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Teacher and Student Perceptions of Microaggressions in College Classrooms

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Subtle forms of prejudice called *microaggressions* occur in college classrooms, but the effective methods of managing such prejudice are not clear. This study explored teachers' ($N = 222$) and students' ($N = 166$) perceptions of vignettes describing classroom microaggressions and the effectiveness of various teacher responses to the microaggressions. Teachers of courses focused on diversity perceived microaggressions more negatively and were more likely to respond to the microaggressions than teachers of nondiversity courses. Students believed that teacher responses to microaggressions were effective and ignoring microaggressions was ineffective. The results suggest that teachers should in some way respond to classroom microaggressions. They also suggest that diversity awareness may be a factor in the ability of teachers to recognize subtle prejudice in the classroom.

Keywords: classroom behavior, college students, college teaching, diversity, microaggression, prejudice

The number of racial and ethnic minority students in college is at an all-time high (American Council on Education 2005), but campuses still struggle to maintain a welcoming climate for diversity. For example, racial and ethnic minorities have lower satisfaction with campus climates than White students, (e.g., Ancis, Selacek, and Mohr 2000; Reid and Radhakishnan 2003; Worthington et al. 2008). One explanation for the difference in satisfaction is the continuing existence of prejudice on college campuses. In fact, students report that the most common way ethnicity impacts their education is through the experience of prejudice (Syed 2010). However, the prejudice that students encounter is more likely to be subtle rather than blatant. Racial and ethnic minority students report that they frequently face subtle slights and insults that are offensive but largely unintentional (e.g., Bourke 2010; Samuel 2004). Researchers refer to these types of events as microaggressions and have documented their presence in college classrooms (Boysen and Vogel 2009; Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso 2000; Sue et al. 2009). Despite their existence as a potential classroom management problem, there is little indication of how subtle forms of prejudice should be handled in college classrooms. The purpose of the current research is to explore teachers' and students' perceptions of classroom microaggressions and their potential management.

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Bias in the Classroom

Surveys of students illustrate that prejudice, discrimination, and stereotypes are relatively common on college campuses. About 50% of students report encountering some form of prejudice on campus (Biasco, Goodwin, and Vitale 2001; D'Augelle and Hershberger 1993; Fisher and Hartman 1995), and students cite classrooms as among the most common places for prejudice to occur (Marcus et al. 2003; Rankin 2003). Classroom bias can be defined as the subtle and blatant ways that prejudice, discrimination, and stereotypes emerge in teaching situations, and recent research has provided a description of classroom bias as it occurs in higher education (Boysen and Vogel 2009; Boysen et al. 2009). To begin, bias in the classroom is relatively common with about 40% of teachers and 50% of students reporting an incident in the last year. The incidents tend to be subtle rather than blatant. Teachers report that stereotypes are the most frequent type of classroom bias; in contrast, overt discrimination and the use of racial epithets are rare (Boysen and Vogel 2009). Among students, 63% report noticing subtle bias in the last year compared to 44% who report noticing obvious bias (Boysen et al. 2009). Considering how frequently subtle forms of bias emerge in the classroom, more information is needed

on teachers' and students' perceptions of it and their beliefs about how it should be managed.

Microaggressions

There are numerous ways to conceptualize subtle bias. The concept of aversive racism posits that most individuals believe in equality, but they can still exhibit behaviors and emotional reactions consistent with an underlying, unintentional bias (Dovidio et al. 2002). For example, normally egalitarian individuals may find themselves becoming fearful whenever they pass an African American man on the street. Similarly, implicit bias research demonstrates that most individuals automatically—that is, quickly, easily, and without intention—associate minorities with negative concepts, and this holds true even when people self-report having little or no bias (Greenwald, McGhee, and Schwartz 1998). The most recent conceptualization of subtle bias to emerge is microaggression. Sue (2010) defined microaggressions as the "brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to certain individuals because of their group membership" (xvi). For example, African Americans face assumptions that they are criminals, people exclude women by using "he" as a universal pronoun, people of color are told that "they speak English well" regardless of their country of origin, and lesbians, gays, and bisexuals are stared at when displaying affection in public. People who commit microaggressions frequently do so subtly and unintentionally; thus, microaggressions are characterized by ambiguity because of the differing perspectives of the microaggressor and the target. Research into microaggressions is new, but studies have found that microaggressions are a common part of the experiences of African Americans (Constantine 2007); Asians (Sue et al. 2007); lesbians, gays, and bisexuals (Shelton and Delgado-Romero 2011); and women (Owen, Tao, and Rodolfa 2010).

Although most microaggression research has emerged from the counseling literature, a few studies have applied the concept as it relates to college students and the classroom. Boysen and Vogel (2009) surveyed teachers to determine what types of student bias occurred in their classrooms. The subtle bias reported by teachers fell into Sue, Capodilupo, et al. (2007) three subcategories of microaggression: microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations. Microassaults most closely resemble traditional forms of prejudice and consist of discrimination or direct verbal attacks. Common classroom microassaults include verbal derogation and avoidance or exclusion. For example, students may use the word "gay" to mean "bad" or exclude individuals from stigmatized social groups during collaborative work. Microinsults consist of actions that disrespect or demean a person based on their group status. Teachers report microinsults such as making stereotyped assumptions about what constitutes appropriate work for women, characterizing all immigrants as "illegal," and asserting that non Western cultures are abnormal. Finally, microinvalidations undermine or deny the experiences of minorities. Examples included denying the continued existence of racism and sexism, treating minorities like foreigners, and claims of color blindness. Although only a few studies have assessed college students' perceptions of microaggressions, the results are consistent—students experience microaggressions in college classrooms (Solórzano et al. 2000; Sue et al. 2009).

Despite their subtle nature, research suggests that microaggressions have deleterious effects on students. To begin, the frequent experience of microaggressions leads students to perceive campus climates negatively (Solórzano et al. 2000). Furthermore, prejudice has long been recognized as a significant stressor on physical and psychological health (Clark et al. 1999), and recent research among African American undergraduate and graduate students confirms that facing microaggressions predicts symptoms of psychological stress and dysfunction (Mercer et al. 2011; Torres, Driscoll, and Burrow 2010). Microaggressions could even interfere with academic performance. Laboratory research suggests that exposure to incidents of subtle prejudice hampers African American students' ability to cognitively process information (Bair and Steele 2010; Salvatore and Shelton 2007). The inability to exert focused cogntive effort in an academic setting is clearly problematic; an excellent illustration of this is stereotype threat. Stereotype threat occurs when worry about confirming negative stereotypes hinders students' ability to exert cognitive effort and subsequently reduces their performance on academic tests (Schmader and Johns 2003).

Teachers' Responses to Microaggressions

Teachers might be tempted to believe that incidents of bias in the classroom are best left ignored so as not to call attention to the behavior, but research suggests that students want teachers to respond to classroom microaggressions. For example, one qualitative study indicated that students prefer that teachers lead classroom discussions about microaggressions rather than ignore them (Sue et al. 2009). In addition, Boysen and colleagues (2009) asked students to recall incidents of subtle bias in the classroom and rate the effectiveness of the teachers' method of responding to the incident. Students indicated that ignoring subtle bias was ineffective overall and that it was significantly less effective than all other response types. Although students seem to want teachers to respond to bias, classroom microaggressions may remain unaddressed. Some teachers may not perceive microaggressions as incidents of prejudice, and this precludes their ability to effectively respond. Indirect evidence that some teachers do not perceive subtle bias can be found in the fact that older, male teachers are less likely to report noticing bias in the classroom than younger, female teachers (Boysen and Vogel 2009). However, no previous research has examined individual differences in the ability to perceive microaggressions, let alone the existence of such an individual difference among teachers.

According to Sue (2010), the ability to properly address microaggressions requires awareness of what microaggressions are, awareness of personal cultural values, and

awareness of personal bias. Although it would be difficult to experimentally manipulate teachers' awareness in these areas in order to test Sue's assertions, one solution is to explore the attitudes of groups of teachers who are likely to have varying levels of awareness about subtle bias. A preexisting group that is likely to possess awareness of subtle bias is teachers of courses focused on diversity issues such as culture, multiculturalism, race, women's studies, or queer studies. There are a few reasons to believe that diversity teachers will be especially aware of subtle bias. Individuals who teach such topics are likely to have increased knowledge about and contact with diverse groups; these traits are associated with decreased prejudice (Paluck and Green 2009; Pettigrew and Tropp 2008). In addition, individuals who teach about diversity self-selected into that field. The personality traits and life experiences that push career interests toward diversity topics are also likely to decrease prejudice and increase awareness of subtle forms of bias. Thus, it may be informative to test for differences in the perception of microaggressions among teachers of diversity courses and teachers of nondiversity courses.

If a teacher makes the decision to respond to a microaggression, that teacher is faced with the equally difficult decision of picking a specific response. The subjectivity and uncertainty surrounding microaggressions makes even those who face them regularly have difficulty in knowing how to respond (Hernández, Carranza, and Almeida 2010). Sue (2010) suggested that teachers should facilitate dialogs on microaggressions in the classroom but not directly control the content of those dialogs. However, no research has examined teachers' perceptions of various responses to classroom microaggressions. One way to determine if teachers agree with Sue's (2010) recommendation is to present them with several different responses to evaluate in terms of general effectiveness. Although effectiveness of responses to bias in the classroom can be assessed in relation to many specific goals (e.g., preventing future bias, teaching a lesson, maintaining class comfort; Boysen 2012), ratings of general effectiveness can show teachers' relative preference for one type of response over another. Such preferences could be compared among groups of teachers but also to similar ratings made by students. Student perspectives are especially important because some evidence indicates that they have lower estimates of overall response effectiveness than teachers (Boysen et al. 2009).

The Current Study

The current study focused on teachers' and students' perceptions of microaggressions and their management in the classroom. A sample of college teachers read brief descriptions of microaggressions occurring inside the classroom and reported how negative the incidents were, if they would respond to the incidents, and their perceptions of the general effectiveness of responses ranging from direct (e.g., immediate confrontation) to indirect (e.g., ignoring). In order to explore the possibility of teacher differences in the ability to recognize microaggressions, the sample included teachers of courses with diversity content and a comparison sample of teachers of nondiversity courses. A sample of students also provided their perceptions of classroom microaggressions and response effectiveness. These methods allowed for the testing of four hypotheses.

- Teachers of diversity courses will perceive microaggressions more negatively than teachers of nondiversity courses.
- Diversity teachers will also be more likely than nondiversity teachers to see microaggressions as necessitating a response.
- Diversity teachers, relative to nondiversity teachers, will be less likely to perceive ignoring microaggressions as an effective response and be more likely to perceive direct responses (e.g., discussion, providing counterexamples) as effective.
- Consistent with previous research (Boysen et al. 2009), students' ratings of the effectiveness of responses will be significantly lower than teachers' ratings.

These hypotheses, should they be confirmed, will aid in understanding how individuals perceive microaggressions and provide suggestions on how teachers should handled them in the classroom.

METHOD

Participants

The teacher sample consisted of instructors ($N = 222$) from across 4-year colleges ($n = 15$) in a large, state university system in the United States. In order to obtain a list of instructors of diversity courses a researcher examined online course schedules for every college in the state system and searched for courses with diversity topics in their titles (e.g., race, gender, multicultural, ethnicity, queer). In order to produce a comparison sample the researcher identified one course each from the humanities, natural sciences, and social sciences that was offered at the same academic level as the diversity course (e.g., 100, 200). This process eventually yielded a list of 540 instructors who received an invitation to participate in the study; of that group, 59 diversity instructors and 163 nondiversity instructors completed the materials, which was a response rate of 41% (46% in the diversity group and 39% in the nondiversity group). Teacher characteristics can be seen in table 1. The second sample consisted of 166 students from a single medium-sized college in the state system outlined above (see table 1 for demographics). Students volunteered in exchange for credit in psychology classes. As such, the

TABLE 1
Participants' Demographic Characteristics

	Diversity Teachers ($n = 59$)	Nondiversity Teachers ($n = 163$)	Students ($n = 166$)
Mean age	48.06 (11.77)	48.15 (12.70)	18.85 (1.87)
Mean years teaching	14.33 (10.17)	16.60 (12.59)	–
Sex			
Male	14%	42%	26%
Female	86%	58%	74%
Ethnicity			
White	63%	81%	92%
Asian	2%	7%	1%
Black	9%	3%	1%
Latino/a	4%	4%	4%
Multiethnic	9%	2%	1%
Native American/Inuit	4%		1%
Other	9%	4%	1%
Rank			
Graduate student	8%	5%	–
Adjunct	23%	13%	–
Non tenure-track	13%	7%	–
Assistant professor	19%	26%	–
Associate professor	13%	18%	–
Full professor	21%	31%	–
Other	4%	2%	–
Program			
Humanities	4%	20%	–
Human sciences	60%	44%	–
Science/math	2%	35%	–
Interdisciplinary	33%	2%	–

Note. Means appear outside the parentheses and standard deviations appear inside the parentheses. Percentages within a group may not add to 100% due to rounding.

sample may not generalize to all students in the university system.

Measures

Participants rated their perceptions of microaggressions using 7-point bipolar adjective scales with endpoints of *very much* and midpoints of *neither;* the adjectives were unbiased-biased and appropriate-inappropriate. The two items were combined into a total negativity scale, which had adequate internal consistency ($\alpha = .74$). Teachers also completed yes/no questions asking if they would respond to the classroom microaggressions. Next, participants completed items, taken from previous research (Boysen 2012; Boysen et al. 2009), assessing perceptions of the general effectiveness of various teacher responses to the microaggressions. Potential teacher responses included "ignoring the incident," "leading a discussion about the incident," "privately confronting the student(s) who made the comment outside of class," "pointing out how flaws in thinking led to the incident," "confronting the student(s) right away by saying something like 'That behavior is not appropriate, and it will not be allowed in this classroom.'" Participants rated each response using a scale from 1 (*very ineffective*) to 6 (*very effective*). The measures also included a brief demographic survey.

Procedure

A human subjects review board approved all procedures. Teachers received an email inviting them to complete an online survey and two reminder emails. The materials included three vignettes describing incidents of microaggressions occurring in college classrooms. The instructions asked participants to pretend that they were the teacher in these classes and to imagine that the class included students of various racial and ethnic backgrounds Scenarios included in the materials included a microinsult: "After a class presentation, an African American student is congratulated by a White student who says 'You are so articulate!' and 'You speak so well!';" a microinvalidation: "A White student comments to an African American student 'When I look at you I don't see color.';"and a microassault: "A group of two White students pretend not to hear when an Asian student asks to work with them on an in-class assignment." Sue and colleagues (2007) noted that each of these incidents is a common form of microaggression. Microaggressions such as these are often ambiguous (Sue 2010). However, awareness of microaggressions allows the recognition of subtly biased underlying messages; "You are so articulate" sends the message "I do not expect you to be intelligent," "I don't see color" sends the message "Racial experiences are not important," and pretending not to hear an Asian student sends the message "You are an unwelcome outsider" (Sue et al. 2007).

The student sample received an email asking for their voluntary participation, and they completed all measures anonymously online as part of a larger study. The instructions asked them to imagine themselves as students in the class. Several questions throughout the student survey asked them to make specific responses in order to assess attention to the materials, and the analyses excluded 22 participants who failed to make correct responses.

RESULTS

Perceptions of Microaggressions

The first analyses examined teachers' and students' perceptions of classroom microaggressions. The hypothesis stated that diversity teachers would perceive the microaggressions more negatively than nondiversity teachers. The analyses utilized negativity scores averaged across the three types of microaggressions. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) examined for differences between teachers of diversity courses, teachers of nondiversity courses, and students. Significant differences emerged between the groups, F (2, 312) = 6.43, $p = .002$.

TABLE 2
Perceptions of Microaggressions and Teacher Responses

	Diversity Teachers		Nondiversity Teachers		Students	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Negativity rating	5.32[a]	0.94	4.89[b]	0.98	4.76[ab]	0.90
Effectiveness ratings						
Direct confrontation	2.07[a]	1.10	2.14[b]	1.10	3.88[ab]	1.17
Class discussion	3.82[a]	1.44	2.84[ab]	1.36	3.82[b]	1.22
Private confrontation	3.32[a]	1.29	3.44[b]	1.15	4.25[ab]	0.92
Provide counterexamples	2.80[a]	1.32	2.82[b]	1.28	3.90[ab]	1.10
Ignore	1.79[ab]	1.03	2.81[a]	1.35	2.75[b]	1.05
Overall effectiveness	2.77[a]	0.69	2.80[b]	0.69	3.69[ab]	0.58

Note. Means that share a superscript are significantly different, $p < .05$.

Post hoc Tukey tests indicated that diversity teachers perceived the microaggressions as significantly more negative than the other two groups (see table 2), which supported the hypothesis.

Responding to Microaggressions

The next analyses examined beliefs about the appropriate response to microaggressions. The hypothesis stated that diversity teachers would be more likely to see microaggressions as necessitating a response than nondiversity teachers. Teachers reported whether or not they would respond to each microaggression. Overall, 56%, 35%, and 85% of teachers reported that they would respond, respectively, to the microinsult, microinvalidation, and microassault. Chi square analyses indicated that a higher percentage of diversity teachers and a lower percentage of nondiversity teachers than would be expected by chance reported that they would respond to the three incidents, all χ^2s > 6.98, all *p*s < .008 (see figure 1). These results supported the hypothesis.

The next hypothesis stated that teachers of diversity courses, relative to teachers of nondiversity courses, would be less likely to perceive ignoring microaggressions as effective and more likely to perceive direct responses to microaggressions as effective. An additional hypothesis stated that students would have lower ratings of response effectiveness than teachers. In order to test these hypotheses, one way ANOVAs examined differences in effectiveness ratings for the 5 responses (i.e., confront, discuss, private, counter, ignore) among teachers of diversity courses, teachers of nondiversity courses, and students. Once again, the analyses utilized scores averaged across the three microaggressions. All 5 ANOVAs were significant, all *F*s > 13.60, all *p*s < .001, and the results of post hoc Tukey tests can be seen in table 1. There was also a significant difference when using an overall effectiveness rating created by averaging across the 5 different responses, F (2, 280) = 68.90, $p < .001$. Diversity teachers rated ignoring the microaggressions as significantly less effective than nondiversity teachers. However, the only other significant difference between teachers was for discussion, which diversity teachers perceived as more effective than nondiversity teachers. An average rating of 4 or higher indicates perception of a response as at least moderately effective, and diversity teachers' ratings of discussion was the only response that reached that level. Unexpectedly, students tended to perceive the responses as more effective than the teachers. In fact, all of the responses except ignoring received an average response indicative of a least moderate effectiveness. Overall, only the difference between teachers' perceptions of ignoring and discussing microaggressions provided support for the hypotheses.

Gender as a Possible Confound

Exploratory analyses indicated that there more females in the diversity teacher group than would be expected by chance. Thus, gender was a demographic variable worth exploring as a possible explanation for the differences that emerged between the diversity and nondiversity teachers. Logistic regression examined if diversity teaching experience predicted perceptions of microaggressions as necessitating a response when controlling for gender. Diversity teaching experience was always a significant predictor (all βs < 1.35, all *p*s < .038) even when controlling for gender, which was never a significant predictor (all βs < 0.38, all *p*s > .223). In addition, Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) examined for differences between the teacher groups in ratings of negativity and response effectiveness with gender serving as a covariate in each test. Gender was often a significant covariate, but only

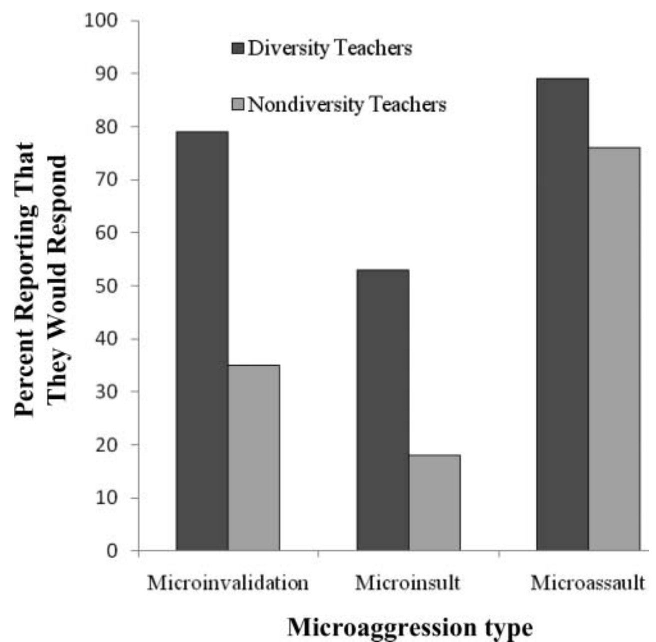

FIGURE 1 Percent of teachers responding to microaggressions.

one outcome changed due to the inclusion of the gender covariate; there was no longer a significant difference between diversity and nondiversity teachers for ratings of negativity, $F(1, 165) = 1.66$, $p = .199$. Considering these results, gender and diversity teaching experience appeared to have largely independent effects on perceptions of microaggressions in this sample.

DISCUSSION

This study tested four hypotheses about teachers' and students' perceptions of classroom microaggressions and their management. The first hypothesis stated that teachers of diversity courses would perceive microaggressions more negatively than teachers from nondiversity courses, and this hypothesis was supported. The second hypothesis stated that diversity teachers would be more likely to see microaggressions as necessitating a response than nondiversity teachers. This hypothesis also received support; diversity teachers were significantly more likely to indicate that they would respond in some way to all of the microaggressions. The third hypothesis stated that diversity teachers, relative to nondiversity teachers, would be less likely to perceive ignoring microaggressions as an effective response and be more likely to perceive direct responses to microaggressions as effective. Diversity teachers did perceive ignoring as less effective and discussion as more effective, but only this limited support emerged for the hypothesis. The fourth hypothesis stated that students' ratings of the effectiveness of responses would be significantly lower than teachers' ratings, but the opposite trend emerged in the data.

The general trend in the data was for teachers to have low ratings of response effectiveness and for students to have high ratings of response effectiveness. Such results were contrary to the hypothesis and necessitate further consideration. Previous research found that teachers rated responses they had actually made to incidents of bias in the classroom as significantly more effective than a sample of students who rated the effectiveness of their own teachers' responses to bias (Boysen et al. 2009). In contrast, both teachers and students in this study rated the effectiveness of a list of potential responses to fictional incidents. The change in procedure seems to have deflated teachers' ratings of effectiveness and inflated students' ratings of effectiveness. Deflation in teachers' ratings of effectiveness might also explain why diversity teachers did not show preference for direct responses other than discussion. Examination of Figure 1 clearly shows that the majority of diversity teachers feel they would respond in some way to microaggressions; however, the list of potential responses did not seem effective to them overall. Presumably, a self-generated response would have received higher effectiveness ratings.

Implications

What should teachers do when microaggressions occur in their classrooms? The results of the current research provide several suggestions for classroom management. The most fundamental suggestion is that microaggressions require a response. Both teacher and student data point to responding rather than ignoring as the preferred course of action. To begin, experts in diversity who participated in this study tended to believe that microaggressions require a response. Teachers of diversity courses not only have knowledge about the topic, but they are likely to have the most experience dealing with microaggressions in the classroom due to the nature of their courses. As such, their opinions on responding to microaggressions are worthy of special consideration. Students also appear to believe that a response is necessary. All of the responses received ratings indicative of at least slight effectiveness from students. Ignoring was the only exception; students perceived it as ineffective. Although no studies have specifically investigated how teachers' responses to microaggressions affect student behavior, research does indicate that confronting someone who has used a stereotype leads them to use stereotypes less in the future (Czopp, Monteith, and Mark 2006). Thus, teachers who are interested in preventing student behavior that is subtly hostile, derogatory, and insulting should be motivated to respond microaggressions in the classroom.

The results of this study also suggest that microaggressions should be handled with responses of moderate directness and intensity. A student who is being actively and intentionally prejudiced in class – for example, using an offensive slur to insult another student – might require an immediate and direct command to stop the behavior. Few microaggressions seem to require such intensity, however. In this study, the only response that received a rating of effective from the diversity teachers was discussion, which is a response of moderate intensity. Furthermore, students perceived the relatively indirect method of talking to a student outside of class as most effective. Again, the likely explanation is that students simply did not see the microaggressions as severe and obvious enough to require direct confrontation. Of course, this result must be understood within the context of the sample, which was predominantly White, and the microaggressions, which were racial in nature. Racial and ethnic minority students may prefer a more direct approach to dealing with microaggressions (Sue et al. 2009).

One tentative recommendation can be made regarding the choice of a specific response; discussion seems to be the preferable response. Discussion received the only rating indicative of effectiveness from the teachers in the study, and it is especially telling that it was the teachers with diversity experience that rated it as effective. Students also rated discussion as effective on average. The major advantage of discussion seems to be that is allows the ambiguous nature of the microaggression to be elucidated for those who might

not be aware that bias has occurred. Furthermore, it allows all parties to be heard and to share their perceptions of the incident. One previous study of microaggressions also pointed to discussion as a preferred response. Students in the study stated that they wanted teachers to facilitate open dialogs about microaggressions that validated their experiences of bias and racism (Sue et al. 2009). However, the students warned against being too passive and letting students dominate the discussion. Overall, the limited evidence available suggests that teachers should take on the role of facilitating and directing discussions when microaggressions occur in class.

A final specific suggestion is to assess the effectiveness of classroom microaggression interventions. Teachers in the current study were not confident in the effectiveness of the responses. Ambiguity inherent in microaggressions is one explanation for the lack of perceived effectiveness, and there is no reason to believe that real-life classroom situations are any less ambiguous. One way to make the effects of microaggression interventions more certain is to simply ask students to evaluate the outcome. Minute papers stand out as a brief and informative way to gather information in the classroom. After a microaggression intervention, teachers could have students anonymously and briefly write down their reactions and if they believe the event was resolved fairly and effectively. Similar results could also be obtained by administering anonymous online surveys via course management software. Conducting a classroom assessment has the advantage of providing immediate feedback; the feedback can then be used to determine if the response was successful, if further intervention is needed, and if future responses might be more effectively handled. The assessment also has the added benefit of sending the message that the topic is important.

Perhaps the most important implication of the current research is related to the preparation of college teachers to handle microaggressions in the classroom. Unfortunately, not all college teachers receive preparation in pedagogy, and some evidence suggests that even those who do receive teacher training are unlikely to spend much time on classroom diversity issues (Boysen 2011). Given the frequency with which students report noticing subtle forms of bias in the classroom (Boysen et al. 2009), it seems that preparation of college teachers should include some basic microaggression content. Multicultural theory states that knowledge and awareness are key to recognizing and effectively handling microaggressions (Sue 2010). Indeed, the current research illustrates that teachers with extensive diversity experiences are more likely to recognize microaggressions than other teachers. Not all teachers can become experts in diversity, but a large body of research indicates that education is effective for fostering multicultural knowledge and awareness (McGregor and Ungerleider 1993; Smith et al. 2006). As such, exposure to information about microaggressions and their effect on students will better prepare teachers for diverse classrooms. Teacher preparation should also impart the message that responding to microaggressions is necessary. All extant research, including this study, indicates that students prefer teachers to intervene in some way when bias occurs in the classroom (Boysen et al. 2009; Boysen 2012).

Limitations and Future Research

Although this study provides a unique perspective on microaggressions in the classroom, it does have limitations worth noting. The most important limitation is the lack of diversity in the samples. Replicating this study with a different sample may be the first step for future research. It is especially important to determine if a sample of racial and ethnic minority students show the same preferences for teacher responses as emerged in the current study. The microaggression descriptions themselves are also a limitation of the research. Although the microaggressions replicated examples identified in previous research, they were necessarily brief, and some participants may have simply believed that they lacked the context to appropriately judge the situations. Another limitation was the measurement of effectiveness, which consisted of just one general item per response type. Effectiveness of responses to classroom bias is multifaceted (Boysen 2012), and a single, general rating can not capture subtleties in perceptions of effectiveness. Future research should assess reactions to actual microaggressions as they occur in real or simulated classroom situations and use multifaceted measures of effectiveness. A final limitation of this study is its inability to explain the origin of individual differences in perceptions of microaggressions. The same training that allows people to teach courses on diversity may also increase awareness of subtle, unintentional prejudice, but it is equally possible that the same individual characteristics that focus people's teaching and scholarship onto diversity issues also sensitizes them to subtle forms of prejudice. Although disentangling such causal factors would be difficult, future research may address the relative impact of personality, life experiences, and training on teachers' abilities to perceive microaggressions.

Conclusions

Despite improvements in the diversity of students and campus climates, there are still reasons for racial and ethnic minority students to feel unwelcome at college. One reason is the existence of classroom microaggressions. Teachers have a professional responsibility to maintain safe learning environments for their students, and that responsibility includes recognizing and responding to subtle bias in the classroom. Effective management of classroom bias should not only improve campus climates for diverse students but also teach

lessons to all students about being responsible citizens in an increasingly multicultural society.

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