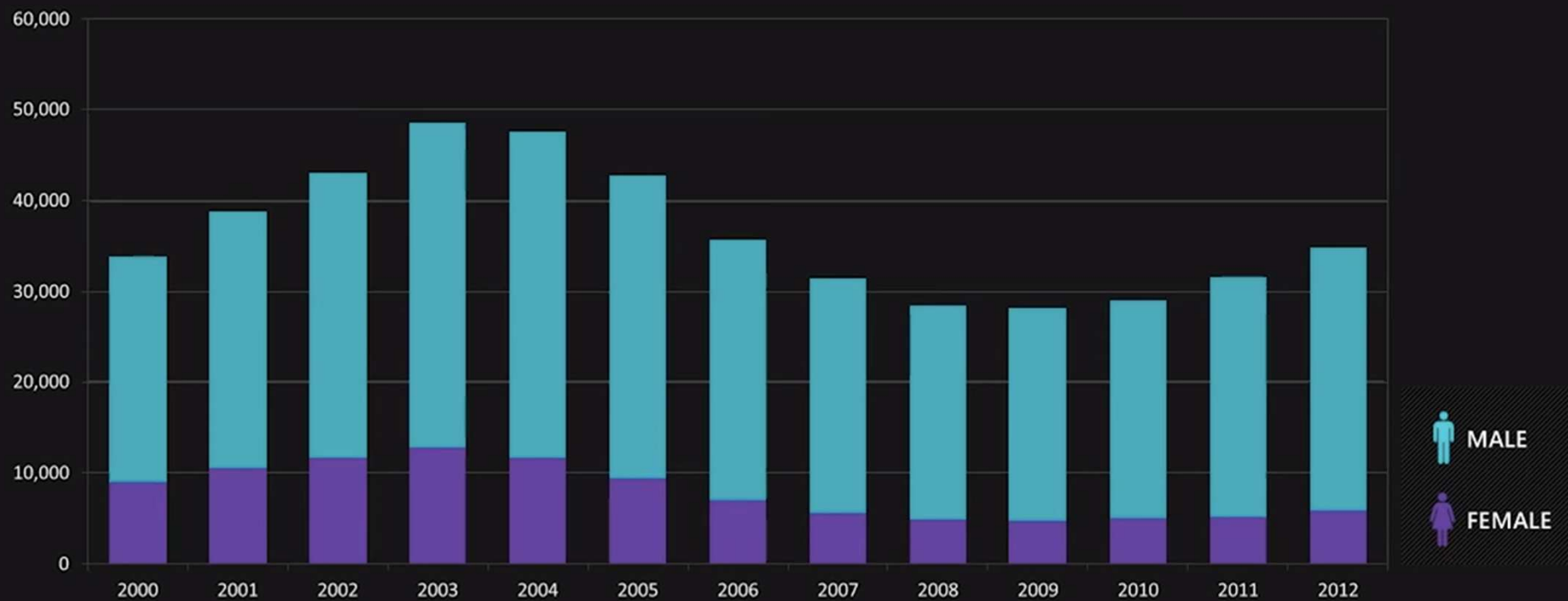# Microaggressions and Underrepresented Groups in Computer Science

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Fewer computer science students than 10 years ago (and half as many women)

Sources: National Science Foundation

HADI
CREATED CODE.ORG

JACK
CREATED twitter

BILL
CREATED MICROSOFT

DREW
CREATED DROPBOX

MARK
CREATED facebook

TONY
CEO @ZAPPOS

GABE
CREATED VALVE

VANESSA
CREATED GIRL DEVELOP IT

ELENA
CREATED CLOTHIA.COM

MAKINDE
EARLY facebook ENGINEER

RUCHI
facebook's FIRST FEMALE ENGINEER
NOW VP @ DROPBOX

BRONWEN
TECHNICAL ARTIST
@ VALVE

CHRIS
NBA ALL-STAR
CODED IN COLLEGE

will.i.am
CREATED THE BLACK EYED PEAS
NOW TAKING CODING CLASSES

- Women have achieved equal status and are no longer discriminated against

- Racism is no longer prevalent in our society nor is it important in the lives of people of color

- Homophobia is a "thing of the past" and gay harassment is on the decline

Reactions?

Microaggressions

"Brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether *intentional or unintentional*, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative slights and insults to the target person or group".

p. 273; Sue et al., 2007, *American Psychologist.*

Microaggressions could apply to any category of people

- Ethnicity/race
- Sex or gender
- Sexual orientation

Are these comments racist/sexist?

- When I said Asians are loud, I wasn't talking about you
- You're not like the rest of them
- I don't think of you as a woman
- You speak such good English
- Funny, you don't look Indian
- You don't look like a programmer

Features of microaggressions

- Ambiguous
- Targets of microaggressions are left to
  - determine if the encounter really was racist/sexist/homophobic
  - decide how to respond, and
  - risk being perceived as oversensitive.
- Cumulative microaggressions may have consequences for well being.

Frustrated
Powerless
Isolated
Invalidated
Invisible
Self-doubt
Angry

4 things to keep in mind

1. Be aware that racial, gender, and sexual orientation microaggressions are a constant reality in the lives of culturally diverse groups.

2. Be aware that everyone has, and continues to engage in, unintentional microaggressions.

3. Do not invalidate the experiential reality of culturally diverse groups.

4. Do not get defensive if a student implies that you have engaged in a microaggressive remark or behavior.

Preventing Microaggressions in the classroom

- Make it clear that you have high expectations for all your students (verbally and nonverbally)
- Make an effort to know the names of underrepresented students in your class (gender, race, etc.)
- If you have images of people on slides or use test questions with names, make an effort to represent women and people of color
- During office hours, ask students what they want you to know about them and what you can do to help them learn better.

Preventing Microaggressions in the classroom

- Feedback should be on content, not appearance. When giving comments, think consider if you would give this feedback to a white, straight man.

- If you hear an insensitive comment by a student or colleague, call them out on it.

- When teaching about products/marketability, show the practical side of gendered diversity

Washington Post (March 4th, 2015)

"The lack of girl characters implies that girls are not equal to boys and they don't deserve characters that look like them. I am a girl; I prefer being a girl in these games. I do not want to pay to be a girl.

If I were an app maker, the ethical issue of charging for girl characters and not boy characters would be enough reason to change. But app-makers should eliminate this practice for a business reason too: If girls stop playing these games, then they also would stop making in-app purchases and stop watching the ads. If our character choices tell us these games aren't for us, eventually we'll put them down."

- Madeline Messer, 12-year-old girl

Professors should call out students who make statements that are not supported by evidence and be honest when they don't know the answer to a question.

"Male professors and colleagues say things they are unsure of with absolute certainty. My female colleagues never say this. Many times, my colleagues would tell me that I am wrong with absolute certainty, when I am not. This behavior is very detrimental to learning because you don't want to freely ask questions or think out loud because you don't want people to think that you are stupid or completely wrong. And you don't want to constantly call out people for telling you you're wrong when you are not...this makes other female colleagues feel like they are "not as smart" or they don't sound like they have expertise in a particular field. If professors directly condemn this behavior by my male colleagues or even stopped doing it themselves, I would feel much more comfortable learning and asking questions.

- African American Woman, PhD student in Electrical Engineering

Conversations about diversity and inclusion should be continuous – not discrete, one-time events.

"Every time we have any sort of discussion on microaggressions or diversity, its always during a specific event targeted towards "diversity". These discussions are not interspersed throughout discussions about research or group meetings. This makes it seem like when people care about diversity, they're doing some charitable work; it doesn't make it look like it is something essential for the development of the field as a whole. It just feels like this is something the professors might care about because they're "good" people."

Preventing Microaggressions in the classroom

- Talk to your student as an individual, not a representation of their ethnic/cultural/gender group
- Avoid making comments like "race or gender doesn't matter"
- Avoid dismissing an individual who brings up race/culture/gender
- Don't put the burden on your minority students to bring up current events that can affect their perceptions of inclusiveness and diversity.

Preventing Microaggressions in the classroom

- ALL faculty should attend and encourage students to attend workshops or diversity-related events and talks. Otherwise, it perpetuates the stereotype that diversity doesn't impact everyone and risks minority students feeling like they are the only ones advocating for themselves.

Professional Development

- Have honest, uncomfortable conversations about what women and minorities face on the job market.

- Talk about pay. Women and minorities need to know what's comparable.

- If you're not sure, invite speakers!

Thank you

Additional Resources

Experts on microaggressions in college and professional settings

- Miguel Ceja in Educational Leadership & Policy Studies @ CSUN
- Daniel Solorzano @ UCLA
- Derald Wing Sue @ Columbia

University Illinois report on racial microaggressions in the classroom

  - http://www.racialmicroaggressions.illinois.edu/files/2015/03/RMA-Classroom-Report.pdf