

# Recognizing and Reducing Microaggressions in Online Courses

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# Definition

Microaggressions are brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to a target group (Sue & Sue, 2008). They occur in three forms: (a) microassaults, (b) microinsults, and (c) microinvalidations

They are extremely damaging because they impair classroom performance and workplace productivity by creating emotional turmoil and depleting psychological resources for multicultural and multiracial persons and other groups (Sue, 2005)

# 3 Types of Microaggressions

**Micro assaults** are blatant, verbal, nonverbal, or environmental attack intended to convey discriminatory and biased sentiments. “Phrase such as faggot, spic, or kype fit this category.

**Micro insults** are unintentional behaviors or verbal comments that convey rudeness or insensitivity or demean a person racial heritage/gender identity, religion, ability, or sexual orientation. Ex. “ girly men”.

**Microinvalidations** are verbal comments or behaviors that exclude, negate, or dismiss the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of the target group . Ex. Wow! I didn't't know women were so good in math?

# Current Research

Focused on **racial microaggressions** as they occurred in online communication in a graduate course in education over a six year period from 2008-2013.

Table 1  
*Types of Racial Microaggressions Identified by Focus Group Members*

Microaggression	Definition	Example
Colorblindness	Denying racial-cultural differences	"I don't see you as Black; I just see you as a regular person."
Overidentification	Denying or minimizing individual racial bias because of assumed similarity	"As a gay person, I know just what it's like to be discriminated against because of race."
Denial of personal or individual racism	Professing presumed freedom from or immunization to racism	"I'm not racist because some of my best friends are Black."
Minimization of racial-cultural issues	Minimizing or dismissing the importance of racial-cultural issues to a person of color	"I'm not sure we need to focus on race or culture to understand your depression."
Assigning unique/special status on the basis of race or ethnicity	Assuming that a positive behavior or characteristic is atypically present in a person on the basis of race or ethnicity	"You're not like other Blacks; you're a credit to your race" and "You're a very articulate African American."
Stereotypic assumptions about members of a racial or ethnic group	Assuming that a behavior, norm, or characteristic exists on the basis of a person's race or ethnicity	"I know that Black people are very religious" and "Did you grow up in the inner city?"
Accused hypersensitivity regarding racial or cultural issues	Assuming that a person of color is hypersensitive during discussions of racial or cultural issues	"Don't be too sensitive about the racial stuff. I didn't mean anything bad/offensive."
Meritocracy myth	Ignoring the responsibility of individual perpetrators and sociopolitical systems for perpetuating racism	"If Black people just worked harder, they could be successful like other people."
Culturally insensitive treatment considerations or recommendations	Displaying cultural insensitivity in the context of understanding or treating clients' concerns	"You should disengage or separate from your family of origin if they are causing you problems."
Acceptance of less than optimal behaviors on the basis of racial-cultural group membership	Accepting or normalizing potentially dysfunctional behaviors on the basis of a person's racial or cultural group	"It might be okay for some people to cope by drinking alcohol because their cultural norms sanction this behavior."
Idealization	Overestimating the desirable qualities and underestimating the limitations of a person on the basis of racial or ethnic group membership	"I'm sure you can cope with this problem as a strong Black woman" and "Black people are so cool."
Dysfunctional helping/patronization	Offering help that is unneeded or inappropriate on the basis of racial or ethnic group membership	"I don't usually do this, but I can waive your fees if you can't afford to pay for counseling."



# Research Data Examples

“There were families of minority races, but these families were part of my town, their children were my friends, and I never considered race as a distinguishing factor between us.”  
(Colorblindness)

“I have three beautiful bi-racial grandchildren and I live what some of my students experience every day so I have first hand knowledge of how it feels.”  
(Overidentification)

# Gathering Data

- Following IRB Approval, archived message board threads were downloaded to MS Word files by semester and year.
- Message board text lost its formatting when downloaded and required reformatting before saved as MS Word docs.
- Word doc files were later uploaded into NVivo for data analysis.

# Challenges to Gathering Data

- Downloading transcripts from the Learning Management System
- Uploading transcripts into NVivo
- Procedures for obtaining, retrieving, and storing transcripts

“LMS’s are delivery/instructional mechanisms, and not research mechanisms”



# Code Book

- Codebook is the template used for identifying text phrases that illustrate microaggression statements.
- Researchers created a code book based on student comments.
- Coding template for identifying microaggression phrases was adapted from research literature.

# NVIVO

- Qualitative analysis software used for data analysis.
- Helped with annotation, coding, and visual display outputs for making sense of data.
- Data analysis using NVIVO continues today.

# Implications

What does this research mean for online instruction?

How can faculty be taught to recognize microaggressions?

How will faculty manage microaggressions in an online discussion board?

What kind of trainings can be done help faculty recognize and manage this disruptive communication?

# References

Source for Table 1

Constantine, M. (2007) , Racial microaggressions against African American clients in cross racial counseling relationships. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 54, 1-16.

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