

## MICROAGGRESSIONS AND RESISTANCE IN THE CLASSROOM

### WORKSHOP ORGANIZERS

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The concept of microaggressions has drawn a lot of recent research interest (Caraves, 2018; Nadal *et al.*, 2017; Gartner and Sterzing, 2016; Sterzing *et al.*, 2017). Microaggressions refer to the small and subtle ways in which exclusion manifests itself, often through everyday discourse, which is perceived as exclusionary or discriminatory. Popularized largely through the work of Sue (2007; 2010), the study of microaggressions has largely focused on race and gender. Sue and colleagues define racial microaggressions as “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group” (Sue *et al.*, 2007, p. 273). Increasingly, microaggressions directed at different marginalized groups such as ethnic minorities and people of color (Balsam *et al.*, 2011; Clark *et al.*, 2014), people with non-conforming sexual orientations (Shelton and Delgado-Romero, 2011; Woodford *et al.*, 2013) and religious minorities (Husain and Howard, 2017), are also being studied.

Even with the expanding interest in microaggressions, there is much debate around what constitutes a microaggression (Lilienfeld, 2017), with clarity around the microaggression experience and its conceptualization still evolving. Some like Sue (2010) argue that even if a slight is unintended by the purported issuer of the microaggression, if the receiver perceives something as a slight, a put down or a marginalization, then it would still constitute a microaggression. It is also believed that microaggressions although subtle, can be more potent than active discrimination and far more detrimental to non-majoritarian identities such as women, people of color, or non-conforming sexual orientations, as the exclusion can be implicit and the slights hard to address or reveal themselves as compared to active racism or sexism (Sue *et al.*, 2008).

Given the early stage of research on microaggressions in general (Lilienfeld, 2017), the complexity of studying the experience of exclusion directed at different marginalized groups (such as those based on race, gender and intersectional identities) and the often invisible nature of how microaggressions play out, new ways of exploring the experience and concept of microaggressions are called for.

There have been very few studies exploring microaggressions with the classroom as a reference point. Of the few studies with the classroom as a focal point (Hartwood *et al.*, 2012; Kohli and Solórzano, 2012), the emphasis has been on studying the experience of microaggressions from the lived experience of the students and uncovering racial microaggressions themes such as the use of racial slurs and the presence of segregated spaces (Hartwood *et al.*, 2012). Kohli and Solórzano

(2012) also report on the K-12 classroom experience of racial minority students who experienced cultural disrespect with regard to their names. To the best of our knowledge, there have so far been no studies examining microaggressions within the college classroom that focuses on multiple minority and intersectional identities, studied from the perspective of the teacher or the academic in the classroom, someone likely to be familiar with class interactions and dynamics and the likely occurrence of microaggressions in the classroom.

Our workshop thus proposes to examine the microaggression experience of multiple minority identities through the prism of different classroom instructors engaging varied classrooms with diverse student populations. Since the workshop is open to unconventional procedures, we envisage the workshop to run like a large focus group where workshop participants share and reflect on their experience of microaggressions in the classroom. Our plan is to facilitate this dialog by offering several open-ended questions for group discussion and dialog. The purpose is to examine the varied nature and forms of microaggressions and other subtle forms of resistance from a critical self-reflective lens. Topics would include sharing examples of microaggressions within a classroom setting, strategies for engaging students in dialog concerning these indignities as well as examples of how resistance can be passive, hidden or active within a classroom setting. The hope is to also draw attention to and build awareness of microaggressions that permeate the classroom space and devise ways to actively counter and limit the negative impact of such exclusion.

Participants in the workshop must have experience facilitating diverse classes and will be expected to send in a one-page write-up based on their own experience with microaggressions in the classroom. The write-up can be based on either participants' own experience of microaggressions or on secondary data as an observer of classroom dynamics having witnessed microaggressions directed at students of marginalized identities.

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