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Spring 4-2021

## Self Affirmations and the Perception of Micro-aggressions

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### Recommended Citation

Groves, Madison, "Self Affirmations and the Perception of Micro-aggressions" (2021). *Psychology Student Research Showcase*. 49.

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# Self-Affirmation on the Perception of Microaggressions Madison Groves



## Background

### Microaggressions

Microaggressions are defined as discriminatory comments or actions towards a particular group of individuals that can either be intentional or unintentional (Patel, 2015).

- Microaggressions are a more subtle form of racism and can be just as harmful as more explicit acts of discrimination.
- Three types of microaggressions: micro-insults, micro-assaults, and microinvalidations (Torres-Harding et al, 2017).
  - Micro-insults: language or actions that can be perceived as offensive
  - Micro-assaults: explicit acts of racism
  - Microinvalidations: an instance in which an individual feels not valued or looked down upon due to certain factors

### Self-Affirmations

The self-affirmation theory is defined as the belief of the self as good and valued is essential to psychological well-being (Little et al, 2017)

- Completing self-affirmations inflates the individual perception of self-worth, while also decreasing defensive responses in favor of more adaptive behaviors (Little et al, 2017).
- In a previous study conducted with White and Latino students on the perception of racism on minority groups, the researchers found that the completion of self-affirmations significantly decreased the differences in group perceptions of racism (Adams et al, 2006).

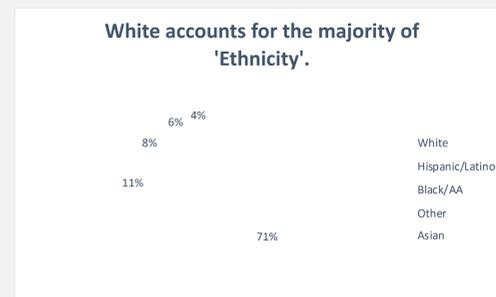
### Hypotheses

- Participants who complete the high-level self-affirmations will rate the microaggressions as more explicit or severe.
- Participants who complete the low-level self-affirmations will not rate the microaggressions as explicit or severe.
- Participants will rate micro-assaults as more explicit than the other types of microaggressions

## Method

### Participants

- The sample consisted of 100 University Mary of Washington students over the age of 18
- Participant age range was 18-31 with the average age being 20.07 years old (SD = 2.12)
- Of the 100 participants, 71% were White, 8% were Black, 11% were Hispanic/Latino, 4% were Asian, and 6% other
- Of the 100 participants, 67% identified as female, 31% as male, 1% as non-binary, and 1% as transgender



### Materials

- Consent form
- Demographic screening (age, race/ethnicity, and gender identity)
- Microaggression vignettes adapted from previous research on the perception of gender microaggressions in the workplace (Basford et al, 2013).
- Debriefing form

## Procedure

- Participants were recruited through SONA and the UMW psychology pool
- Subjects read through the consent form
- Answered demographic questions
- Randomly selected to complete the high-level or low-level self-affirmation manipulation
- Read through all levels of the sample microaggression vignettes depicting interpersonal scenarios
- Vignettes were counterbalanced
- Participants rated the vignettes on the Likert scale according to how explicit they believed the microaggression to be
- Read debriefing form

## Results

A counterbalanced condition was included but was determined not be significant as a main effect,  $F(3, 96) = 1.06, p = .37, R^2 = .03$ , or in the interaction,  $F(9, 288) = 1.50, p = .15, R^2 = .05$

- There was no effect of order, and the order did not interact with any other variables

Of the types of microaggression, micro-assaults were rated the highest in terms of severity across all conditions ( $M = 2.03, SD = 0.82$ )

### Means and Standard Deviations (in parentheses) of Microaggression Ratings by Level of Self-Affirmation and Type of Microaggression

Type of Microaggression	Self-Affirmation	
	High	Low
Microinvalidation	0.98 (0.81)	0.88 (0.75)
Microinsult	2.04 (0.72)	1.22 (0.77)
Micro-assault	2.37 (0.60)	1.67 (0.88)
Control	0.51 (0.73)	0.45 (0.71)

A 2 x 4 mixed ANOVA was conducted to examine the effects of self-affirmation (high vs. low) and the type of microaggression (microinvalidation, micro-insult, micro-assault, and control) on the rating of microaggression severity

- Significant interaction between self-affirmation and type of microaggression,  $F(3, 294) = 14.55, p < .001, R^2 = .13$
- Significant main effect of self-affirmation,  $F(1, 98) = 12.11, p < .001, R^2 = .11$
- Significant main effect of type of microaggression,  $F(3, 294) = 180.75, p < .001, R^2 = .65$

Note: These data were generated by Dr. Stebbins for the purpose of this assignment.

## Discussion

### Conclusion

- Study found that there was a significant difference in the perception of microaggression in terms of self-affirmation.
- Those participants who completed the high-level self-affirmations rated the microaggressions as more severe than those who completed the low-level self-affirmations
- The type of microaggression was also significant, as micro-assaults were consistently rated as more severe across both conditions
- This may be explained by the fact that self-affirming reduces defensive behaviors, which allows individuals to accurately perceive discrimination

### Limitations

- The sample size was small ( $n = 100$ )
- Sample was one of convenience
- Sample was predominately White
- Small age variability

### Future Research

- Use a larger sample size
- No convenience sampling
- Focus research specifically on micro-assaults
- Explore other factors that may play a part in the perception of microaggressions

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