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The moment of microaggression: The experience of acts of oppression, dehumanization, and exploitation

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ABSTRACT

After a brief introduction and review of recent literature on microaggressions, a theoretical typology of three sources of social injustice (oppression, dehumanization, and exploitation) contributes to the theorization of the sources of microaggressions. A selected compendium of words and affective phrases generated in classroom exercises illustrates the nature of the experience of the moment of microaggression. Future research on microaggressions as well as evaluation of practice should examine the experience of microaggression, including being subjected to microaggression, initiating such acts, and observing such acts.

Introduction

This article contributes to the theorization of microaggressions by identifying three sources of social injustice: oppression, dehumanization, and exploitation (ODE). These unjust social systems provide the social structural foundation for individual acts of microaggression. The article illustrates this theoretical contribution by presenting a selected compendium of affective words and phrases associated with the experience of any aspect of ODE (Dover, 2008), interpreted here as acts of microaggression. The compendium includes a typology of words and affective phrases generated from classroom exercises on the experience of acts of oppression, dehumanization, and exploitation: (1) those reported as experienced at the moment of such an act, (2) those describing short-term subsequent reactions to that experience, and (3) those associated with evolved adaptive and maladaptive responses to the cumulative experience of such acts. The article discusses the limitations of the approach taken and proposes further research to better inform helping professionals, empower human service recipients, and inform social activism that confronts the unjust social systems that produce microaggressions.

At the intersection of the individual and the social environment, people address their human needs while interacting with each other from the standpoints of our multiple social group memberships and social positions within cultural, organizational, and institutional environments. Understanding human diversity requires recognizing within-group and between-group human similarities and differences, as well as differences in our social positions. Unfortunately, these differences are often correlated with reduced opportunities. At the intersection of the individual and the social environment, people encounter barriers that produce systematic inequality in their opportunities to address their human needs in their preferred manner. These barriers have their roots in unjust social systems such as oppression, dehumanization, and exploitation.

One of those barriers is the experience of microaggression. This experience includes being subjected to microaggression, initiating such acts, and observing such acts. Once it is recognized that microaggressions arise from human interactions influenced not only by group-based social

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oppression, but also from the experience of acts of organizationally and technologically based dehumanization and from the microenforcement of economic exploitation, the near universality of the experience of microaggression becomes apparent. Given our many group memberships and social positions, even the most consistent individual and collective efforts at achieving relational competence within diverse social environments are unlikely to eliminate the likelihood that nearly all people experience microaggression.

Literature review

The term microaggression was coined by Chester Pierce to describe offensive acts that reinforced racism (Pierce, 1970, cited in Pérez Huber & Solorzano, 2015a). Microaggressions can also be understood as put-downs (Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez, & Willis, 1978, cited in Sue, 2010b); everyday indignities (Smith, 2003); "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative … slights and insults" (Sue et al., 2007, p. 271); everyday racist slights (Pérez Huber & Solorzano, 2015b); covert racism (Coates, 2011); visual microaggressions (Pérez Huber & Solorzano, 2015b); brief, often subtle acts that convey derogatory messages (Forrest-Bank, Jenson, & Trecartin, 2015); "small, specific, every day experiences of perceived discrimination" (Forrest-Bank & Jenson, 2015, p. 66); or a "toxic raindrop over time on its victim's well-being" (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015, p. 157).

Microaggressions were seen as taking three forms: microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidation (Sue et al., 2007), with microassaults subsequently defined as macroaggressions, involving blatant and egregious acts (Donovan et al., 2013). The causal path was from institutional racism and the ideology of white supremacy to therapist behavior (Sue, 2010a). These forms of microaggression have also been traced to other forms of group-based oppression, including three types of heterosexism: blatant victimization, interpersonal microaggressions, and environmental microaggressions (Woodford et al., 2014). Gender identity microaggressions have been traced to transphobia (Nadal, 2013), disability-based microaggressions to ableism (Dávila, 2015; Keller & Galgay, 2010), and sexual orientation-based microaggressions to heterosexism (Nadal, 2013) and to homophobia (McCabe, Dragowski, & Rubinson, 2013), with additional studies of socially devalued groups collected in one volume (Sue, 2010b). One notable study distinguished between microaggression, bullying, and hate crimes reported in research with Jewish, Muslim, and Catholic secondary school students (Dupper, Forrest-Bank, & Lowry-Carusillo, 2015).

Another typology of microaggressions was presented by Pérez Huber and Solorzano (2015a). Seeking to overcome a false dichotomy between macro-interpretations and micro-interpretations of the causes and consequences of microaggression, the authors introduced a taxonomy of microaggressions, including (1) verbal and nonverbal assaults, often subtle, routinized or unintentional; (2) "layered assaults," a term that incorporates how racial microaggression intersects with other sources of microaggression, including immigration status, accent, surname, and phenotype; and (3) cumulative assaults, thus accounting for the experience of microaggression over time. The authors viewed racial microaggressions as "everyday reflections of larger racist structures and ideological beliefs" (2015a, p. 6) and saw them as rooted in social group domination. The causal path was from the ideological foundations of white supremacy (defined as macroaggression) to forms of institutional racism to specific microaggressions.

In another study, butcher paper was used to collect examples from among employees of an institution of higher education who were attending a workshop on cultural competency (Young, Anderson, & Stewart, 2015). Exposed during the training to a definition of microaggression and videotaped scenarios related to race, gender, and language-status microaggressions, small groups of four to six persons identified three examples of microaggression each. The authors later analyzed the examples using a modified version of the typology of microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidation (Sue et al., 2007). This research shared several similarities with the production of the compendium presented here. First, in both cases, the contribution of specific individual participants was not made known to the group as a whole, which reduced potential harm to participants, given the emotionally charged process of recalling

such experiences. Second, there was an initial exposure to key concepts and definitions related to the nature of microaggression. Third, there was subsequent coding of the data into a typology for discussion by the participants. Fourth, the resulting examples were further coded according to a typology adopted. Notably, Young et al. (2015) reported examples of microaggression regardless of status as producer, recipient, or observer of microaggression, something called for in the further research section of the present article.

Pérez Huber and Solorzano (2015a) contributed to the theory of microaggression by juxtaposing it to critical race theory (Ortiz & Jani, 2010), as has also been done by others (Cappiccie et al., 2012; Ross-Sheriff, 2012). Consistent with the present compendium, Pérez Huber and Solorzano (2015a) traced research on examples of microaggression to Friere's suggestion to name the pain experienced as part of oppression (Freire, 1970). However, they also stressed how institutionalized practices such as stop and frisk can produce wholesale microaggressions. Recent dissertations have also provided an important source of theory, methodological improvements, in-depth discussion of results, and extensive reviews of theory and literature (Haws, 2014; Williams, 2015).

Drawing on the theory of intersectionality, Lewis and Neville (2015) explored gendered racist microaggressions and discussed frameworks for carrying out research when two forms of oppression may be experienced in the same setting or event: (1) the two compound each other as a form of double jeopardy, (2) they simply interact as race and gender, and (3) they represent a special form of oppression that is qualitatively unique. Adopting the latter approach, they used the terminology of gendered racism, citing Essed (1991). One study on the initiation of microaggressions concluded that supervisors should take responsibility when they microaggress on others and that institutions should reduce the hierarchical microaggressions generated when people are systematically devalued by virtue of their institutional role (Young et al., 2015). This review suggests the need for theoretical and research attention to the roles of oppression, dehumanization, and exploitation in producing microaggression, as well attention to the full range of the experience of microaggression, including initiating, receiving, and observing such acts.

Theory: Microaggression and the sources of injustice

More attention needs to be paid to the theorization of multiple social structural sources of the experience of microaggression. One of these is clearly oppression itself. Oppression as a social group-based phenomenon is well theorized (Cudd, 2006; Marsiglia & Kulis, 2009). Ann Cudd, who theorized oppression as group based and rooted in coercion, recognized the unique nature of each form of oppression (Young, 1990) but also theorized common aspects of all forms of group-based oppression. Cudd reviewed a number of other previous theories of oppression (Harvey, 1999; O'Connor, 2002; Wertheimer, 1987; Young, 1990) but focused more fully on several theories (Clatterbaugh, 1996; Frye, 1983), especially Gilbert's reliance on the concept of a social group (Gilbert, 1989). Cudd theorized four aspects of oppression that constitute necessary and sufficient conditions for their existence: (1) a harm condition linked to identifiable institutionalized practices, (2) consistent and institutionally applied harm to a social group that would exist even in the absence of the harm condition, (3) a condition of privilege for a social group that benefits from the institutionalized practice, and (4) the use of coercion in order to enforce the identified harm associated with the oppression.

Notably, Cudd did not include economic classes as social groups. Cudd considered exploitation to be conceptually distinct from oppression, given that exploitation varies among specific economic systems and does not always involve the use of coercion. Exploitation is clearly a source of injustice, and the present literature recognizes class as a source of microaggression (Smith & Redington, 2010). However, it is important not to trivialize exploitation by reducing it to a matter of classism and class chauvinism, since such attitudes are not necessary or sufficient conditions for exploitation-rooted microaggression.

Oppression

Cudd's theory of oppression itself helps enrich understanding of the nature of microaggression. Cudd discussed a number of direct and indirect types of material and psychological oppression, and she viewed material oppression as the use by one social group of violence or economic domination (seen as distinct from exploitation per se) to hinder the access of a social group to resources such as income, wealth, health care, and use of space. However, Cudd's theorization of psychological oppression is perhaps most central to the present discussion. For Cudd, oppression has both direct and indirect effects. Direct psychological forces associated with oppression produce inequality via the intentional actions of people in a dominant group upon people in a subordinate group. This often involves the use of degradation, terror, objectification, and humiliation. As such, Cudd's theory is consistent with the concept of microassaults involving intentionally discriminatory actions and behavior (Sue et al., 2007).

Theory of microaggressions recognizes the roles of both intentional and unintentional verbal and nonverbal acts (Sue et al., 2007). This is consistent with Cudd's theory of the direct and indirect psychological forces which produce inequality. Such forces constrain decisions made by oppressed people and can also produce internalized oppression, an observation consistent with the various psychological dilemmas facing both oppressor and oppressed (Sue et al., 2007). Cudd identified objective and subjective aspects of direct and indirect oppression. Subjective oppression involves conscious awareness of how one's membership in a social group has resulted in unjust and systematic harm, while objective oppression can take place independent of awareness. The principle that hierarchies of oppression are not useful (Collins, 1993) is consistent with theoretical openness to the possibility that microaggressions originate not only in oppression but in other sources of injustice as well.

Exploitation

Cudd concluded that there is a qualitative distinction between oppression and exploitation. First, exploitation is not inherently coercive. This observation is enhanced by important insights into the nature of exploitation offered by the political economist Robin Hahnel (2006). Hahnel noted that exploitation can be found in voluntary exchanges based on unequal possession of resources influencing the negotiation of the terms of the exchange. This theorization of exploitation is applicable across varying economic systems.

Second, Cudd found that exploitation is not group-based, which was one of her criteria for oppression. According to the present theorization, microaggression stemming from exploitation is not produced by virtue of whether one is a member of a social group of employers or a social group of employees. Nor is it a function of whether someone is a member of a group of sellers of goods and services as opposed to a group of buyers of goods and services. The microaggression comes from the enforcement of exploitation itself at the level of the interaction between those with superordinate responsibility for the microenforcement of exploitation and those being exploited. This can take place in a myriad of forms of economic exchange, irrespective of the social group membership of the person overseeing the exploitation and the exploited individuals. In oppression, the member of the dominant group engages in an act of microaggression that contributes to their privileged social group position as a member of a superordinate social group. In exploitation, the person engaged in microenforcement does not necessarily benefit individually from the exploitation. Acts of microaggression associated with exploitation stem from the microenforcement of exploitation: day-to-day acts by individual agents whose assigned or assumed role is the supervision and subordination of people whose labor is used in a wide range of familial, organizational, and institutional environments or whose goods and services are exchanged from the standpoint of significantly unequal resources.

Dehumanization and implications of the typology

The process of dehumanization can also give rise to moments of microaggression. Haslam's theory of dehumanization made an important distinction between animalistic dehumanization (which is consistent with Cudd's theory of oppression) and mechanistic dehumanization, which is distinct from both exploitation and oppression (Haslam, 2006; Haslam & Loughnan, 2014). Animalistic dehumanization involves one social group treating another social group as having significantly different attributes and is often accompanied by applying animalistic characteristics to the other group. Animalistic dehumanization is often found in intergroup relations. These include relationships based on ethnicity, sexual orientation, race, disability status, gender, and other forms of group domination that are typically reinforced by social structures. The dominant social group often harbors or expresses emotions such as contempt and disgust for the members of the other social group. Animalistic dehumanization is here considered oppression, as theorized by Cudd (2006). This type of oppression is already included in the theories of microaggression reviewed earlier in this article.

Mechanistic dehumanization characterizes established organizational, institutionalized social environments that treat human beings as not possessing the core features of human nature. Dehumanized human beings are treated as automata, not as animals. Mechanistic dehumanization is characterized by the application to human beings of "standardization, instrumental efficiency, impersonal technique, causal determinism, and enforced passivity" (Haslam, 2006, p. 260), similar to the kind theorized by Szasz (1970). Montagu and Matson (1983) tied dehumanization to industrialization, compulsive obedience, mechanized behavior, and the impact of the scientific revolution, producing technological dehumanization, or the reduction of human beings to machines. These theories of biomedical, technological, and mechanistic dehumanization are not consistent with Cudd's theory of oppression or Hahnel's theory of exploitation. This suggests that in addition to oppression and exploitation, dehumanization is a third significant source of moments of microaggression.

These three social systems of injustice operate in ways that overlap at the levels of their enforcing social mechanisms and individual expression. People producing microaggressions may simultaneously engage in oppression, dehumanization, and exploitation. People receiving microaggressions may experience them as arising from any aspect of oppression or any element of ODE, consistent with research on gendered racial microaggression (Lewis & Neville, 2015).

Method and compendium of words and affective phrases

The moment is an important unit of analysis. Practice decisions in professional helping are often made in moments in which something is said or not said, done or not done, based on what is thought or not thought, perceived in others or not perceived in others, understood or not understood. In a single, often identifiable moment, feelings are experienced, often memorably. In *The Present Moment in Psychotherapy and Everyday Life* (Stern, 2004), child psychiatrist Daniel Stern discussed the moment of an intersubjective dyadic or group experience, during which professionals and clients reunderstand themselves, their present relationship, and past moments in each of their personal and professional lives. Much can happen in a moment that is positive, but microaggressions research has given voice to people who point out that "you could find a thousand offenses in any moment of the day" (Sue, Capodilupo, & Holder, 2008, p. 332).

The unit of analysis of the moment of aggression is not well developed in microaggression research. It is here defined as the smallest unit of analysis where a clearly discernable act of microaggression takes place. The subjective reaction to such an act may be instantaneous or delayed in nature, as is suggested by the words and affective phrases presented here. The theoretical typology of three sources of injustice (oppression, dehumanization, and exploitation) presented here arose initially not from a process of formal theory construction but from the necessity for an inclusive approach to involving students in effective learning about the nature of oppression. Although this typology has now been

applied to a more formal partial theory of social injustice integrated with extant theory of human need (Dover, 2016a; Dover, 2016b), its origins in the classroom were serendipitous. This theory can help answer an important question arising from the literature on microaggressions (Sue et al., 2007, p. 277): "Herein lies a major dilemma. How does one prove that a microaggression has occurred?"

Words and affective phrases such as those presented below also help address the following methodological problem (Sue et al., 2007, p. 279): "What is lacking is research that points to adaptive ways of handling microaggressions by people of color and suggestions of how to increase the awareness and sensitivity of Whites to microaggressions so that they accept responsibility for their behaviors." Sue has also asked the following question (2010a, p. 74): "From the moment a microaggression presents itself, what internal psychological mechanisms are activated?" Arguably, those mechanisms are activated with the production of an initial response that can be expressed with an affective word or phrase, such as those following in List 1 below. The cumulative compendium is excerpted here in order to begin the process of answering Sue's question and to provide examples of the subjective experience of "direct psychological forces of oppression," such as those emanating from the experience of terror, humiliation, degradation or objectification (Cudd, 2006, p. 175).

The use of lists of affective words and phrases was pioneered in a widely used textbook (Hepworth & Larsen, 1990; Hepworth et al., 2013). The partial compendium below is based on classroom exercises done from 1990 to 2007. Although classroom exercises have continued periodically since that time, no words collected at the author's current university are used here. This article received an exemption from the Institutional Review Board at the author's university. The words and affective phrases below were written by students on 3×5 cards that were handed in to the instructor, sorted anonymously, recirculated to the class, and slowly and respectfully read to the class. Further details of the exercise itself were published earlier (Dover, 2008). The words are in the body of the text (and not in a table or appendix) to give voice to the experience of the oppression, dehumanization, and exploitation they represent. Space does not permit the full presentation of List 1, with more than 300 different words and affective phrases.

Presented in List 1 first are the words and affective phrases considered by the participants to be *core emotions* produced at the moment of acts of oppression, dehumanization, and exploitation. Included are those words and affective phrases beginning with all five English vowels and those beginning with each third English consonant:

> abandoned, abused, accused, affronted, agony, alienated, alone, always wrong, as if I didn't exist, as if I didn't matter, attacked, battered, beat up, beaten down, behind, being left behind, being used, beleaguered, belittled, berated, betrayed, blamed, blocked, booted out, bound, boxed, boxed in, bridled, broke, broken, burdened, emasculated, emptiness, empty, enslaved, estranged, excluded, expected to be different, expected to be difficult, expected to fail, expendable, exploited, exposed, faceless, failed by the system, failure, fake, feel like a number, feel like an idiot, feel like dirt, flim-flammed, foiled, forced, forced to do what told, forsaken, frightened, fucked, futile, I have no purpose, I just take up space, I'm not worth their time, identified by age, ignored, immobilized, impeded, imprisoned, in slavery, inconsequential, inhibited, inhuman, injured, insecure, insignificant, insulted, interrupted, intimidated, invalidated, invisible, isolated, jerked around, judged, judged as an object, junked, just another number, made to feel unimportant, made small, maltreated, managed, manipulated, marginal, marked, marginalized, mastered, meaningless, minimized, mislead, mistreated, misunderstood, misused, monitored, my adulthood was disregarded, objectified, obsolete, obstructed, oppressed, ostracized, out of place, out of control, outcast, outdone, overburdened, overcome, overlooked, overpowered, overprotected, overwhelmed, overworked, ranked always as second best, raped, ready to give up, reduced, regulated, rejected, restrained, restricted, ridiculed, ruled, unacknowledged, unappreciated, uncared for or about, under-appreciated, underclass, underestimated, underpaid, underrated, undervalued, unequal, unfair, unfulfilled, unimportant, unintelligent, unjustified, unrecognized, unsafe, untruthful, unwanted, used, useless, treated like a thief, vanquished, victimized, viewed as a child, violated, vulnerable.

This list gives an idea of the enormity of the experience of what this article contends is the retrospective memory of an act of microaggression.

Classroom discussion of the words and phrases generated concluded that some of the words did not represent core emotions experienced at the initial moment of ODE. Rather, they were how people felt

seconds, minutes, hours, or days after those initial immediate feelings. These words and affective phrases were classified as reactive emotions. They help answer the short-term part of the question posed by Sue (2010a, p. 74): "What short-term and long-term consequences do microaggressions have on recipients?" The same sampling criteria reduced 94 items to 44 items in List 2:

afraid, agitated, analyzed, anger, angry, annoyed, antagonized, anxiety, anxious, ashamed, baffled, bummed out, embarrassed, emergency, empathy, enclosed, endangered, envy, fear, fearful, feeling like shit, fight or flight, fragile, frightened, frustrated, frustration, furious, in danger, in shock, infuriated, injured, injustice, jealous, nervous, offended, on-edge, outraged, ready to attack, rage, resentful, unloved, unsure, upset, voiceless

Over time, the compendium came to include words and phrases that classroom discussion concluded weren't amenable to coding either as core emotions or reactive emotions. These words and affective phrases excerpted in List 3 and List 4 were seen as related to feelings and states that evolved over a longer period of time, in reaction to cumulative and repetitive experiences of core emotions and reactive emotions. These we coded as adaptive (List 3) and maladaptive (List 4) evolved responses to oppression. These two lists help answer the long-term part of the question posed above as well as an additional question of the same authors (Sue, 2010a, p. 74): "How do marginalized groups cope in the face of these assaults and are some coping mechanisms more adaptive than others?"

With respect to evolved adaptive responses, sensitivity to oppression and feelings of solidarity with the oppressed, exploited and dehumanized were evident in 48 evolved adaptive responses in List 3 (with no sampling used):

accepting of sexual orientation, anti-authoritarian, anti-racist, anti-sexist consciousness, assertive, came to look at positives, consciousness, class conscious, creative, determined, differently abled, dignified, dissatisfied, empowered, enduring, feminist, full of righteous indignation, fed up with the system, hopeful, humanized, humble, inadequate, inspiration, internationalist, mad as hell won't take it anymore, militant, modest, motivated, nationalist, oppositional, organized, outspoken, persevering, persisting, prayed for, proud, rebellious, resourceful, self-respecting, sensitivity to oppression, sisterhood, solidarity, spiritual, they're connected!, together, union, united, unpretentious, we're tight

List 4 (also with no sampling used) presents some emotions or emotional states that can be seen as maladaptive evolved responses:

actor, aggressive, apathetic, apologetic, ashamed, assumed role, bitter, conquered, damaged, dead, defeated, depressed, destruction of identity, diminished self-worth, disillusioned, displacement, distrustful attitudes, drained, dutiful woman, exhausted, flattened, full of despair, helpless, hidden, hopeless, ignorant, incompetent, inferior, institutionalized, irrational, irrelevant, lethargic, like a robot, like an actress, never good enough, no self-worth, not good enough, phony, pitiful, powerless, unpurposeful

The coding of these words and affective phrases into core emotions, reactive emotions, and adaptive and maladaptive evolved responses is not validated in any way by social psychological research. The compendium and typology were developed for heuristic and pedagogical purposes. No claim is made that the compendium has any formal reliability or validity. However, the compendium and the typologies of sources of injustice that arose from them are one example of class theory: theory arising from the classroom. They may also be seen as one example of the craft of theorizing (Swedberg, 2014), a process which is often only understood retrospectively (Dover, 2010).

Limitations of the work presented

It is important to discuss a number of limitations in the approach taken by this article. First, the material presented here was not social research but ideas generated in a classroom exercise. The compendium summarized here cannot be considered a reliable database of the range of feelings produced at the moment of microaggression. Second, the words were collected as self-described feelings associated with the experience of an act of oppression, dehumanization, or exploitation, not as feelings associated with the moment of microaggression. However, with respect to both of these

limitations, since the first publication of the compendium (Dover, 2008), subsequent use of the exercise at the author's present university has shown that it is now rare for new words and affective phrases to be generated in List 1. Another limitation is that more attention was given to collecting words for List 1, rather than to List 2 (reactive emotions). Lists 3 and 4 are also very undeveloped but serve to complete a typology of four kinds of words and affective phrases emanating from the exercise. They are presented here for theoretical purposes and may have research implications.

Third, participants were not asked to identify the nature of the experience itself, such as whether the words were generated by oppression, dehumanization or exploitation or some combination of them. Fourth, most of the words generated in Lists 2, 3, and 4 were generated very early on in the development of the compendium. Fifth, no effort was made to document the nature of the interaction producing the remembered words and affective phrases. No vignettes were collected to place the words in context. Actual research with full human subject protection could collect vignettes that provide more context to these words. This would also permit collection of demographic data on the persons involved in the interaction and their membership in various social groups, if known. Sixth, the words and affective phrases were collected only in English. Finally, a solid definition of oppression, dehumanization, and exploitation was not finalized until the publication of the important works on which the present theoretical typology is based (Cudd, 2006; Hahnel, 2006; Haslam, 2006). This meant that there was variation over time in the nature of the definitions to which participants were exposed.

Further research

This section discusses the potential for future research stemming from the theoretical and empirical material presented in this article. First, given the contention that microaggression is produced by oppression, dehumanization, and exploitation, rather than by various forms of oppression alone, future research should fully explore the varied causal paths associated with the experience of microaggression. Second, given the multiple social roles most people engage in, including our multiple social group memberships, more attention needs to be paid to the way in which individuals both initiate and receive acts of microaggression. Third, as this suggests, the experience of microaggression is a mutual one, at various levels of realization at that moment and immediately after. This requires further research. Fourth, research on microaggression would benefit from more random surveys within universities, workplaces, and elsewhere.

Fifth, vignettes of the initiation and receipt of microaggression should be collected (Basford, Offermann, & Behrend, 2014). Sixth, such research should avoid using terms such as perpetrator of microaggression and the commission of microaggression, because it evokes the language of criminalization. Seventh, research should incorporate improved measures of the frequency and longevity of experience of microaggression, something important to the conceptualization of cumulative advantage and disadvantage (Du Bois, 1935) and the cumulative nature of microaggression (Pérez Huber & Solorzano, 2015a; Sue, 2010a). Eighth, research should more fully appreciate the experience of microaggression rooted in membership in more than one oppressed social group (Lewis & Neville, 2015). Ninth, research should appreciate the distinct empirical possibility that there is variation in the severity of the psychosocial outcome of acts of microaggression. With all due respect to not creating hierarchies of oppression (Collins, 1993)—a principle important to building unity within struggles against social injustice—failure to expand microaggression research to general populations would trivialize the experience of microaggression by oppressed populations if it did not seek to understand the question of severity of impact, measured in terms of frequency and longevity and in ways to be determined.

Tenth, future research would benefit from exposing research participants to a simple paragraph length rendition of each of the three sources of injustice presented here. Participants would also be asked to choose which source(s) of injustice were seen as most closely related to the events in the experiential vignette they shared. Researchers could also themselves code the vignettes without being privy to the participant's evaluation. In these ways, progress could be made toward a better

understanding of the nature of social injustice and the myriad acts associated with microaggression. Finally, because microaggressions impair effective human relationships, future research should draw upon self-determination theory, a psychological theory of human needs for relatedness, competence, and autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 2000), as well as a compatible theory of human need that stresses the significance of human relationships for achieving health and autonomy needs (Doyal & Gough, 1991; Gough, 2015).

Conclusion

One of the author's instructors, the late Paul Byers of Columbia University Teacher's College (Byers, 1977), called for research on human relations that uses an epistemological perspective to understand the significance of results for social theory. He distinguished between findings that stress what people do and those that help us think about who people are. This distinction between does and is, between doing and being, is not a trivial one. Byers felt that research should help us expand the horizons of our research domain.

At the time Byers wrote, Chester Pierce was already suggesting that microaggressions were an important aspect of human communication. Since that time, microaggression research has addressed nearly every recognized form of social oppression. Byers's work, as well as the theory and compendium presented here, suggest that research on microaggression should attend to the full range of human emotions experienced in connection with the everyday experience of moments of oppression, dehumanization, and exploitation. After all, when research related to the experience of oppression is done using data collected at the individual level, it can and should still be analyzed at the unit of analysis of the structures that have an effect on individuals (Fine, 2006; Opotow, 2002; cited by Fine, 2006). In this article, three such structures have been suggested: the social systems of oppression, dehumanization, and exploitation.

Not all knowledge development takes the form of published formal research and/or theory. This article was based upon classroom exercises (Dover, 2008), and one article reviewed was rooted in a training exercise (Young et al., 2015). Although such exercises do not represent formal experiments, they can generate theory and professional understanding of the nature of microaggressions.

Also, practitioners can contribute to knowledge development about microaggressions through the use of process recordings in the evaluation of practice. Nearly all helping professionals and client populations have multiple memberships in social groups that influence our human interactions in many capacities, including participation in social groups that are both dominant and subordinate and participation from the standpoint of various social positions within cultural, organizational, and institutional environments. Recognition of within-group and between-group similarities and differences in the experience of microaggression and the diversity of social positions suggests an expanded use of the collection of words and affective phrases as part of research on the nature of microaggression.

This recognition can also inform the evaluation of practice. By examining the unit of analysis of the practice decision, defined as something said or not said, done or not done at a particular moment, helping professionals can learn to avoid producing microaggressions in our work with clients and communities. Process recordings can also serve as the basis for writing narratives of practice for publication in interdisciplinary journals such as *Reflections: Narratives of Professional Helping*.

One tradition in the literature on microaggressions has been a first-person account of the experience of microaggression (Sue et al., 2007). Rarely, however, has an author provided an account of the commission of a microaggression. In one published account of the present author's practice, there were certainly examples of microaggression (Dover, 2009), including the time I abruptly shut off the radio at a group home, only to later realize how I had failed to understand the depth of the oppression faced by the residents. None of us are immune from the production of microaggression, few of us are free of its experience, and we are all positioned to observe and respond to such acts. Using process recordings to remember and document how one felt (or didn't feel), what one said (or

didn't say), and did (or didn't do) within a professional or other human interaction is perhaps the best way to systematically understand, learn to avoid, and learn how to respond to microaggressions that are initiated, received, or observed. Increased attention by field instructors, students, educators, practitioners and researchers to microaggressions, and to the sources of the injustice that produce them, can contribute to practice and activism geared toward achieving social justice for clients and communities.

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