Unveiling Microaggressions: Understanding, Confronting, and Fostering Inclusivity

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Introduction

A stitch in time saves nine, a wonderful saying we would have heard from childhood. What does it mean? Dealing with an issue early on is preferable to waiting until the very end, when it may worsen and require more time and effort to resolve. As a researcher, I would say that when problems start, they are always small, tiny, and subtle; if not dealt with properly, it may become a severe issue. This is what happens with microaggressions. It is like "death by a thousand paper cuts" or "death by a thousand mosquito bites." Supposing one mosquito bites, we do not react; often, we might say, "Ushhh". If a hundred bite, we will run away. But what we do if we get bite by 1,000 mosquitoes in a short amount of time? Even though we won't feel the pain, the collective bites will do a lot of harm. This simple expression can make the reader understand microaggressions.

The Aim of the Paper

The aim of this article is to shed light on the concept of microaggressions, with a particular focus on their impact within different social contexts such as race, ethnicity, gender, economic status, and physical appearance. Through clear definitions, illustrative examples, and comprehensive explanations, readers will gain a deeper understanding of how microaggressions manifest and the potential harm they can cause to an individual's psychological and emotional well-being.

Moreover, this article aims to elucidate the various forms of microaggressions-be they, verbal, nonverbal, and environmental and point out their sources, which can range from familial environments to educational institutions and media influences. By providing this contextual background, readers will be better equipped to recognize and address microaggressions in their own lives.

What is Microaggression

Aggression is a concept that everyone is familiar with. Additionally, microaggression is tiny-scale aggression. It describes inadvertent or deliberate slights or insults delivered orally, through behavior, or through the surroundings. The frequency with which it occurs in educational institutions makes it a matter that requires the attention of educators. The students who engage in microaggression bully others; they insult others using words or gestures and sometimes threaten others who are weaker than them or are smaller than them. Those who engage in it may not always realise they are doing it because it comes from their prejudiced mentality. This type of behaviour is what social scientists call "microaggression". It happens quite frequently in schools.

Microaggressions are quick, subtle, or covert actions of bias and discrimination directed toward members of specific groups, whether on purpose or accidentally. These behaviors could bring up memories of previous instances of oppression, either by one person or by many (Helms et al., 2012; Sue, 2010). According to Sue et al. (2007), they take the form of insults that downplay the marginalized group member's humanity, worth, and/or experience. These traumas can lead to long-term psychological distress due to the feelings of violation, disenfranchisement, and dehumanization (Brave et al., 2011; Leary, 2005).

Dr. Chester Pierce, a professor at Harvard University, first used the word "microaggressions" in reference to racial prejudice in the 1970s. According to Pierce et al. (1977), microaggressions are subtly offensive remarks or "put downs" that are specifically directed towards African Americans in the US. After that, the idea was mainly ignored until it was expanded upon by eminent academic and intercultural psychologist Dr. Derald Wing Sue (Sue, 2010). Microaggressions are ordinary verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults that transmit hostile, disparaging, or hurtful messages to a certain marginalized target demographic. Dr. Sue characterized these behaviors in her key study (Sue, 2010). There are three ways that microaggression appears. They are environmental, nonverbal, and vocal.

Verbal Microaggressions

In schools, verbal aggression is often significantly more prevalent than physical violence. (Mis & Kit, 2020; Wang et al., 2009). For example, "I don't see colour; you look beautiful, though dark-skinned. I mean, you look beautiful for a black girl". "Though you look chubby, your face is beautiful". "If you put on or reduce 5kgs, you might look perfect". "Do you feel comfortable with this weight?" "You are under weighting for your height, so why not try this food pattern?" "Do you use heels every time or on occasion?" "You are so tall; I think you must be a backbencher". "You are too short and look like a high school boy/girl."

Nonverbal Microaggressions

Body language, facial expressions, and gestures that send negative or discriminatory messages to a certain group of people or individual constitute nonverbal microaggressions. For instance, pursuing someone at a store if you suspect they're going to steal anything. Eye rolling when someone mentions something you disagree with. Turning away from or avoiding someone altogether. Staring at someone and moving away. Just laughing at someone in order to insult them.

Environmental Microaggressions

Environmental microaggressions are often packaged in symbols. Examples of environmental microaggressions may be a multi-lingual campus where all the teachers are of one linguistic group only; a multi-religious campus where all teachers are of one religion only; and a classroom where all the posters display the ideology of one dominant group only.

Forms of Microaggressions

Three types of behavior are categorized under the term "microaggressions": microinsults, microassaults, and microinvalidations. (Lacocque, Mikkel 2013: 435).

Microinsults: A microinsult is a phrase or action that is frequently intended to be rude, offensive, or disparaging toward a person or a group. They are frequently meant to degrade or humiliate the target and might be purposeful or inadvertent. Unintentional acts or words that disparage someone's ancestry, race, or ethnicity are known as microinsults (Sue et al. 2007: 274-275, Minikel-Lacocque 2013: 436). (Andrews & Associates, 2017 4) Microassaults are frequently deliberate actions, in contrast to microinvalidations and microinsults.

Microassaults: Microassaults are intentional, conscious acts of discrimination that are frequently conveyed by signs in the environment, in words, and nonverbally. Mostly, they are verbal or nonverbal assaults meant to cause harm by slurs, exclusion, or deliberate discrimination.

Microinvalidation: When someone's ideas, opinions, emotions, and behaviors are rejected or discounted as worthwhile or legitimate, this is known as invalidation. On campus, microinvalidation occurrences are something we see frequently. When a student from a low-income family declares, he is going to take the IAS test, for instance, a classmate can reply, "You! Really?" insinuating that he is not capable of doing so. A person's psychological health and wellbeing can be harmed by validation. A person may come to believe that their subjective emotional experiences are irrational, inappropriate, or unimportant if they feel rejected. Unconscious verbal or behavioral acts that marginalize or neutralize other people's ideas, feelings, or knowledge are known as microinvalidations. (Minkel-Lacocque 2013: 436; Sue et al. 2007: 274).

The Causes of Microaggressions

Microaggressions can stem from a variety of variables, including one's color, ethnicity, caste, community, religion, language, gender, learning difficulty, socioeconomic level, physical appearance, and disabilities. Body shaming can take many forms, including the extremely unethical practice of making subtle remarks or criticisms about someone's appearance when they are present or when they are not.

According to Saxena et al. (2020), body shaming is a type of bullying when victims are made fun of for specific aspects of their physical appearance. These include height, dress preferences, skin tone, facial characteristics, body weight, body form, and makeup. Kumara and Jayawardhana (2018) state that characteristics like fairness, slenderness, lack of wrinkles, and perfection are often associated with the idealized concept of a "fantasy body image".

Microaggressions differ from physical assault in that they are frequently unintentional. Many times, microaggressors are unaware of the harm they are doing. People frequently give the impression that they have no actual control over the microaggressions they engage in. Only when microaggressions are combined to form oppressive institutions can they become truly significant.

Effects of Microaggressions on Learning

Microaggressions can make it difficult to focus, solve issues, and pick up new information. This could exacerbate emotions of loneliness, invisibility, and self-doubt. If someone injures you during work hours, whether on purpose or accidentally, it can ruin your day and eventually interfere with your ability to study. Body shaming has been shown to have a detrimental effect on academic achievement by making people feel ashamed and more likely to put off their study. This is consistent with the results of Gam et al. (2020), who found that body shaming has a major role in the absence of students. Additionally, the study shows that body shaming has an impact on one's mental health and sense of self, which is in line with previous studies on the topic (Brewis &

Bruening, 2018; Gani & Jamal, 2020; Greenleaf et al., 2014; Pont et al., 2017; Saxena et al., 2020). Moreover, the experience of body shaming may contribute to various mental traumas.

Where does Microaggression Happen?

Three settings are where microaggressions most frequently occur: the home, the classroom, and the media. Microaggression in the family: Microaggression frequently originates with parents and other family members. According to counseling psychologist Utkarsha Jagga, it is a complement to the parent if the child appears "perfect." They will consider it a dishonour on [their being] if it is not. As a result, they make the kids look flawless. Sometimes parents will begin microaggressions by making comparisons between their siblings or relatives. They can taunt someone who looks different and compare themselves to them, which can make them feel uncomfortable and cause them to start undervaluing themselves. After repeatedly encountering these kinds of microaggressions, people often believe they are inadequate. Microaggression at School: Among friends, classmates, and peers at school, microaggression is much more prevalent. Below are a few instances of microaggressions that occur in the classroom:

- Pronouncing students' names incorrectly after they have voiced their disapproval.
- Making offensive jokes in class that make fun of students in particular groups.
- Making special requests of pupils based on their own histories. Speaking in a sexist manner or using incorrect metaphors or examples in class. Engaging in blame-games as well.
- Having low standards for kids from specific neighborhoods and groups. Assuming things about the backgrounds and experiences of the pupils.
- Focusing on, interacting with, or supporting a certain student's gender, class, or race while neglecting the other pupils in the class.
- Precluding students from participating in extracurricular activities that are highly compensated.
- Assuming that in class discussions or debates, only students belonging to a specific group, race, caste, gender, etc., will "represent"
- Having images on the school website that exclusively feature pupils with fair skin, or students from a single caste, ethnicity, or gender.
- Believing that every student is capable of using computers and software to communicate about assignments and school-related matters. And demeaning someone who can't handle it.
- Inquiring in class about the identities of those who have concealed disabilities. Making students who have disabilities that are not immediately apparent "out" or discuss them in public.
- Without considering that other people are observing, always provide praise to pupils who excel in extracurricular activities, athletics, or academics.

Microaggression in the media: Other venues where microaggressions are frequently apparent include print, social, and film media. Cultural manifestations like as art, movies, novels, fables, and iconic dolls like Barbie have glorified Western beauty standards (Kumara & Jayawardhana, 2018). Certain notions of beauty are reinforced when negative characters in fairy tales or movies are shown as ugly or dark-skinned, whereas protagonists are portrayed as perfect, slender, and light-skinned. The promotion of the idealized or fantasy body image has been boosted by social media. The primary determinants of an individual's body shape and color are their genetic makeup and geographic location.

Micro-Resistance

The Following are a Few Techniques for Micro-Resistance Against Body-Shaming

- Express your feelings to the kids who make you feel less than they are in a courteous manner.
- Be confident with your physique. What does that signify? It alludes to a favorable, accepting, and all-around perception of your body.

- Embracing and enjoying the uniqueness of your own body is what body confidence is all about, not reaching a certain body shape, size, or color.
- Get into the self-care habit.

The Following are a few Powerful Micro-Resistance Strategies to End Microaggressions Directed at Academic Underachievers

- The first thing to do is to ask the person who is bullying you to stop if you feel like you can talk to them about it.
- Speak with your parent, teacher, or another trusted person if you are uncomfortable or unable to accomplish this.
- Report the event at the bully box if your school has one. Management has the ability to implement bullying prevention programs that work in the school.
- Keep a journal: describe the events and your personal impact, then list the actions that can be done to put an end to this. You'll become more polite and brave as a result. Also, be aware of when to give up. That is a sensible recipe for protection.
- Improve yourself completely

Conclusion

To sum up, this research provides a thorough examination of microaggressions and provides insightful information on their causes, expressions, and possible effects. Through comprehension and recognition of the importance of microaggressions, we may proactively establish settings that are more welcoming and compassionate. We possess the ability to eliminate the numerous subtle types of discrimination that exist all around us and establish a more equal society for everyone by means of open communication, self-awareness, and education.

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