Microaggressions

Kaiyu and Muhammad

Photo: FrankenSim by Animade, UK
Agenda

● Operationalizing concepts about microaggressions
● Data collection and annotation
● Results and discussion
  ○ End discussion: footing
Operationalizing Microaggressions
Four categories, eleven sub-themes

Attributive
Attributing some feature or quality to an identity.

Attribution of Stereotype

Institutionalized
Reflecting biases found in existing institutions.

Objectification

Teaming
When speaker claims to be similar to a victim.

Myth of Meritocracy

Othering
Drawing in- and out-groups.

Monolith

Alien in Own Land

Criminal Status

Denial of Lived Experience

Abnormality

Second-Class Citizen

Ownership

Othering

Ownership

Erasure
The Classic Illustration via Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-theme</th>
<th>Definition and Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attribution of Stereotype</td>
<td>Link some attributes to an individual based on their identity. “Girls just aren’t good at math.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alien in Own Land</td>
<td>Marginalized individuals are foreign. “But where are you from, originally?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abnormality</td>
<td>Marginalized individuals are abnormal. “Why do we need the word cisgender? That’s just normal people.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objectification</td>
<td>Diminish the humanity of marginalized individuals. “If you don’t want to get hit on, wear a longer skirt.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal Status</td>
<td>Link a person’s identity to criminality, danger, or illness. “You look like a terrorist with that beard.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second-Class Citizen</td>
<td>Marginalized individuals belong to low-status positions in society. “Oh, you work at an office? I bet you’re a secretary.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myth of Meritocracy</td>
<td>Differences in treatment are due to ones merit. “They just cast actors who are best for it. Why does it matter if they’re all white?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denial of Lived Experience</td>
<td>Minimize the experiences of a marginalized individual. “It was just a joke! You’re too sensitive.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ownership</td>
<td>Anyone can have some claim to a marginalized groups experiences. “Why is it offensive for a white person to wear a bindi? It’s just jewelry.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monolith</td>
<td>All members of a marginalized group are identical. “My gay friend doesn’t have a problem with this show. I don’t get why you’re mad.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erasure</td>
<td>Anyone can claim that an individual does not belong to that group. “Your mom is white, so it’s not like you’re really black, though.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Sub-themes that we developed based on the data from www.microaggressions.com, and short excerpts that show the main claim or assumption of each sub-theme. Examples demonstrate that MAS can harm and invalidate in a subtle way, typically targeting disadvantaged populations. The phenomenon is complex, different from overt profanity or negative sentiment.
Discussion: how well do they categorize the concept of microaggressions?
→ Can you think of specific examples of a microaggression that do not conform to these categories?
→ Is there overlap between categories?
→ The current categorization is based on the property of the biases. What other metrics can we use to classify microaggressions?
→ More dimensions?
Now, time for a quick activity!

To test the efficacy of this definition, we will:

2. Each post will come with a line describing the context of the conversation and an utterance from each speaker.
3. You will be asked to first determine if there is a micro-aggression, then given context we will assess the severity and category.
Exercise: Is it a microaggression? What category?

"There's fighting, for you boys, and romance, for you ladies."

My high school teacher, talking about Les Miserables.

gender

Attribute
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“Wow. She is actually quite beautiful for a Samoan.”

ethnicity, race
Exercise: Is it a microaggression? What category?

“\[
\text{You only got into [my university] because you’re Native American AND Mexican. I had to work harder to get into this same honors program, and that’s not fair.}
\]
”

A fellow woman of color, days before my freshman year of college at a flagship university of Texas. Well, fuck...

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DISCUSSION | An email we received from a reader:

I feel very confused when I see submissions about a white person having a preference for only another white person when it comes to dating. I’m not sure how or why this is microaggressive.
Microaggressions are tough to categorize!

"So every week, do the Guatemalans come and mow your lawns?"

My world history teacher, mocking students for living in a generally wealthy town.

race, nationality, class

"I'm not Trans, I just want to watch your daughter pee."

A white man's T-shirt in a restaurant. I am a trans man - I transitioned medically over 20 years ago and I have lived with gender dysphoria throughout my life.

discern, shaking, his and her, times the meaning, child, people, man

"CAN YOU HEAR ME?"

The "joking" reaction of various people with hearing aids. They then tell me "oh well, it's just a big deal or anything, actually deaf". Makes problems don't matter.

"There's fighting, for you boys, and romance, for you ladies."

My high school teacher, talking about Les Miserables.

gender

8 years ago  220 share
Data Collection and Annotation
This paper’s data collection, annotation "journey"

From expert annotations to crowdsourcing

- They began with a large corpus of microaggressions, spanning race, gender, sexuality, and other areas of aggression.

- Three experts in the theory of microaggressions (i.e., the four themes and related sub-themes) labeled the data.

- However, inter-annotator agreement was moderate at best.

- Annotation instructions
  - On a scale of 1 to 6
  - A comment like "So happy for you :)") or "Yeah sorry I don't remember where they were exactly" might be classified as “no offense”
  - A comment full of slurs, direct attacks, and targeted insults might be classified as “extreme offense”
  - Requirement: Make judgements under 5 seconds after reading the post
Discussion: How do you feel about this pivot?

“Mainly, they present the annotators as familiar with the theoretical background. This is ambiguous enough to be anything from an overconfident male that read a wikipedia entry to underconfident PhD student studying MA’s.”

–Roberto Lopez

“How do you feel about the classifier used to select microaggressions from social data?”

“How do they consider annotator status differently?”

“Obtaining large quantities of labeled data is often a bottleneck in research, so I really appreciated learning about the paper's use of active learning to reduce the amount of labor involved in labeling.”

–Helen Gu

“How do you feel about the classifier used to select microaggressions from social data?”

“How do they consider annotator status differently?”

“I simply question whether or not the single dimension of offensiveness applied over a heterogeneous (albeit gender balanced) annotator population is sufficient to draw a meaningful discrepancy in follow-on work and other contexts.”

–Joel Johnson

“How do you feel about this pivot?”

“I simply question whether or not the single dimension of offensiveness applied over a heterogeneous (albeit gender balanced) annotator population is sufficient to draw a meaningful discrepancy in follow-on work and other contexts.”

–Joel Johnson

“How do you feel about the classifier used to select microaggressions from social data?”

“How do they consider annotator status differently?”

“Are they abandoning the original framework of microaggressions in favor of an offensiveness scale?”

–Joel Johnson
This paper’s data collection, annotation ~journey~

From expert annotations to crowdsourcing

- Despite the bias, they look to source microaggressions directly from social media data.

- Posts fall into groups of (i) gendered microaggressions, (ii) inoffensive, (iii) good ol’ fashion aggression (GOFA), and (iv) random posts.

- Comments were rated on a linear scale of offensiveness; the initial definition of microaggressions faded to the background.

- Method 1: Further operationalizing MAs
  - H1: there will be a discrepancy of perceived offensiveness between the dominant group and the marginalized groups

- Method 2: Surfacing MAs
  - Actively learning new Reddit posts using classifier
  - Subreddit example: changeMyView, MensRights, relationships, techsupport...
Results and Discussion
What do these trends point to?

Figure 3: Difference in perceived offensiveness between annotator genders show that MAS in the SELFMA were perceived as substantially more offensive by annotators identifying as women (shown through a positive rating discrepancy on y-axis) than offensive comments in OFFENSIVE. Difference is significant under t-test ($p < 0.001$).

Annotators who identify as women perceived gendered microaggressions as more offensive than generally aggressive comments.

Irregularity in offensiveness ratings of gendered microaggressions.
Outro: Footing
What a lot of us have been thinking

In many ways, this study creates more questions than answers about the methods of CSS.

**Footing** is a concept from linguistic anthropology that re-evaluates the meaning of an utterance given the relation between the speaker, addressee, and their environment.

- The footing between you and your boss has a quality from difference in status alone.
  - However, footing can reconstitute itself, as it would with your boss in a weekly meeting versus the office Christmas party.

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○ However, footing can reconstitute itself, as it would with your boss in a weekly meeting versus the office Christmas party.


As mentioned in the paper, the MA is highly context-sensitive, which is closely related to the poster’s and victim’s social identity. However, the dataset doesn’t include the information, and it’s also very hard for the model to learn the representation of this context.

– Xiaoyuan Ni

The authors should further analyze the faithfulness of the features and design a more targeted model.

– Xinran Zhao

I would like to know more about the details of how in-group individuals are better at identifying micro-aggressions, and whether this better performance varies across political or social dimensions.

– Sarah Bitter

While having a diverse group of people rating MAs may have different viewpoints, it is likely that people are able to recognize MAs regardless of whether they identify more with the abuser or the target.

– Sophia Ramsey

I wonder under what context the experimenters felt that their new typology was generalizable across axes, because microaggression experience is perceived differently depending on the context of the axis itself. For example, gender discrimination has a distinctly different affective product than having your work questioned or belittled - one is a personal attack and the other is a slightly detached one.

– Anjali Ragupathi

Is it even necessary?