't know if I have any at all.
09 G: What do you assume like-
10 (2.0)
11 how they would react if they heard you say that
12 T: They probably wouldn't say anything(.)they probably
13 wouldn't say anything at all they'd probably be

(Continued)
angered in their head but I mean what's the gay dude

gonna say to me.

G: Maybe react a little bit on

why you associate gay with negativity;

This constructive conversation with our friend Teddy was based on his reaction to losing one of his video games. In response to losing, he stated, "That is so gay." I thought this was a perfect opportunity to call-in to attempt to make a change in Teddy's language. Because Teddy said, "that is so gay" and associated being gay as a negative, this undeniably classifies as a microaggression. My roommate, Kaylee, and I just sort of looked at each other at a loss for words. We stayed quiet in the moment, but I am glad we talked it out. Our goal was to help Teddy think, act, and speak better. I would classify Teddy's microaggression as “on record, with redressive action.” This is because, as much as Teddy validates his statement, I also think that he did try to do some explaining as to why he said what he said. In line 06-07, Teddy addresses that he knows that if someone gay were to hear this statement, that he knows that someone could be offended by this. He also acknowledges that he does not have any gay friends, insinuating that he does not know how someone that is gay would respond to this statement.

On the other hand, in lines 13-16, Teddy states "they'd probably be angered in their head, but I mean, what's the gay dude gonna say to me?" Perhaps this statement could be considered without redress because although he seemed slightly apologetic in the beginning of the conversation, this line was pretty degrading and could be taken as unapologetic. Our constructive conversation had to continue beyond this relapse into the microaggression.

Teddy’s statement is indirect—perhaps Teddy can be somewhat saved by his indirectness. Although Teddy’s comment, "that's so gay" was distasteful and definitely could count as a microaggression, his comment was not directed at anyone specifically. He did not look at someone who is gay and say "you are so gay," in which case, that would be a direct
microaggression. Still, there’s no denying that the indirect connotation of Teddy’s utterance was “used for impolite or face-damaging purposes” (Archer et al. 2012). Teddy’s indirect comment nonetheless equates losing a video game with being gay. Since Teddy doesn’t have to explain this “equation,” it must be built on “presequences.” Pre-sequences lead to pre-formed opinions and behaviors that shape the idea of the conversation. Pre-sequences may work on listeners as much as speakers in a conversation. Teddy must have had a prior experience (or many prior experiences) that caused him to think that this equation between “losing a video game” and “being gay” is natural. Teddy’s words were undoubtedly a repercussion of an underlying pattern, and his easy use of this equation treats its “actual appearance as ‘the document of’ a presupposed underlying pattern” (Garfinkel, 1967).

979126616 Fioretti Recording 1-1.mp3.mp3
01  G:  Was your intention, like, poor in saying that? Or do
02    you think it was just, like, a natural reaction?
03  T:  It was poor because it came from a place of
04    anger. I lost, so I said, that's so gay. The person I
05    lost against... In all likelihood, probably wasn't
06    gay. Let's be real here, like, not everybody is. This
07    kid probably wasn't either, and he beat me. So,
08    that's why I said it.

There are various elements of social interaction that I see in new ways after my Language and Social Interaction class. I am very pleased with how my thinking and my social awareness changed after learning new concepts. Specifically, one element I see in a new way is microaggressions, which I might have overlooked or ignored in the past. I am convinced that it is important to detect and avoid microaggressions—even microaggressions that are not intentional efforts to do harm (Lee, et al., 2018).
Before I studied Language and Social Interaction, I would have heard Teddy’s "that is so gay" comment; I most likely would have ignored it and not discussed it with him afterwards. I now know that talking about this with someone and making them aware of their wrongdoings does not always have to be an uncomfortable debate. The guiding questions I used made it easy to just have a simple conversation with Teddy, as opposed to it being awkward.

In addition, the transcription above made me realize in my real life how to react to people that have skewed perspectives of how to discuss gender, race, or LGBTQIA+. The transcription I integrated into this part shows how Teddy associated being gay with his anger and rage. I politely questioned Teddy, and it showed that I was not trying to judge, or threaten his face, but rather I was trying to be a good friend and improve his overall language. In this constructive conversation, we were just “co-participants in talk [ourselves] attend[ing] to some bit of speech as embodying practices/actions specific to a certain gender or sexual identity, often the result of a deviation from the speaker’s (and society’s) behavioral norms" (Raymond, 2013). On this evening, Teddy, Kaylee, and I were just talking against the shared behavioral norms and practices that shape our shared experience. All three of us had learned in our pasts that the equation of “being gay” and “losing a video game” is both normal and “microaggressively harmful” to our society and us.

Conclusion
This paper indicated how the concepts we learned throughout the semester work. Action is a distinguished and centralized topic throughout all parts of this assignment. There are several takeaways from this conversation that Kaylee and I absorbed; one being that it is always better to communicate and express your concerns of actions that may not sit right with you. Making someone aware of your concerns hopefully sparks their desire to make a change. Voicing your feelings, successful or not, is worth it. What I hoped to see moving forward with Teddy is to be more sensitive to situations and making sure his language is not misinterpreted by others who he may be around, which I think was accomplished. Teddy seems to be more aware of his wrongdoings. Through remorse, Teddy has chosen to improve his language. Today, I am
uncertain if Teddy fully comprehends the implications of his words, but I do know I have heard improvement in his everyday language. Kaylee has learned from this as well, as neither of us originally planned to address this, she has learned that speaking out may be better than ignoring a situation. Surrounding yourself with people who want to help you reconsider your actions is important for the bettering of yourself. This conversation with Teddy seemed to change the way he speaks of losing a video game. This experience shows how actions are a large factor of everything, however, can also change everything at the same time.

Works Cited