

USING A MOBILE APP TO REPORT MICROAGGRESSIONS: A PILOT STUDY

MICROAGGRESSIONS

Microaggressions are subtle verbal and nonverbal slights and insults based on a person's group identity (Sue, 2010). Though sometimes unintentional and often meant in a lighthearted or joking way, microaggressions can be very hurtful. Because they can occur over and over again, microaggressions can feel like "death by a thousand cuts". The cumulative effects of microaggressions are feeling like you don't belong, stress, and poor academic performance.

We conducted a study to explore how microaggressions happened on campus and to see whether using an app to report them would moderate some of these negative effects.

Microaggression are brief

I was walking by the dorms in Cowell and heard someone shout "NIGGA".

THE APP



We developed a native app for Android and a web app for other devices. The app is called MicroReport and was only available to study participants. The app allowed users to submit anonymous reports and view the reports of others.

PARTICIPANTS

Those who identified as a women and/or as member of a disadvantaged group could participate.

The 61 participants were on average 20 years old. The sample was 82% women, 32% Asian/Asian American, 12% Black/African American, 27% Latino, 13% White, and 13% multiracial. 3.4% identified as transgender and 18% as gay, lesbian, or bisexual.

The participants were affiliated with all ten colleges, with the most from College Ten (23%), Cowell (18%), and Oakes (15%).

STUDY

Participants were randomly assigned to use the app for one or two quarters. They were asked to make a report every time they experienced a microaggression. Everyone also took surveys at the beginning of the Winter quarter, at the beginning of Spring quarter, and at the end of Spring quarter.

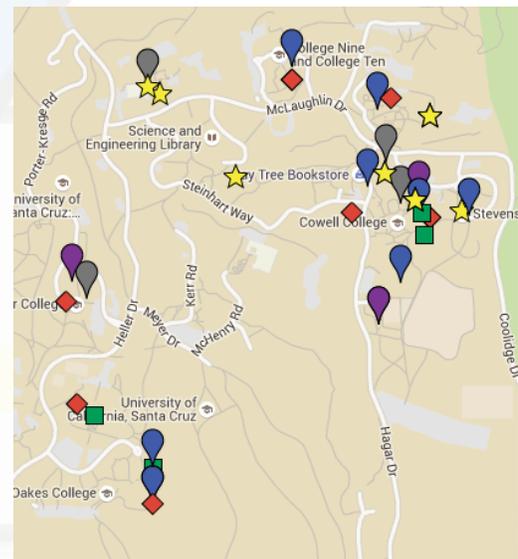
Microaggressions can be unintentional

My friend was talking about how surprised [she was] to find out that one of her friends was gay because he definitely didn't "look like it."

REPORTS

There were 60 reports during the 2 quarters. 58% of the microaggressions were based on race, ethnicity, or culture, 30% were based on gender identity/expression, and 5% were based on sexual orientation.

The most common locations were class (23%) and other locations such as the bookstore and coffee shops (23%), followed by the dining hall (20%). Another 13% of microaggressions occurred in dorms or apartments.



- ★ Class (14)
- Residence (8)
- ◆ Dining Hall (12)
- Other (14)
- Common Area (5)
- Walking/Driving (7)

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When asked how they felt about the incidents, students commonly reported feelings of discomfort, anger and confusion. Additionally, students often reported feeling helpless without successfully reaching a resolution.

Microaggressions can be jokes

I told a male identified friend that I am taking a class called "Women's Lives". He jokingly said, "So are you going to learn how to make a sandwich or what?"

BENEFITS

Preliminary reports indicate that students felt having the app has raised their awareness of microaggressions and provided a sense of comfort in knowing others share their experiences. Students also noted that their ability to report the incident facilitated a sense of control over the situation.

OUTCOMES

In the surveys, we measured participants' psychological well-being, their satisfaction with their college experience, their coping styles, their identity beliefs, and their general experiences with discrimination.

There were no significant differences between the group that used the app for one quarter and the group that used the app for two quarters on well-being or satisfaction with the university experience.

There was also no significant difference between the groups in the impact of discrimination on their well-being.

The lack of findings is most likely due to the small sample size. Of 61 participants who began the study, only 40 completed the third survey.

Microaggressions are hurtful

My friend asked if I was drinking for "Cinco de Drinko". It offended me to think that a significant battle in Mexican history has come to be somewhat of a joke/excuse for others to drink. (coming from someone who is of Mexican descent)

CONCLUSIONS

Many participants felt the app was helpful because they had an outlet to report what was happening to them. Though the sample size was too small to see

the psychological benefits of the app, we believe that future studies will illuminate them.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

We've now developed an iOS version that is more user-friendly than the web app and updated the features of the Android app. Additionally, the next phase of the study, beginning this fall, will recruit more broadly and offer greater incentives. The next phase of the study will also incorporate workshops that teach individuals how to respond directly to microaggressions.

This pilot study was the first step in showing that MicroReport can be a useful tool for helping students to cope with microaggressions and for teaching others about microaggressions. Future work with the app and other tools will guide UCSC toward building a supportive campus community for all.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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For more information, please contact Dr. Christy Byrd at cmbyrd@ucsc.edu or visit <http://byrdlab.sites.ucsc.edu>.

Microaggressions are intersectional

A girl [...] said she needed to finish her hw and didn't want to waste time. She had trouble doing programming homework and proceeded to ask all the White and Asian males (preoccupied or not) in the room if they or any one they knew could help her with her programming homework. I noticed she avoided most of the females present and the group of African Americans sitting a few feet away. The only female she did ask was a thickly accented Chinese girl to see if her boyfriend could help her.