MICROAGGRESSIONS

FRAMEWORKS & DISCUSSION

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- History of the terminology
- The “racialised other”
- Manifestation of microaggressions
- Types of microaggressions
- Examples from my research
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Framing Microaggressions

- Dr Chester Pierce created the concept of ‘ racial microaggressions’ in response to a lack of a theoretical framework for the discussion of ‘*coded discrimination towards non-white individuals.’*
- In ‘***Is Bigotry the Basis of the Medical Problem of the Ghetto?’*** he recognises the unique psychiatric needs of African-Americans. He says that Black people experience unique ‘subtle racisms’ on a daily basis. He initially describes this as ‘offensive mechanisms.’
- *‘To be Black in the United States today means to be socially minimised. For each day Blacks are victims of white “offensive mechanisms,” which are designed to reduce, dilute {…} and encase the hapless to his place.”*
- In 1970, Pierce first introduces the concept “microaggression” to explain the “subtle forms of racism.”

Framing Microaggressions

- *“Most offensive actions are not gross and crippling. They are subtle and stunning.”*
- *“Whilst the single negotiation of offense can be considered {…} to be relatively innocuous, the cumulative effect to the victim and to the victimiser, is of unimaginable magnitude.”*
- Not until 1980 when Pierce explicitly uses the term “microaggression.”
- *“ Any single microaggression from an offender to defender in itself is minor and inconsequential. The relentless omnipresence of these noxious stimuli is the fabric of Black-white relations.”*
- Microaggressions act as a *“major contribution to the continuing traumatic stress suffered by Blacks as individuals and as a group.”*

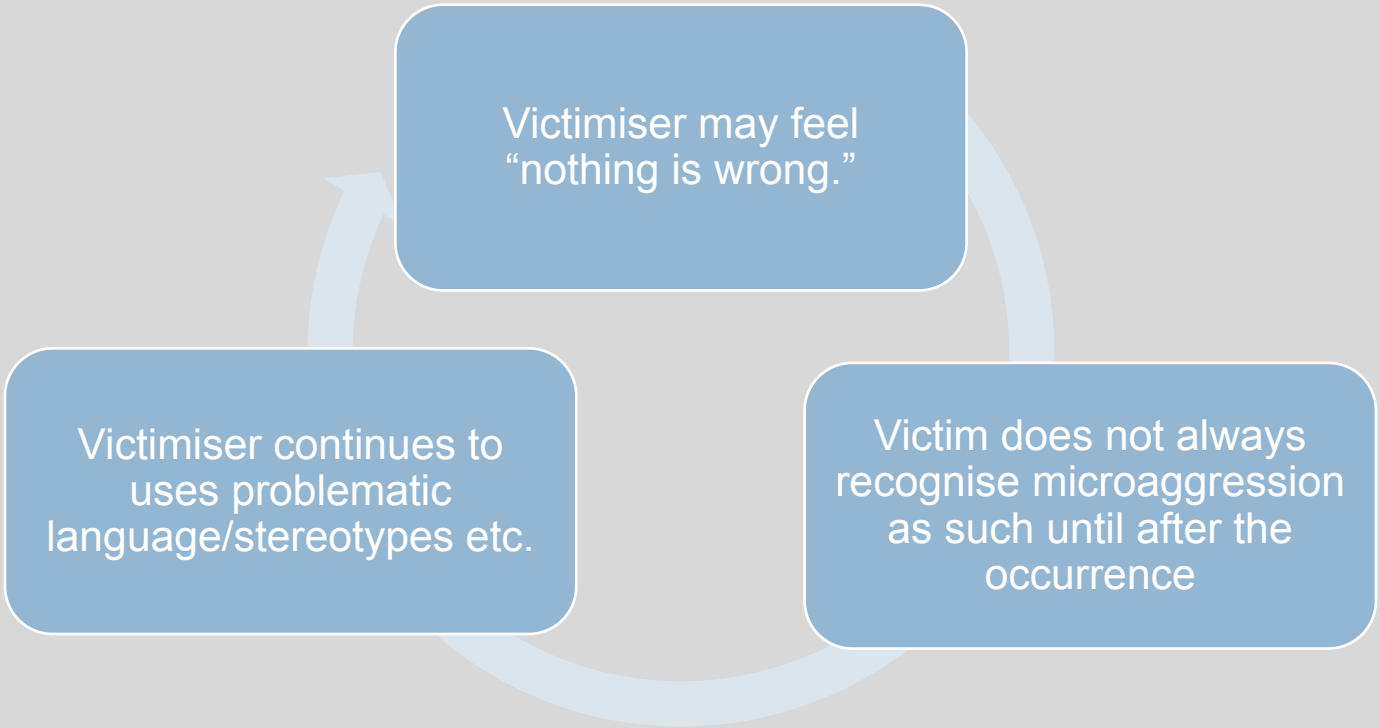
Victim & Victimiser

- Why would the victim & victimiser both experience “unimaginable magnitude” of consequences when experiencing/committing microaggressions?

Victim - The “Racialised Other”

- Victim is experiencing low doses of harassment and discrimination with regularity.
- Teaching becomes problematic when racialised as “other.”
- When one doesn’t fit majority categories, contention is caused with overt pedagogies (Dlamini, 2010).
- **Could this be a reason why microaggressions might manifest?**

“Victimiser Emboldening Cycle” (Hogton,2020)



Manifesting Microaggressions

- D.W Sue & Capodilupo et al (2007) dismantled the concept of the microaggression into 3 forms.
- ***Microassualt:*** Most overt form of discrimination can manifest itself in verbal or non-verbal attacks.
- ***Microinsults:*** Rude or insensitive behaviours/statements that degrade a person's racial identity or heritage.
- ***Microinvalidations:*** When someone negates or denies the thoughts, feelings and/or experiences of Person(s) of Colour (PoC).

Microassaults

- Perpetrators are more aware of the discrimination but they may be unaware how their actions can unintentionally effect the person who experiences the microassault.
- E.g. A white woman crosses the street when a Black man is heading towards her on the path. The white woman is conscious of her change of route – and she is changing it because she does not want to walk past the man – but she may be unaware that her behaviour manifests her stereotype that Black men are “dangerous.”
- Racist jokes would fall in this category. Individuals know they are discriminating against a group for “comedic effect,” but justify it because it is “funny.” This ignores the fact that jokes are often based on stereotype or underlying racial biases.

Microinsults

- Less overt in terms of discrimination, but more likely to manifest. Particularly in white-dominated spaces.
- E.g. Telling a Black-Welsh individual that they “speak good Welsh.” Whilst the perpetrator hasn’t explicitly tried to discriminate, this verbally implies that Black people in Wales “must be foreigners.” Solidifying the stereotype of Welsh people looking a certain type of way.
- E.g. A white security guard following a Black customer around a shop. This is physically implying the stereotype that Black people are thieves, not customers.
- Whilst these often do not overtly mean to discriminate, they are results of the manifestation of people’s stereotypes.

Microinvalidations

- When someone negates or denies the thoughts, feelings or experiences of PoC.
- E.g. “Racism doesn’t exist anymore,” “I don’t see colour,” “But you must be white.” etc.
- Someone would perpetrate a microinvalidation when they questioned someone’s racial background – particularly after they have explicitly told you how they identify.

Research

- Conducted two qualitative projects, focussing on Black British experience in Higher Education.
- *Wake Up and Smell the Coffee* (2020), focused on student's experience and their understanding of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Policy. Participants also discussed discrimination they had experienced on campus; both over and as microaggressions.
- *No Seat at the Table* (2021), continued the research, this time focussing on the experience of Black faculty members at 5 Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). This was also supported by a medium-scale policy analysis of 10 HEIs' publicly available EDI policies.
- My PhD focuses on Black British experience in Higher Education. I put an emphasis on the inclusion of creative methods, employing the use of photography and visual media in my data collection.

Overt Discrimination on campus

- *This group of lads just came up right behind (me) and they were like “look at this n*****.”*
- *I’ve been called the n word by a housemate. Got called a monkey. Told to go back to the jungle.*
- *This guy, he came up behind me with a lighter at the SU and tried to set fire to my hair! When I was like “what are you doing?” he called me a mulatto and laughed.*

Microaggressions

- *I’ve been exoticised definitely. (I’ve had) people saying I wish I had the bum of a Black girl, that happened on a university. placement*
- *People (will) be like are you down for the swirl or whatever like I’m exotic or something.*
- *I just met him that day in a seminar. he’s asking “do you carry a knife?” “”Do you know how to rap?”*
- *I know they call the Hip Hop room (at the club) the Black room. Come on, its insensitive.*

What allows them to occur?

- *By the time I actually spoke to someone in charge, I'd explained it so many times {…} every time it was the same reactions. They just looked shook, they didn't know what to do about it.*

- *The people in the (senior) roles don't get it. They haven't experienced the stigma. So how can they help?*

- *Ignorance is not bliss. It has to be dealt with and educated. It should be the responsibility of the university to assess and address the concerns of non-white students.*

What about the ‘safe spaces?’

- *It felt a bit separated from the university. Did the uni care about it? Did they care about what it did? I’m not 100% sure whether they did.*

- *I know people who are part of those societies who have those discussions and debates. Personally I don’t think there’s an overarching one provided by the uni. Not one that’s effective anyway.*