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World-Shaping Speech

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My research focuses on the power that language has to shape our social and political worlds, often in subtle and difficult to detect ways. Our society is stratified along lines of race, ethnicity, religious affiliation, gender, class, sexual orientation, dis/ability status, and more. I am interested in the ways that our linguistic practices (e.g., how we use speech and engage in communication with one another) contribute to, or reinforce, problematic forms of social stratification and hierarchy. One speech phenomenon that I focus on in my research is called “microaggressions.” Microaggressions are frequent and subtle comments (or gestures, or features of our social environments) which function to reinforce stereotypes or biases about members of structurally marginalized groups. My work aims to get clear on what microaggressions are, how we should understand and study them, in what ways they can be harmful to their targets, and why they warrant our moral concern.