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Unmasking Microaggressions on the Homefront: Exploring Faculty and Staff Perceptions After Attending an Online Workshop on Microaggressions in Higher Education

Andrea N. Crenshaw
University of West Georgia, andreas@westga.edu

Natasha N. Ramsay-Jordan
University of West Georgia, nrjordan@westga.edu

Allyson Deskins
University of West Georgia, ad00152@my.westga.edu

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Abstract

Microaggressions are brief and everyday slights, insults, indignities, and denigrating messages sent to people of color and/or marginalized groups (women, LGBTQ+, etc.) by well-intentioned [people] who are unaware of the hidden messages being communicated (Sue et al., 2007). Microaggressions are connected to broader conceptualizations of the impact of implicit bias and systems of inequity. Specifically, in K-12 and higher education, microaggressions impact the physical, social, and emotional well-being of those who experience them. Growing research posits the need for more discussions in education about racism, sexism, and other bias prevalent in the field of education (Bergerson, 2003). As such, some researchers ((Escayg, 2018; Lin, Lake, & Rice, 2008) have advocated for the importance of bringing anti-bias pedagogy into educational spaces, which involves attempting to move beyond educators' comfort zones and providing them with tangible strategies to disrupt microaggressive behaviors. To discuss the intent and impact of microaggressions in educational settings and how we might respond to them, we developed a two-hour online workshop for educators and students at Western State University. This workshop allowed participants to think critically about microaggressions, how they impact higher education, and how administrators, faculty, staff, and students can promote inclusive environments. The workshop included a presentation on microaggression theory, microaggression scenarios in education, and the utilization of the A.C.T.I.O.N framework (Chueng, Ganote, & Souza, 2016) as a tool to disrupt microaggressions. Participants provided feedback about their experiences from the workshop based on an electronic survey they were provided at the end of the workshop.

Keywords

Microaggressions, higher education, diversity, equity, inclusion

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Introduction

The persistent threat of covert racism, sexism, heterosexism, and other implicit bias have indulgently festered within higher education clandestinely. Operating as a seemingly concealed force of implicit bias, microaggressions inadvertently render ambiguous remarks through well-intentioned [people] who unknowingly insult minority races and those of marginalized groups. Intentional discrimination occurs through frequent denigrating statements, actions, and incidents, often targeting women, LGBTQ+, people of color, and other minoritized communities. Although microaggressions may not always reflect malicious intent, the abashing impact of those actions or statements resides with the victims of these messages. These brief and everyday slights could be compared to the vexing experience of a mosquito bite as they leave their victims with lingering irritation (Freedom Project, 2019). This minuscule attack appears insignificant; however, an accumulation of these stings regularly creates an environment that is psychologically and physically unsafe for people who experience microaggressions on an ongoing basis (Sue et al., 2019).

Despite the harm these microaggressions have inflicted upon historically marginalized communities, oppositions argue the notion merely manipulates victimhood and emphasizes sensitivity. A recent article by the *American Sociology Association* addresses this narrative by explaining unaffected individuals often struggle to see how more subtle forms of discrimination reflect the same system of power that fostered overt bias (Eisen, 2020). Additionally, arguments claim there is no valid basis to determine what constitutes a microaggression (Cantu, 2021). However, psychologist and university instructor, Monica T. Williams, ensures adequate agreement exists amongst scholars regarding the validity of microaggressions, stating, "we do not need agreement by all or even most targets to classify a microaggression as a problem; we

simply need to demonstrate that a sizeable percentage find it [racially] objectionable" (Williams, 2020). Considering microaggressions more critically acknowledges it is unnecessary to require everyone to define behavior as offensive for it to be deemed problematic.

Subtle forms of discrimination are inescapable as they reside within quotidian establishments. Settings like workplaces, grocery stores, and classrooms employ common characteristics of covert bias. Studies (Allen et al., 2000; Solórzano et al., 2001) concede microaggressions have manifested within the university community and remained unaddressed amongst staff and faculty. As research surrounding microaggressions expands, organizations such as educational institutions must examine the need to implement anti-bias teachings within higher education. In a 2016 article, Miami University described microaggressions as having "a detrimental impact upon recipients by promoting and fostering inequities in higher education." Furthermore, the *Journal of Black Studies* (Louis et al., 2016) released a disquisition outlining specific incidents of microaggressions encountered by Black faculty members cooperating in a predominantly white university workplace, stating, "microaggressions are commonplace at the university level and is a pertinent issue to faculty of color" (p. 455). Although the impact of microaggressions has been identified and examined within the framework of university studies, there remains an insufficient amount of anti-bias training available to faculty in higher education on this issue.

The significance of this research lies in the examination of participant experiences after taking part in an online workshop about microaggressions in higher education. The knowledge gained from participants informed programs to promote and create more diverse, equitable, and inclusive programs and policies within the College of Education. This study contributed to the professional literature on microaggressions as it privileges discussions about microaggressions in

education by drawing upon and contributing to increased knowledge about the role implicit bias plays in perpetuating disparate and inequitable treatment, despite reductions in covert racism, sexism, homophobia, and other forms of bias (Compton, 2020; Kohli et al. 2018; Young et al., 2015). This research aimed to examine the perceptions of participants after taking part in an online workshop about microaggressions in higher education. Examination of their experiences informs programming and policies in education to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in K12 and higher education environments. Notably, the study has the following objectives: a) to examine participants' experiences after participating in an online workshop about microaggressions in higher education, and b) to understand how the microaggressions workshop impacted their understanding of microaggressions in higher education.

The Foundation of Microaggressions

American psychiatrist Dr. Chester Pierce coined the term microaggressions during the 1970s when describing the various forms of covert racism he and other Black Americans were experiencing at this time. Pierce initially defined microaggressions as "Black-white racial interactions [that] are characterized by white put-downs, done in an automatic, preconscious, or unconscious fashion" (Pierce, 1974). The term has since evolved to include covert discrimination towards all marginalized groups. Sue et al. (2007) redefined microaggressions in the early 2000s as "brief and everyday slights, insults, indignities, and denigrating messages sent to people of color and/or marginalized groups by well-intentioned [people] who are unaware of the hidden messages being communicated" (p. 137). Although the defining construct of microaggressions has expanded, the acknowledgment and/or ownership of these behaviors remain significantly overlooked and unaddressed.

Microaggressions have acquired the ability to remain inconspicuous through supporting the same oppressive system that cultivated overt bias (Sue et al., 2007). The historical components of microaggressions originated within the roots of many foundational ideas and policies, often leading to modern systemic oppression and/or discrimination. More specifically, systemic discrimination within higher education has influenced the development and execution of university policies throughout history (Museus, 2015). Although significant strides of inclusivity have been made within the university realm, the perennial impact of previous ideologies maintains an opening for implicit bias to operate within. Cohen et al. (2010) examined historical policies in universities and communicated how they are still impacting higher education through subtle formalities, stating, "Today's problems are related to yesterday's practices (p. 4)." The authors go on to explain how curriculum, language preferences, pedagogical methods, and hierarchical ideology amongst faculty stem from the initial discriminatory culture of early American education. Through the implementation of federal laws, overt discrimination has become an intolerable act within education; however, the remnants of racism, sexism, ableism, heterosexism, and other manifestations of implicit discrimination linger within the subconscious of most people.

Types of microaggressions

According to Sue et al. (2007), microaggressions can be classified into three categories: microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations. Research expounding upon these three classifications is currently limited as these terms are not yet present in common dictionaries. Microaggressions reveal themselves through three primary forms: verbal, behavioral, and environmental (Lilienfeld, 2017). The characteristics of these microaggressive types and forms

collaborate to demonstrate an implicit bias discreetly and surreptitiously towards marginalized communities.

Microassaults

The first classification, microassaults, is defined by the *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health* as an "explicit attack that is verbal or nonverbal in nature" (Mallot, 2015, p. 388). Sue further expounds on microassaults by stating the behavior is likely conscious and deliberate but expressed in a limited or private setting to allow for an extent of anonymity (Sue, 2007, p. 1). Examples of these intentional actions or slurs may include the use of epithets, offensive signs or visual displays, and noticeable actions that reflect bias, such as clutching a handbag in the presence of certain individuals (COD Library, 2021). This form of microaggressive behavior may reveal itself as an evident manifestation of discrimination, yet its obscurity rests within the ability to deny blatant bias.

Microinsults

Microinsults are "explicit derogations characterized by communications that convey rudeness and insensitivity and demean a person's racial heritage or identity." (Sue, 2007, p. 1). Examples of micro insults would include comments that convey bias, such as telling a Latinx person, "You're so well-spoken!" or a patient telling an Indian doctor, "Your people must be so proud." (Litner, 2020). Phrases such as these are typically intended to serve as a compliment, yet they reveal underlying biases and stereotypes while insulting the receiver.

Microinvalidations

Microinvalidations demonstrate the third style of microaggressive language and behavior, which "invalidates or undermines the experiences of a certain group of people." (Litner 2020). This microaggression could be manifested through a conversation that invalidates one's feelings

by insisting a comment or action was not offensive. Another example may include a white person telling a Black person, "Racism doesn't exist in today's society." Each form of microaggressive behavior and language demeans recipients through varying degrees of intentionality and oblivion.

Microaggressions in Higher Education

Investigating microaggressions within higher education serves the purpose of supplementing literature and research in conjunction with advocating for anti-bias teachings within the realm of university staff and faculty. While navigating literature supporting research on microaggressions within higher education, it became apparent that content on this matter was sparsely available. Thus, the significance of this review is to initiate a wave of micro resistance through a collaborative effort to promote awareness of this epidemic. The *American Council on Education* proposed the initial actionable step towards cultivating an inclusive campus climate is to implement responsive training for administrators, staff, faculty, and student leaders that explicitly address microaggressive behaviors (Garcia, 2016).

Although studies surrounding microaggressive interactions within higher education are limited, existing research demonstrates commonalities between the styles of microaggressions experienced by marginalized staff and faculty members manifesting themselves through a hierarchical formality, thus stimulating subtle de-professionalization, nonrecognition, and fatigue (Young et al. 2015). Examples of microaggressions in higher education include historically marginalized staff and faculty members who receive insufficient recognition because their accomplishments are overlooked, belittled, or credited for by others. These professionals may also experience pressure to overexert their successes and intelligence to assert their position in higher education. This overcompensation can result in an exhausting form of defense recipients

of these fatiguing microaggressions experience regularly. In addition to the hostility experienced within office spaces, historically marginalized professors may receive similar disrespect from their students who exhibit their disapproval through disruptive behaviors or languages that intentionally antagonize educators (Museus et al., 2015). Daily and seemingly invisible attacks such as these continue to minimize the validity of these marginalized professionals and contribute to the revolving door of diverse staff and faculty.

Similar to staff and faculty experiences in higher education, studies reveal the experiences of LGBTQ+ students, students of minority races, female students, students with disabilities, and other marginalized groups attending universities endure microaggressive language and behaviors from their peers, professors, and campus environments. This may entail lower or higher expectations due to their race or gender, intentional exclusion or ignoring of a student's identity (religion, sexual orientation, etc.), and the common use of insensitive remarks from professors or fellow students (Brooks-Hurst, 2018; Harris, 2017). A Ph.D. student from Michigan State University released a dissertation recounting the campus experiences of LGBTQ+ students who felt fearful of informing their professors of a name change or were frustrated by the environmental genderism applied by the campus climate (Bilodeau, 2007). Other researchers examined the sexist and racist suggestions often made by professors who assumed they were complimenting or acknowledging students' identities through insensitive or belittling comments (Levchak, 2013; McCabe, 2009). Another dissertation published by Utah State University explored the experiences with microaggressions of students with disabilities on college campuses. These accounts with professors invalidated students with learning disabilities and minimized their challenges, leading to the retraction from classroom participation and a significant decrease in these students attending postsecondary education (Lynsie, 2017).

Current training on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) within higher education staff and faculty is seldom yet necessary. Yale Chief Diversity Officer, Deborah Stanley-McAulay, explains diversity must be woven into the fabric of the organization through a collective effort of staff and faculty members actively embracing inclusion and self-awareness, thus promoting an expansion of inclusive language and actions serving as daily micro affirmations (2017). An influx of DEI training amongst university leaders would veer the trajectory of societal morality towards the direction of micro resistance and consequently improve the retention of marginalized staff and faculty members. The theoretical framing of the study relies heavily on Sue et al.'s work (2007) since they have extensively researched microaggressions in everyday life and created a comprehensive typology of microaggressions. Through this framework, the hope is that participation in a microaggression workshop would stimulate self-awareness amongst all staff and faculty members and train professionals to combat microaggressions while simultaneously utilizing micro-interventions and microactivism to dismantle bias and discrimination.

Microaggressions Workshop Overview

The purpose of this interactive online workshop was to engage participants in focused discussions about microaggressions in higher education and to offer microactivism as a conduit for social justice within higher education. The workshop offered new knowledge, resources, and skills necessary to challenge microaggressions in higher education effectively. It further explored real-life scenarios through personal stories from faculty, staff, and students within the College of Education. The use of an online workshop format was significant as it allowed us to use video-conferencing technology that enabled both direct and small group interaction to occur between participants and facilitators without the need for them to be in the same physical location and

made it possible for participants to communicate directly with facilitators who were able to provide immediate feedback (Gegenfurtner et al., 2017).

Research on adult learning highlights the significance of active engagement (Merriam, & Bierema, 2013). The researchers designed this workshop as a shared experience among facilitators and participants, with a balance of workshop participants learning about research on microaggressions in higher education and sharing their own expertise and experiences with microaggressions. Interactive activities such as think-pair-share, case studies, and many other active learning activities were utilized to help participants explore various types of microaggressions and themes that aligned with each type, along with microactivism practices to combat microaggressions. The A.C.T.I.O.N. framework (Souza, 2018; Chueng, Ganote, & Souza, 2016) served as a model for participants to use that outlined how to communicate when microaggressions occur. The microaggressions workshop agenda is outlined in figure 1 below.

Figure 1

Microaggressions Workshop Agenda

Content/Activity	Time
Introduction: • Overview of workshop/community norms for courageous discussions	11:00a-11:10a
Content (Awareness): • History of Microaggressions • Examples of Microaggressions • Impact in Higher Education	11:10a-11:20a
Activity #1: *Visualizing Microaggressions* • Review and reflect on the photographs and discuss the underlying assumptions and messages microaggressions send to individuals/groups	11:20a-11:35a
Content (Action): Microactivism-- • Review the A.C.T.I.O.N. framework • Review scenarios and discuss how one can utilize the A.C.T.I.O.N.	11:35a-11:45a

framework to combat microaggressions ● Strategies for recognizing our own microaggressions ● Implications	
Activity #2: *Verbal Frisbees* ● Participants will use provided scenarios to explore micro-aggressive behaviors and strategies.	11:45-12:00p
Wrap up ● Inclusion starts with 'I'	12:00p-12:10p
Q/A	12:10p-12:30p

Context of the College of Education

The COE is one of the region's largest and most respected Colleges of Education. There are over 40 programs available that prepare students for meaningful, professional careers in diverse settings within teacher education, leadership, sports management, and wellness. The COE comprises 157 faculty and staff who are in full-time or part-time roles in the college. See table 1 below for the demographic composition of the COE.

Table 1

COE Faculty/Staff Demographics

	Teaching Faculty		Administrators		Total	Percent
	Full time	Part time	General[1]	Academic[2]		
Race/Ethnicity						
African American/Black	15	9	1	1	26	17%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	1	-	-	-	1	1%
Asian	7	1	-	-	8	5%
Caucasian/White	64	32	1	17	114	73%
Hispanic or Latino/a	4	-	-	-	4	3%
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	-	-	-	-	0	0%
Two or More Races	-	-	-	-	0	0%
Unknown/Not Reported	-	4	-	-	4	3%
Total	90	47	2	18	157	100%
Gender						
Female	66	37	1	10	114	73%
Male	24	10	1	8	43	27%
Total	90	47	2	18	157	100%

Source: Office of the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

Method

The researchers utilized a case study method approach to collect and analyze survey data from faculty and staff in the College of Education which served as our 'case' for the study (Yin, 1994). This study was conducted within a methodological paradigm that combined elements of focus group case study design, informed by social constructivist theory. Creswell (2014) acknowledged that constructivist researchers generate a theory or pattern of meanings as data is collected. We viewed the data from the study as emergent and the site of "exploration, emergent understandings, legitimation of identity, and validation of experience" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 91).

Participants

Participants included faculty and staff who agreed to participate in the microaggressions workshop as part of this research. The recruitment email and flyer were sent out via the college of education faculty listserv by the Assistant Dean to all faculty and staff. Interested participants were able to register using a Google Form to request their name, position, and email address. The researchers conducted the workshop with participants who agreed to take part in it via the consent form provided electronically to participants before starting the workshop.

Survey Instrument

To evaluate the participants' perceptions of the workshop, an online survey questionnaire was developed using Qualtrics. The questionnaire was anonymous to provide honest feedback without fear of judgment regarding their thoughts and feelings. The questionnaire was administered after the conclusion of the workshop to examine participants' experiences after taking part in the microaggressions online workshop and to understand how participants' experiences impacted their understanding of microaggressions in higher education. The survey included five questions, four of which were open-ended and one of which was a five-point Likert scale with eight prompts for participants to answer. Anchors relative to specific questions were provided for each rated question. For example, participants responded to prompts based on a Likert scale with the following ranges: *strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, and strongly agree.*

Questions 2-5 included opportunities for additional depth in response through associated open-ended responses. The online survey included the following open-ended questions: What surprised you the most during the workshop? What surprised you the least? What strategies, practices, and/or information did you learn about during the workshop that will be

useful/beneficial to your work in education, various organizations, and/or society at large? Please provide additional feedback about your experiences during the workshop.

Data Analysis Procedures

The researchers enacted content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) in the study to identify keywords, understand how participants discussed the keywords in contexts, and determine and group emergent themes concerning participant experiences about participating in an online workshop about microaggressions in higher education. Data analysis for qualitative responses from the survey included:

a.   reviewing the questionnaire responses

b.   coding themes derived from the questionnaires

c.   synthesizing and refining the themes

d.   comparing the inter-rater coding results

e.   discussing disagreement and revisiting the questionnaire responses until researchers reached 100% agreement.

With emergent coding, categories were established following preliminary examination of the survey data. First, three researchers independently reviewed the data and came up with a set of features that form a checklist. Second, the researchers compared notes and reconciled any differences that showed up on their initial checklists. Third, the researchers use a consolidated checklist to independently apply coding. Fourth, the researchers checked the reliability of the coding (Stemler, 2000).

Results

The goal of this research was to examine the perceptions of participants after taking part in an online workshop about microaggressions in higher education. While previous research

(Combs & Luthan, 2007; Rawson, 2018; Roberson et al., 2001) focuses mainly on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and identified gaps between DEI programming and tangible practices within higher education, this workshop aimed to add to the work of DEI training build to develop deep level critical conversations. The ensuing sections focus on the questions asked of the participants, which generated quantitative ratings and qualitative remarks, including 1) relevance and appropriateness of workshop; 2) clarity, structure, and engagement of workshop; 3) practicality of workshop as common experiences; 4) presenters' knowledge of the subject; 5) helpfulness of workshop materials and handouts; and 6) overall quality of the workshop. These themes emerged from the researchers' goal for an in-depth look at how faculty, staff, and students perceive a workshop focused on microaggressions in higher education.

Quantitative Ratings

Quantitative responses require giving participants a choice or set of choices, and this study was no exception. Questions for this study gave participants opportunities to give numeric ratings as responses to assist the researchers with garnering data that would help answer the research question. The quantitative reports also helped the researchers establish the importance of microaggressions training and gain insight into participants' perceptions of the workshop. The study utilized closed-ended questions with opportunities for participants to provide answers ranging from 1 to 5, with 1 being strongly disagreed and 5 strongly agreed. The numerical responses to the closed-ended questions in the workshop were instrumental in helping to establish how participants perceived the microaggression training.

Relevance and Appropriateness of Workshop: To report on the results, the authors start with participant responses about the relevance of the workshop. Of the 19 participants, 94.7% agreed that the workshop presentation was informative and relevant, while the remaining

5.7% strongly disagreed. Of the 19 participants, 16 attendees, 84.2%, strongly agreed, and two attendees, 10.5%, agreed that the workshop was connected and appropriate to higher education. The remaining one participant, 5.3%, strongly disagreed about the relevance of the topics covered in the workshop.

Clarity, Structure, and Engagement of Workshop: The participants in the workshop noted that the clarity and structure of the materials were engaging. Overall, 100% of the participants agreed that the content of the workshop was involved and interesting. Specifically, 78.9% strongly agreed with the statement that the presenters delivered the material in a clear, structured, and engaging manner. With such a high rating, the participant's perspectives as to the meaningfulness of the workshop indicate that critical workshops addressing microaggressions in higher education can help combat and challenge disparate educational experiences for faculty, staff, and students at universities and colleges alike.

Practicality of Workshop as Common Experiences: To assess whether participants in their recognition of microaggressive acts connected the session examples to common experiences, a question was asked about the practicality of the examples shared in the presentation. Results revealed that 89.5% of the participants recognized the practicality of the examples and useful techniques applicable to higher education. The remaining 10.5 % disagreed, and an overwhelming majority, 73.7%, of participants strongly agreed.

Presenters' Knowledge of Subject: 100% of the participants agreed that the faculty presenters were knowledgeable about the topic and related issues, with 94.7% strongly agreeing and the remaining 5.3% agreeing to the faculty presenters' competence and knowledge about the topic. Participant statements suggest an appreciation for the faculty presenters' in-depth understanding and basic knowledge about microaggressions in higher education and experiences

among faculty, staff, and students. Such an appreciation for the presenters' knowledge may inadvertently contribute to a climate in which the workshop was beneficial. Evidence of appreciation for the faculty presenters' knowledge about microaggressions was clear from the participant's comments such as: "I want to commend the two professors for their work, and I especially appreciated how local the examples were…that poor student with the campus police and the "smart, colored women" comment in the faculty meeting. Felt those in my gut."

Helpfulness of Workshop Materials and Handouts: The data also reflects participants' sense of appreciation for workshop materials. 100% of participants agreed that the workshop materials were helpful to their understanding of what microaggressions are and how they could take action against being microaggressed or being the aggressor, with 78.9% strongly agreeing and 21.1% agreeing to the helpfulness of the workshop materials. Participants' perspectives suggest that the contents of the workshop, mainly those that encouraged self-reflection. One participant comment captured most of the participant's regard for the materials, which allowed for self-analysis with the statement: "...really appreciated the close look at our own aggressions. I needed a clear discussion about that to help me think more intentionally about my behavior. I'm grateful."

Overall Quality of the Workshop: It is important to note that 100% of the workshop participants said they would recommend the workshop to someone else. This reflects the sense that there is a desire to have workshops centered on critical conversations like microaggressions. Even more participants of the workshop shared that one way to lessen the challenging relationships many faculty, staff, and students of color face on campus was to require the workshop for everyone. For some, the requirement was due in part to those who might self-select to opt-out of the training, as described by this participant: "My one disappointment about this is

that while this was helpful for all of us I'm sure, I wonder if many who could especially benefit self-select out. More mandatory training of this quality on bias for faculty and staff would be great."

Participants also valued the quality of the workshop. An overwhelming majority, 94.7%, rated the workshop as excellent, while the remaining 5.3% rated the quality of the workshop as good. Many of the participants' comments included single-word responses such as "excellent" and "great" to describe the quality of the workshop. Considering the study's aim was to examine participants' perceptions about the microaggressions, such comments about the workshop were helpful. A participant described the workshop as "... well presented, relevant, and practical. What an amazing start to a series of very difficult but necessary conversations."

Qualitative Remarks

Alongside the quantitative survey responses from participants, the qualitative survey responses helped to capture how participants perceived the workshop. With open-ended questions that allowed participants to express themselves, the researchers were able to use participants' own words to capture how they experienced the workshop. Overall, two broad themes emerged from participants' open-ended responses.

The first theme that emerged was related to participants' call for professional development specific to assisting faculty with diversifying their curriculum and addressing factors that shape their experiences, while the second theme reflected participants' desire to address those factors that shaped their experiences through engagement in critical conversations similar to this workshop. One attendant of the workshop stated, " we need diversity in building curriculum; I've had trouble with this in the past." Another seeking assistance with diversifying the curriculum requested additional information on being "culturally responsive within the

university." One participant called for more "courageous conversations" and added that "...we need to weave in conversations about disabilities as well when we are talking about diversity."

Discussion

This interactive online workshop aimed to engage participants in focused discussions about microaggressions in higher education and to offer microactivism as a conduit for social justice within higher education. The workshop offered new knowledge, resources, and skills necessary to effectively challenge microaggressions in higher education. It further explored real-life scenarios through personal stories from faculty, staff, and students within the College of Education. After the workshop, participants rated the importance and significance of knowledge gained from the workshop and noted an overall appreciation and greater understanding of microaggressions and strategies to disrupt them. Data from the survey revealed three themes: (1) feelings of awareness and desire for required training, (2) feelings of discomfort, and a (3) necessity for a brave space to discuss issues related to equity.

Feelings of Awareness and Desire for Required Training

Overall, participants expressed appreciation for the workshop. One participant noted, "This work is amazing, and I am sure it took thought, effort, and time to put together. Hats off to the presenters and organizers!! I would like to see more efforts aimed at educating every single individual on campus (not just COE) on how widespread microaggressions are and how they can impact every aspect of campus life (student success, job satisfaction, and sense of belonging), and what to do about it. It is my wish that the university makes this (or similar trainings) mandatory for all." Another participant lamented,

> I can't say enough this type of training should be mandatory. I want to thank you both for taking the time to create this training and try to spread awareness. Sadly, I feel the ones

who need it the most aren't willing to participate. Thank you, again, for continuing to do the work so many are scared to do. This is relevant and is greatly needed in the climate of our nation today."

Such sentiments suggest participants understood the importance of DEI training and the necessity for such training to be mandatory to truly impact organizational structures such as higher education (Morrison, 2021).

Feelings of Discomfort

A sense of discomfort and uncertainty is to be expected when discussing issues of bias and discrimination (Leonardo & Porter, 2010). Exposing faculty and staff to the concept of microaggressions was an important step in moving the college and university forward. Some of the concerns that the participant's expressed related to feelings of guilt, not quite knowing where to start, and the use of language that could be perceived as uncomfortable to participants. One participant expressed, "There was space to ask about ways that we (white people or people with the agent identities) have perpetuated microaggressions in practice. I know my bias impacts how I teach which is uncomfortable at times. Being able to talk about that with a small group could be beneficial to a lot of people as you continue to think about ways to impact our teaching." Another participant commented, "At times I thought some of the content was over the top. Please consider that tone and phrasing are important." These sentiments suggest that while some participants recognized that feelings of discomfort should not supersede self-awareness to avoid the perpetuation of bias and discrimination (Case, 2012), other participants felt the training was uncomfortable and preferred to focus on their discomfort with discussions of systemic racism and discrimination during the training (DiAngelo, 2018).

Necessity for a Brave Space to Discuss Issues Related to Equity

Given the current sociopolitical climate in the United States, it is more important than ever for helping professionals advocate, foster, and support the promotion of diversity, equity, and inclusion in organizations. To this end, it was essential for the facilitators to discuss and create a *brave space* during the workshop to highlight an expectation of full and equitable participation from people from all social identity groups since culturally competent individuals and groups benefit the greater society (Cook-Sather, 2016). The facilitators characterized brave spaces as: "controversy with civility," "owning intentions and impacts," "challenge by choice," "respect," and "no attacks" (Ali, 2017, pp. 3-4). Many participants expressed appreciation for the overall tone of the workshop. Specifically, participants noted they felt the 'general tone of the workshop was educational rather than accusatory," and another participant was "surprised that a safe enough environment was created that a white male was willing to share about a time he was supported through understanding his own bias."

The majority of the faculty and staff who participated in the workshop reported increased awareness and understanding of microaggressions and indicated they would implement strategies they acquired during the workshop into their own practice. Given the immense harm inflicted on historically marginalized individuals and groups via prejudice and discrimination, it is imperative for our nation to undertake steps to disrupt and dismantle microaggressions. Participants found the strategies to disrupt microaggressions meaningful and significant for both the aggressor and the person who is targeted. Specifically, one participant noted they learned:

Two things: 1) the way to approach others if I feel something was said or done against me that I construe as a microaggression; 2) suggestions for how to respond if I get a response from someone to something I said that seems like they were offended or felt

attacked. How to recognize my own ignorance in the situation and attempt to learn from it to prevent similar experiences in the future.

Another participant further added, "The biggest takeaway is being brave enough to both confront someone (from a positive point of view) and be willing to be confronted. It can be hard to be open and receptive in both positions." In essence, the use of microinterventions during the workshop helped illustrate and engage participants in dialogue about their beliefs and values while also considering the worldview and lived experiences of historically marginalized groups (Goodman, 2011).

Limitations

There are several limitations associated with this study. The small sample size, selection bias in participating residents, the low survey response rate with variable response rates by group size, single-site application, and the use of self-reported outcomes undergird a wider understanding of participant perceptions. Additionally, a common concern about the effectiveness of DEI training is its inability to move beyond a single occurrence and ongoing professional development and support (O'Donnell, 2019). To promote large-scale change, it is important to develop standards for anti-bias dispositions and create ongoing opportunities for continuing education related to DEI (Fong et al., 2016). Future work is needed to determine the durability of benefits and whether participants' perceived comfort with addressing microaggressions translates to their actions in the higher education environment.

Final Thoughts and Implications

Microaggressions in higher education have significant implications for historically marginalized individuals and groups in these spaces and also for majoritized and privileged individuals (Midgette & Mulvey, 2022). In this study, we found that participation in an online

workshop on microaggressions was associated with improvements in self-reported comfort in identifying microaggressions, understanding of their impacts, and confidence in responding to them. The workshop could be easily disseminated to other institutions, delivered at the different levels of education, and adapted for community organizations and businesses. By increasing knowledge and self-efficacy about the prevalence of microaggressions, we may be better able to mitigate microaggressions' harmful effects. This study revealed a need for universities to support faculty, staff, and students with the institutional and individual tools to disrupt and dismantle microaggressions. Universities can accelerate this disruption and greatly improve the campus climate by simultaneously including systemic-proactive and individual-reactive microaggression removal strategies. In essence, this study is significantly important as we respond to heightened examples of discrimination and for reaffirming commitments to a culture of diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education.

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