Microaggressions

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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.

Institutionalized
Reflecting biases found in existing institutions.

Teaming
When speaker claims to be similar to a victim.

Othering
Drawing in- and out-groups.

Attributive	Institutionalized	Teaming	Othering
Attribution of Stereotype	Objectification	Myth of Meritocracy	Monolith
Alien in Own Land	Criminal Status	Denial of Lived Experience	Erasure
Abnormality	Second-Class Citizen	Ownership	

The Classic Illustration via Table

	Sub-theme	Definition and Example
Attributive	Attribution of Stereotype	Link some attributes to an individual based on their identity.
		"Girls just aren't good at math."
	Alien in Own Land	Marginalized individuals are foreign.
		"But where are you from, originally?"
	Abnormality	Marginalized individuals are abnormal.
		"Why do we need the word cisgender? That's just normal people."
Institutionalized	Objectification	Diminish the humanity of marginalized individuals.
		"If you don't want to get hit on, wear a longer skirt."
	Criminal Status	Link a persons identity to criminality, danger, or illness.
		"You look like a terrorist with that beard."
	Second-Class Citizen	Marginalized individuals belong to low-status positions in society.
		"Oh, you work at an office? I bet you're a secretary."
Forced Teaming	Myth of Meritocracy	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?"
	Denial of Lived Experience	Minimize the experiences of a marginalized individuals.
		"It was just a joke! You're too sensitive."
	Ownership	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."
Othering	Monolith	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."
	Erasure	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."

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.

"Something else worth noting is: do these categories of MA not overlap?"
– Axel Peytavin

"I think the framework in Table 1 is operationalizable, but it may not produce the desired results, as there are some issues, especially around the true efficacy of the findings."
–Mike Hardy

"In cultural appropriation contexts, it once again matters so much who the subject is, who their audience is, and what their intentions are. This simply cannot be gleaned from just text or even the context around the text."
–Clare Chua

I'm interested in whether the moderate inter-annotator agreement reflects that the typology could be better refined.
– Azure Zhou

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:

1. *Take a look at various posts collected from www.microaggressions.com.*

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*

🕐 8 years ago   ♥ 220   💬   share ➡

Attribute
→ **Attribution of Stereotype**
→ **Alien in Own Land**
→ **Abnormality**
Institutionalized
→ **Objectification**
→ **Criminal Status**
→ **Second-Class Citizen**
Forced Teaming
→ **Myth of Meritocracy**
→ **Denial of Lived Experience**
→ **Ownership**
Othering
→ **Monolith**
→ **Erasure**

Exercise: Is it a microaggression? What category?

> Wow. She is actually quite beautiful for a Samoan.

ethnicity, race

🕐 9 years ago   ❤ 6   💬 0   share ➤

Attribute
→ Attribution of Stereotype
→ Alien in Own Land
→ Abnormality
Institutionalized
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→ Criminal Status
→ Second-Class Citizen
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Exercise: Is it a microaggression? What category?

> **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...

Attribute
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Exercise: Is it a microaggression? What category?

Follow microaggressions   **tumblr**

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.

Attribute
→ **Attribution of Stereotype**
→ **Alien in Own Land**
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→ **Erasure**

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*

🕐 2 years ago   ♡ 13   💬 0   share ➦

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 'passing privilege'. I am not discern...
shakin...
and his...
times t...
How is...
a child...
simulta...
people...

🏷 *trans*...

🕐 6 ye...

CAN YOU HEAR ME?

The "joking" reaction of various ... and bosses when ... hearing-impaired and r aids. They then tell ... a big deal or anything, ... ctually deaf". Makes ... blems don't matter.

♡ 85   💬 0   share ➦

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 MAs.*"

–*Roberto Lopez*

"*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*

"*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?

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...

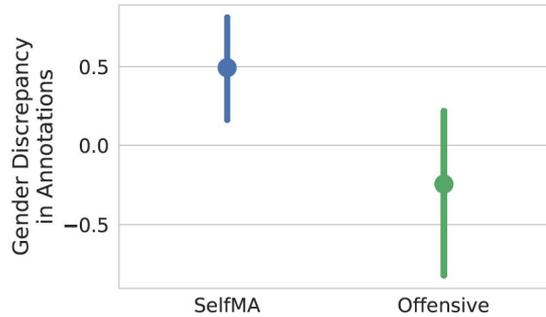# Results and Discussion

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
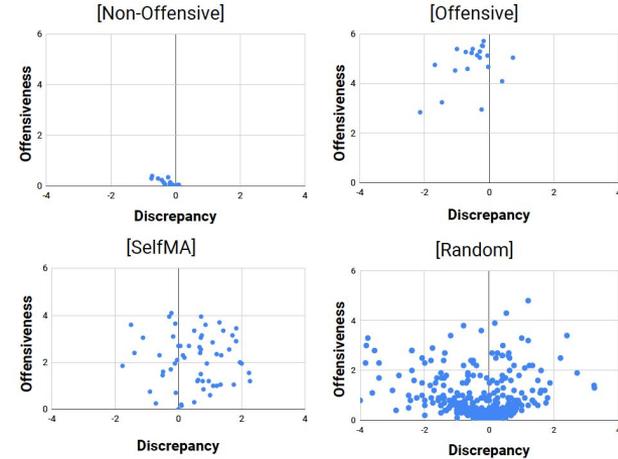

Figure 4: Offensiveness (y-axis) vs Discrepancy (x-axis) of perceived offensiveness between annotator gender. for the four sets of posts (§3.1). Note that compared to clearly offensive data [OFFENSIVE] and clearly non-offensive data [NON-OFFENSIVE], the SELFMA data (§2.1) identified as gendered MAs are annotated as somewhat offensive (indicated by the distribution around the middle of the y-axis), and having more discrepancy in perceived offensiveness between annotator genders (indicated by the higher degree of spread on the +x-axis). RANDOM data collected from Reddit sit all along the two axes of offensiveness and discrepancy.

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.

Goffman, Erving (1981). *Forms of Talk*. Chapter 3: Footing.

Consider a journalistically reported strip of interaction, a news bureau release of 1973 on presidential doings.[1] The scene is the Oval Office, the participants an assemblage of government officers and newspaper reporters gathered in their professional capacities for a political ritual, the witnessing of the signing of a bill:

WASHINGTON [UPI]—President Nixon, a gentleman of the old school, teased a newspaper woman yesterday about wearing slacks to the White House and made it clear that he prefers dresses on women.

After a bill-signing ceremony in the Oval Office, the President stood up from his desk and in a teasing voice said to UPI's Helen Thomas: "Helen, are you still wearing slacks? Do you prefer them actually? Every time I see girls in slacks it reminds me of China."

Miss Thomas, somewhat abashed, told the President that Chinese women were moving toward Western dress.

"This is not said in an uncomplimentary way, but slacks can do something for some people and some it can't." He hastened to add, "but I think you do very well. Turn around."

As Nixon, Attorney General Elliott L. Richardson, FBI Director Clarence Kelley and other high-ranking law enforcement officials smiling [*sic*], Miss Thomas did a pirouette for the President. She was wearing white pants, a navy blue jersey shirt, long white beads and navy blue patent leather shoes with red trim.

Nixon asked Miss Thomas how her husband, Douglas Cornell, liked her wearing pants outfits.

"He doesn't mind," she replied.

"Do they cost less than gowns?"

"No," said Miss Thomas.

"Then change," commanded the President with a wide grin as other reporters and cameramen roared with laughter. [*The Evening Bulletin* (Philadelphia), 1973]

This incident points to the power of the president to force an individual who is female from her occupational capacity into a sexual, domestic one during an occasion in which she (and the many women who could accord her the role of symbolic representative) might well be very concerned that she be given her full professional due, and that due only. And, of course, the incident points to a moment in gender politics when a president might unthinkingly exert such power. Behind this fact is something much more significant: the contemporary social definition that women must always be ready to receive comments on their "appearance," the chief constraints being that the remarks should be favorable, delivered by someone with whom they are acquainted, and not interpretable as sarcasm. Implied, structurally, is that a woman must ever be ready to change ground, or, rather, have the ground changed for her, by virtue of being subject to becoming momentarily an object of approving attention, not—or not merely—a participant in it.

"How the do we operationalize THIS?"

Is it even necessary?

"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

"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

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

"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

Footing is a concept from linguistic anthropology

The footing

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