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Title
Toxic Rain in Class

Permalink

Journal
Educational Researcher, 44(3)

ISSN
0013-189X

Authors
Suárez-Orozco, Carola
Casanova, Saskias
Martin, Margary
et al.

Publication Date
2015-04-01

DOI
10.3102/0013189x15580314

Peer reviewed

Toxic Rain in Class: Classroom Interpersonal Microaggressions

Carola Suárez-Orozco[1], Saskias Casanova[2], Margary Martin[3], Dalal Katsiaficas[1], Veronica Cuellar[4], Naila Antonia Smith[5], and Sandra Isabel Dias[6]

In this article we share exploratory findings from a study that captures microaggressions (MAs) in vivo to shed light on how they occur in classrooms. These brief and commonplace indignities communicate derogatory slights and insults toward individuals of underrepresented status contributing to invalidating and hostile learning experiences. Our aim is to expand the ways in which we research and think about MAs in educational settings. Our data are drawn from structured observations of 60 diverse classrooms on three community college campuses. Our findings provide evidence that classroom MAs occur frequently—in nearly 30% of the observed community college classrooms. Although cultural/racial as well as gendered MAs were observed, the most frequent types of MAs were those that undermined the intelligence and competence of students. MAs were more likely to be delivered on campuses with the highest concentration of minority students and were most frequently delivered by instructors. We conclude by reflecting on the implications of these events for classroom climate and make recommendations for both future research and practice.

Keywords: colleges; descriptive analysis; diversity; ethnography; higher education; mixed methods; multiculturalism; professional development; qualitative research; research methodology; social context

Microaggressions (MAs) are "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) toward individuals of underrepresented status. There is mounting evidence that subtle MAs have negative emotional, cognitive, and behavioral implications for their victims (Sue, 2010c). These MAs are often delivered carelessly without thought. Though the intent of the person initiating the MA may not consciously be to render harm, the victim often reports that she or he feels distinctly uncomfortable afterwards (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Sue, 2010b; Sue et al., 2007).

MAs have been documented in a variety of contexts, including the workplace (Deitch et al., 2003; Sue, 2010b), clinical practice (Johnston & Nadal, 2010; Sue et al., 2007), as well as educational settings (Minikel-Lacocque, 2013; Sue, 2010c). In education, much of the work in the field has emerged from 4-year college settings and from the victim's point of view (Lau & Williams, 2010; Solórzano et al., 2000). Further, most research on MAs has been studied retrospectively, with individuals reporting their memories of how MAs affected them (Lau &

Williams, 2010). In this article we share exploratory findings from a study that captures covert MAs in vivo to shed light on how such MAs occur in the classroom, expanding the ways in which we research and think about MAs in educational settings.

MAs—An Elusive But Toxic Bias

The theory of *racial* MA was initially introduced as a form of enduring bias encountered by African Americans (Pierce, 1974, 1995). Pierce argued that the cumulative burden of ongoing microaggressive indignities was damaging to an individual's self-confidence and health (Pierce, 1995) and that these denigrations were the most fundamental remaining form of racism in the post–Civil Rights era (Pierce, 1974). Although arguably overt

[1]University of California, Los Angeles, CA
[2]Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ
[3]Brown University, Providence, RI
[4]Children's Aid Society, New York, NY
[5]Fordham University, New York, NY
[6]New York University, New York, NY

forms of racism and discrimination have declined over the last few decades, covert racism and implicit biases have remained stubbornly intractable (Devos & Banaji, 2005; Dovidio & Gaertner, 1996). The applications of the concept of MAs have since been extended beyond race to other underrepresented and disparaged or devalued groups, including Latinos (Minikel-Lacoque, 2013; Rivera, Forquer, & Rangel, 2010), Asian Americans (Lin, 2010; Ong, Burrow, Fuller-Rowell, Ja, & Sue, 2013), women (Capodilupo et al., 2010), LGBT populations (Nadal, Rivera, & Corpus, 2010), religious minorities (Nadal, Issa, Griffin, Hamit, & Lyons, 2010), individuals of low socioeconomic status (Smith & Redington, 2010), and people with disabilities (Keller & Galgay, 2010), among others.

MAs are by their very nature elusive. The sting of the words (or actions) seem trivial to the perpetrator/initiator—who recognizes neither his or her position of privilege nor the multiple previous incidents that may have been encountered by the victim over the course of a lifetime (Solórzano et al., 2000; Sue, Capodilupo, Nadal, & Torino, 2008). Typically, the perpetrator delivers a comment without forethought and, if questioned, responds that the comment was not ill-intentioned or that the victim was being overly sensitive (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012; Sue et al., 2007; Sue, 2010b, 2010c). The reality of the victim's experience may be called into question (Sue et al., 2008) without recognition of the cumulative burden and fatigue of ongoing questioning of legitimacy (Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007; Sue, 2010a).

There is a notable and emerging body of evidence demonstrating the negative associations between MAs and an array of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral outcomes. Anxiety, depression, and anger are all associated with exposure to MAs (Sue, 2010c). At least two forms of cognitive distraction and disruption of attention arise following microaggressive events—an attempt to make meaning of the event (Did that really just happen?) (Sue, 2010c) and activation of a stereotype threat (Do I have to prove myself as a member of my group *yet again*?). Behavioral disruptions following a microaggressive event can lead to an individual's disengagement resulting from feeling disempowered or initiated as an act of protest (Sue, 2010c). In addition to the immediate effects, there are the cumulative effects of continuous "Othering" and questioning of social belongingness (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012; Pierce, 1995; Sue, 2010a).

MAs in Educational Settings

As educational settings increasingly serve students from a broad variety of backgrounds and social circumstances, MAs on campuses are a growing concern. Several studies in education have shed important light on this phenomenon. In a seminal study using focus group interviews, Solórzano et al. (2000) linked MAs to "self-doubt and frustration as well as isolation" (p. 69) for African American college students. In a retrospective study—unusual because of its focus on the K-12 experience—students of color recalled MAs that specifically targeted their names (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012). In a recent case study of six Latino students attending a primarily majority-serving college, participants voiced their frustration over their disempowerment following MAs (Minikel-Lacoque, 2013); this study made the

important distinction between *overt, intentional microassaults* (e.g., name calling) and *covert*, often unconsciously rendered, more elusive MAs (what Sue et al., 2007, defined as *microinsults and microinvalidations*).

Using focus group data, Sue et al. reported that MAs delivered within the classroom can lead to "difficult dialogues on race" (Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo, & Rivera, 2009, p. 183). Participants reported classroom conversations that were "emotionally charged" (p. 183) and fraught with misunderstandings, hostile dialogues, and hurt feelings, and they reported that instructors were ill-prepared to facilitate such conversations. These difficult racial dialogues are challenging to address for both White faculty (Sue, Torino, Capodilupo, Rivera, & Lin, 2009) and faculty of color (Sue et al., 2011). Microaggressive events in the classroom led to eruptions followed by silencing of students. Thus, emerging research suggests that microaggressive interactions are linked to "a hostile and invalidating learning environment" (Sue, 2010b, p. 235).

To date, most research on MAs in educational settings has primarily been qualitative in nature, based on small samples participating in focus groups or interviews (Lau & Williams, 2010). This research has been mostly retrospective in nature, asking participants to reflect on their past experiences—with overremembering, underremembering, as well as misremembering being possible biases (Lau & Williams, 2010). One notable exception is a study of over 150 Asian American college students who kept daily diaries for 14 days of their self-reported experiences of MAs, affect, and somatic symptoms; multilevel analyses showed that elevations in daily MAs predicted negative affect and increases in somatic symptoms (Ong et al., 2013). This body of research to date has shed important light on victims' experiences of this phenomenon. A critical next step in this field, however, as Lau and Williams (2010) have suggested, would be to observe the effects of MAs in "real-life settings" (p. 319) as they occur.

Thus far, most of the work on MAs has taken place in 4-year college settings (Lau & Williams, 2010). Community colleges represent an interesting learning context of study for MAs, as they are at the midway point between 4-year institutions and public high schools. As institutions of higher education, community colleges share some structural similarities with 4-year college settings; however, as open-access, affordable, second-chance settings, community colleges also serve a broad array of racial/ethnic minority and fewer socioeconomically advantaged students represented in our public high schools (Bailey, 2009; Bailey & Morest, 2006). Community college students are often subjected to negative racialized stereotyping of intellectual inferiority (Jain, Herrera, Bernal, & Sólorzano, 2011; Rhoads & Valadez, 1996). As such, community colleges are an important context to examine MAs.

In sum, foundational research on MAs in higher education has been conducted almost exclusively in 4-year institutions, been retrospective in nature, and has tended to examine the implications of the effects on the individual who was victimized rather than considering classroom implications. In this study we sought to build upon this important research and explore ways of observing and recording real-time covert MAs in community college classrooms.

The Current Study

We draw from the Research on Immigrants in Community College (RICC) Study, a multiphase embedded mixed-methods study (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011). The aim of RICC was to examine the relationship between classroom and campus settings and academic engagement and performance in community college settings, focusing on the experience of immigrant-origin students. Data collection took place in three phases: Phase 1—campus ethnographies, 60 structured classroom observations, nine focus groups; Phase 2—646 student surveys matched to student records; and Phase 3—60 semistructured interviews with students and 45 interviews with instructors and administrators. This article draws upon data from MA observations collected as part of a structured classroom observation protocol during Phase 1. MAs were documented as part of the classroom observation by using a specially designed protocol (Alicea, Suárez-Orozco, Singh, Darbes, & Abrica, under review).

As part of that study, we wanted to document the kinds of classroom climates that immigrant-origin students were experiencing. Excellent work has been done in this regard ethnographically in community colleges. We wanted to extend this work by doing systematic observations of classrooms. Although structured classroom observations have been done in K-12 research, they have not been similarly conducted in community college classrooms (Pianta & Hamre, 2009). Thus, we set out to develop a systematic protocol that could be replicated across classrooms by a team of graduate research assistants. Given that the settings we were observing served students from a broad variety of backgrounds and social circumstances, we thought it was very important to capture whether or not MAs occurred during instruction as an important aspect of the classroom climate.

Our conceptualization of MAs was influenced by both sociological (e.g., Solórzano et al., 2000) and psychological (e.g., Sue et al., 2007) traditions in the field. The sociological perspective uses Critical Race Theory to frame researchers' work in this field (Solórzano et al., 2000). Because immigrant-origin students in contemporary society are "otherized" in a variety of ways that include race, undocumented status, accent and language, as well as poverty (Suárez-Orozco, Tseng, & Yoshikawa, 2015; Viruell-Fuentes, Miranda, & Abdulrahim, 2012), we used an intersectionality framework (Cole, 2009; Syed, 2010) in our approach to this research. Hence, we assumed that MAs could and would be initiated and perpetrated according to various social categories and that these categories would be jointly associated. Therefore, we set out to capture a wide array of observed MAs as they occurred, including, but not limited to, racial MAs, and then analyzed for intersectionality. Lastly, whereas we recognize that many MAs are highly subjective events (Solórzano et al., 2000; Sue et al., 2008), we expected that at least some of these events would be observable and that the field would be advanced by such observation (Lau & Williams, 2010).

We address the following research questions:

1. To what extent do MAs emerge across campuses and classroom types?
2. What types of MAs are delivered in diverse community college classrooms?

Methods

Campus Settings

Three distinct community colleges in the New York City metropolitan area were selected to participate in the RICC study with the explicit intention of including institutions with varying campus-level characteristics and contexts. All participating community colleges offer 2-year public associate's degree programs and serve low-income, ethnic minority, and immigrant-origin commuter populations. Located in a low-resourced neighborhood, Taino (all campus names are pseudonyms) serves predominately Latino (64%) and Black (31%) students. In 2012, only 2% of the students were White, and 3% were Asian/Pacific Islander. More than 90% of student body members report speaking a language other than English at home. Located in the burgeoning downtown section of a large urban center, Domino, the second school, focuses heavily on technological education and serves diverse populations of students: 32.5% Black (non-Latino), 33.2% Latino, 19.2% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 11.2%, White (non-Latino). Forty percent of the students were born outside of the United States, coming from 134 countries, and 62% report speaking a language other than English at home. The third school, Oakmont, although a commuter school, physically resembles more traditional 4-year university campuses. It is located in an affluent suburban county known for long-standing class-based (i.e., socioeconomic) segregation. Reflecting the shifting demographics of the county, the student population has become increasingly diverse. Forty-two percent of the student population is foreign-born, and 49% of the students identify as White, 28% as Latino, and 21% as Black.

Classrooms selected for observation included at least four RICC study participants, ranging in ages between 18 and 25 and coming from a broad variety of backgrounds and social circumstances. The observed race/ethnicity of the students across the different types of classrooms illustrates the diversity that exists in the different types of classrooms (e.g., general education, remedial, and vocational; see Table 1). The faculty who agreed to have their classrooms observed included both full-time instructors and adjuncts from an array of backgrounds; they were mostly female (58.3%) and White (55%; see Tables 2 and 3 for instructor characteristics by course type and campus, respectively).

Classroom Observation Protocol

The Classroom Interpersonal Microaggressions Protocol was developed to capture MAs in "real time." We defined MAs as "subtle, everyday (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) insults, indignities, and demeaning messages directed automatically or unconsciously towards under-represented persons or people of color." The observation protocol includes a section in which to check who initiated the event/the perpetrator (student or instructor), toward whom the MA was directed/the victim (student, instructor, or unclear), student responses (no response, intervened, escalated, visibly upset, withdrawn, other), and instructor responses (no response, intervened, escalated, visibly

Table 1
Student Characteristics by Course Type

| | Course Type | | | |
Student Characteristic	General Education	Vocational	Remedial	Total
Students in all 60 observed classrooms by classroom type				
Female	51.1%	26.4%	22.5%	57.3%
Students of color	86.6%	79.7%	86.7%	84.7%
Students in 17 classrooms where microaggressions occurred by classroom type				
Female	44.9%	12.3%	42.8%	47.6%
Students of color	89.7%	92.4%	87.2%	89.2%

Note. The observers were asked to note the gender and race/ethnicity composition of the classrooms they observed. These data were missing from 1.7% observation protocols.

Table 2
Instructor Characteristics by Course Type

| | General Education ($n = 29$) (48.3%) | | Vocational ($n = 14$) (23.3%) | | Remedial ($n = 17$) (28.3%) | | Total ($N = 60$) (100%) | |
Instructor Characteristic	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Faculty in all 60 observed classrooms								
Female	17	58.6%	8	57.1%	11	64.7%	36	60.0%
Asian	6	20.7%	1	7.1%	1	5.9%	8	13.3%
Black	5	17.2%	1	7.1%			6	10.0%
Latino	3	10.3%	2	14.3%	2	11.8%	7	11.7%
White	14	48.3%	9	64.3%	13	76.5%	36	60.0%
Unclear/unknown	1	3.4%	1	7.1%	1	5.9%	3	5.0%
Faculty in 17 classrooms where microaggressions occurred								
Female	3	42.9%	1	33.3%	5	71.4%	9	52.9%
Asian	2	28.6%	1	33.3%			3	17.6%
Black	2	28.6%	1	33.3%			3	17.6%
Latino	1	14.3%					1	5.9%
White	2	28.6%	1	33.3%	6	85.7%	9	52.9%
Unclear/unknown					1	14.3%	1	5.9%

Table 3
Instructor Characteristics by Campus

| | Taino ($n = 8$) | | Domino ($n = 6$) | | Oakmont ($n = 3$) | | Total CIMA Classrooms ($N = 17$) | | Total for All Observed Classrooms ($N = 60$) | |
Instructor Characteristic	n	%	n	%	n	%	N	%	N	%
Gender										
Male	6	75.0%	2	33.3%			8	47.1%	24	40.0%
Female	2	25.0%	4	66.7%	3	100.0%	9	52.9%	36	60.0%
Race/ethnicity										
Asian			2	33.3%	1	33.3%	3	17.7%	8	13.3%
Black	1	12.5%	2	33.3%			3	17.6%	6	10.0%
Latino	1	12.5%					1	5.9%	7	11.7%
White	6	75.0%	1	16.7%	2	66.7%	9	52.9%	36	60.0%
Unclear/unknown			1	16.7%			1	5.9%	3	5.0%

upset, withdrawn, other). It also provides additional space where the observer can supply an ethnographic narrative account of the MA as well as the event(s) immediately leading up to and following the MA (see Online Appendix available on the journal website for protocol).

Training process. All members of the data collection team underwent 6 hours of rigorous training to learn the protocol, and interrater agreement was established before they entered the field. The data collection team was made up of a diverse group of graduate student researchers (six Latinas/Latinos, two Black Caribbeans, three Asians, and one White; two male and the rest female) as well as postdoctorate researchers. Prior to attending the training workshops, all team members read Sue et al.'s (2007) *American Psychologist* article on MAs and Solórzano et al.'s (2000) "Critical Race Theory, Racial Microaggressions, and Campus Race Life." All observers read a detailed manual specifically designed for this study that included descriptions of key concepts (see Online Appendix available on the journal website). They participated in a 2-day guided practice and reliability training that included extensive coding and feedback sessions using videotaped community college classroom footage. At the initial training, the team discussed examples of racism, negative references to countries of origin, immigrant status (including unauthorized status), intelligence or capabilities, homophobia, references to atypical use of language (use of a foreign language, accented English, or use of nonstandard English), disparaging references to religion, and sexist references and sexual innuendos as well as derisions of socioeconomic status. The follow-up workshop focused on the observation protocol notes section and strategies for writing ethnographic field notes (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). In order to enhance comparability of observations and assess interrater agreement, the team watched videos of class sessions containing MAs, filled out protocols, and discussed their notes.

Data Collection

Recruitment and sample. Sixty classrooms were observed—18 at Domino, 20 at Oakmont, and 22 at Taino. We purposefully sampled a variety of disciplines (math, science, language arts, and humanities) as well as different types of courses (29 general education, 17 remedial, and 14 vocational classes). Classroom observations were arranged with consent from tenured and adjunct faculty; instructors were told that we were observing classroom interactions and classroom engagement.

Observing MAs. For each classroom observation, two members of the research team attended a class session, arriving 10 minutes prior to class and continuing to observe for 10 minutes after it. During the observations, researchers recorded their notes independently for the length of the observation. Upon observing a potential microaggressive event, the researchers took detailed field notes. After the observation, they transferred their field notes to the MAs protocol. Finally, they turned in both their original field notes and their annotated notes, which included a summary and reflective memo about the event(s).

Data Analysis

To conduct our exploratory analysis, we followed a strategy involving both categorization and contextualization (Maxwell & Miller, 2008) of the data. To take advantage of the number of observations that had been made, the all-female analysis team (consisting of the White senior author, two Latina postdoctoral fellows, and four graduate students—Latina, Afro-Caribbean, Portuguese American, and Arab American)—conducted descriptive analyses to examine differences across classrooms by event types (Hesse-Biber, 2010), which were further complemented by field notes that contextualized the events.

To answer our first research question regarding the frequency of MAs, we first had to establish whether or not an MA had occurred. Our analysis team met weekly to review completed observations and establish consensual validity (Hill et al., 2005). Each example had to fit the team's established definition of MAs found in the training manual, which was based on the definition developed by Sue et al. (2007) noted at the beginning of this article. During each meeting, we also reviewed the observation notes from the class in which the MA had been reported to contextualize each MA event. Once all MAs had been identified, the descriptive statistics of the MAs were tabulated by type of classroom and campus.

To examine our second research question regarding the typologies of MAs, the research team developed codes based upon the categories that had emerged from the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994), guided by deductive codes that had been introduced by Sue et al. (2007). Each category was then defined, and exemplars of each typology were compiled to anchor the codes. All of the identified MAs were then coded for typology.

The third research question focused on the initiators/perpetrators and targets/victims of each MA. The observer checked off who had initiated (i.e., the perpetrator of) the observed MA (instructor or student) and who had been targeted (i.e., the victim) on the MA protocol. We then conducted descriptive analyses, employing Chi-square analysis, to determine significant differences between the initiators/perpetrators and targets/victims types.

Findings

Frequency of MAs

Out of the 60 classrooms observed, at least one MA was identified in 17 classrooms (28.3%). Furthermore, in 14 of these microaggressive classrooms, an MA event occurred more than once (ranging from 2 to 10 times in the same class session). Thus, a total of 51 MAs were recorded in the 17 classrooms where MAs had been observed.

The 51 MAs were observed most frequently in the two campuses that served predominantly racial/ethnic minority students: 11.8% of the MAs occurred at Oakmont versus 35.3% at Domino and 52.9% at Taino, $\chi^2(2,51) = 13.1$, $p < .001$. Furthermore, of the 60 classrooms, MAs were observed in 41.2% of all remedial classrooms, compared to MAs observed only in 24.1% of all general education classrooms and 21.4% of all

Table 4
Microaggression Occurrences in Observed Classrooms by Course Type

Course Type	CIMA Occurrence	
	Total Classes Observed	Classes With at Least One CIMA
Remedial	17 (28.3%)	7 (41.2%)
General education	29 (48.3%)	7 (24.1%)
Vocational	14 (23.3%)	3 (21.4%)
Total	60 (100%)	17 (28.3%)

vocational classrooms (see Table 4). Given the relatively small sample size, we could not confidently calculate statistical significance among course types to see if campuses differed; nonetheless, these findings suggest that MAs disproportionately occurred in remedial courses relative to general education and vocational courses.

MA Types

Four predominant categories emerged from our data analyses: intelligence (n = 30), cultural/racial (n = 12), gendered (n = 4), and intersectional (n = 5) MAs.

Intelligence-related MAs. Sue (2010a) described "ascription of intelligence" as MAs that are intended to demean a person's intellectual competence by questioning his or her intelligence based on his or her group membership. A classic example would be asking a woman how she became so good at math (the underlying assumption being that women cannot do math). In the context of our study, the intelligence-typed MAs were also expressed as a challenge to the student's college identity. This questioning of intelligence and competence occurred frequently during our observations; intelligence-typed MAs were the most frequent type of observed MA, occurring in 59% (n = 30) of observed MAs, $\chi^2(3,51) = 34.1$, $p < .001$.

The following example from a general education math course illustrates this point (all names are pseudonyms):

> After collecting quizzes from students, the instructor states: "Now you got to show your work." He asks a young Latino male to come to the board to solve a problem. The student attempts the problem but gets the wrong answer. The professor states, "You need to do it like you are in kindergarten, that way you make no mistakes, right? Write this 17 times [he writes, "17 times" on the board]—Right, Javier"? Javier looks at the board expressionless.

Cultural/racial MAs. Cultural MAs overtly disparage the assumed cultural backgrounds of the victims and can send messages that certain groups are inferior. This situation might occur, for example, by homogenizing, stereotyping, or pathologizing based on a person's culture or race (Sue, 2010a). These cultural/racial MAs expose biases that reflect cultural or racial stereotypes. We observed cultural/racial MAs that victimized a person's country of origin, immigrant status, ethnicity/race, and linguistic or socioeconomic background.

In a student-to-student exchange, a Latino student approaches a table with several students from a variety of origins. Jokingly he says, "You're spying, man!" A white female with a strong accent looks offended and responds seriously, "Yeah, Eastern Europeans—we're all spies." The two students exchange hard looks before returning to their work.

In a remedial English class, an Asian student encounters a language-based MA when the instructor, while going over a homework assignment, randomly calls on him to answer a question. When he does not respond immediately, the instructor yells, "English Channel!" at the student. The student, flushes, does not respond and is silent for the duration of the class.

In another example, another instructor in a remedial English course asks her class, "Have any of you ever visited a prison?" As some students raise their hands, the professor continues, "Better yet have any of you been to prison?" As students share their experiences with the prison system, the professor insists, "Use I statements." In this incident, the instructor makes assumptions about the criminal experience of her community college students that she is unlikely to have made if she had been teaching a middle or upper class student body.

Gendered MAs. Gendered MAs refer to gendered roles, sexuality, sexual objectification, or sexual orientation (Sue, 2010a). We observed nine gendered MAs, five of which occurred in combination with either cultural- or intelligence-based MAs.

In the example below from a philosophy class, the male instructor reinforces negative stereotypes of women.

> "Anyone know somebody beautiful?" A male student responds, "I know someone beautiful. She is an exotic dancer. …" The instructor continues the gendered discourse by adding, "I'm in love with a stripper." The class laughs in response. … Later, the instructor asserts: "Beauty is power. Who uses it more?" Most of the students respond "women." Continuing along this discussion, the instructor calls on a male student by name and elicits the response "women."

The instructor brings up the topic of beauty, which the students turn into a gendered conversation focusing on stereotypes of women. The instructor encourages the discussion rather than steering back to neutral ground and, in so doing, perpetuates gendered stereotypes

Intersectional MAs. Individuals can identify with multiple social groupings. An individual's intersectional identity may be

composed of a combination of group belongings, some of which may be marginalized (Purdie-Vaughs & Eibach, 2008), such as being Black, Dominican, and female. On several occasions, multiple identities were overtly targeted in the same MA. We coded intersectional MAs as those that conveyed biases against a combination of a victim's gender, intelligence, and/or culture. Of the five MAs typed as multiple/intersecting, two involved culture/race and gender, two targeted intelligence and gender, and one combined intelligence, gender, and culture/race.

An example of an intersecting-typed MA targeting both race and gender was observed in a remedial English class:

> The White instructor started to speak about Thomas Jefferson and his relationship with his slave Sally Hemings. A Black male student asked, "He raped her?" The instructor disagreed, saying, "He had three or four children with her." The student then asked, "Oh, so he had a relationship with her?" The instructor replied, "He was an honorable guy. He bought her a sandwich." [The instructor] grinned, evoking what seemed to be uncomfortable laughter from the students in the class.

In this case, the instructor conjured an example from history of an exploited Black slave woman. When a Black student suggested the possibility of abuse, the instructor quickly dismissed the likelihood by (1) suggesting that Jefferson was "honorable," (2) maintaining that it does not follow that additional children would be born after a rape, and (3) making light of the matter by equating the provision of a "sandwich" with some kind of courtship.

Perpetrators and Victims

Instructors were most frequently the perpetrators of the MAs recorded ($n = 45$), $\chi^2(1,51) = 29.82$, $p < .001$. The majority of the instructors' MAs (41 out of 45) were directed at a specific student (e.g., the intelligence MA listed above), though some were undirected, with no specific victim (e.g., the prison cultural/racial MA noted above). The six MAs initiated by students were never directed at an instructor. Most of the student-initiated MAs targeted other students.

MAs occurred most often in remedial classrooms (see Table 4) where the majority of faculty members were White (see Table 2). Interestingly, though the literature predominantly considers MAs perpetuated by members of the majority on members of underrepresented groups, we found that a diverse range of instructors across the gender, age, and ethnicity/race spectrum initiated MAs.

Discussion

Each MA is a toxic raindrop over time on its victim's well-being (Meyer, 2003; Sue, 2010c) falling corrosively into learning environments. The extant literature on MAs has clearly articulated their negative cumulative effects on individual well-being across a variety of domains of functioning in a number of settings (Sue, 2010a, 2010b). With this research we have contributed to an understanding of how to systematically capture this phenomenon in classroom environments.

Our novel research approach took on the challenge of capturing MAs as they occurred during class sessions (Lau & Williams, 2010). Rather than exclusively burdening the victims with the responsibility of reporting these incidents retroactively, we trained observers to recognize events and capture them as they occurred. Although we cannot claim random sampling, by collecting observations from several types of campuses and a range of classrooms, we attempted to represent a variety of classrooms and subject areas. While just a snapshot, our findings provide evidence that classroom interpersonal MAs are pervasive—occurring in nearly 30% of the community college classrooms that we observed.

We found that although cultural/racial and gendered MAs were uniquely observed, the most frequent types of MAs witnessed were those that attacked the intelligence and competence of students (Sue et al., 2007). Strikingly, these intelligence- and competence-related MAs were observed in the institutions with the highest concentrations of racial/ethnic minority students. As we consider this finding, it is useful to draw upon both critical race theories (Solórzano, 1998) and intersectionality theories (Cole, 2009; Syed, 2010). For visible racial/ethnic minority students, race is a central feature of their educational experiences (Solórzano, 1998). Furthermore, students are members of multiple subordinate groups concurrently and experience stereotyping and expectations on any number of levels. When stereotyping and MAs occur, the attribution of a category that is the cause for stereotyping may not necessarily be obvious (Cole, 2009; Syed, 2010). Nonetheless, expectations and stereotypes are a daily part of experience.

Community colleges, which serve primarily low-income students from traditionally underserved backgrounds, are settings that have been documented to have low expectations of their students (Jain et al., 2011; Rhoads & Valadez, 1996). Instructors were far more likely to initiate MAs than students were, reflecting power dynamics in the classroom (Sue et al., 2008). The comments made by instructors were often sarcastic and laced with their obvious frustration with students (Cox, 2009). Most often, the MAs were directed to a specific student rather than directed to the class as a whole. Many of the observed MAs served to convey a sense of low teacher expectations (Weinstein, 2002). The kinds of classroom interactions we observed, especially those that happen over time and across numerous classroom settings, have the potential to reinforce stereotype vulnerability (Aronson & Inzlicht, 2004), undermine academic self-concept (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003), and activate stereotype threat (Steele, 1997) for its victims. This development is deeply concerning, as students representing a variety of backgrounds and social circumstances will continue to be increasingly present in every classroom.

Both Sue (2010c) and Solórzano et al. (2000) hypothesized that there are negative cognitive and emotional as well as behavioral implications following a person being subjected to MAs. We witnessed numerous MAs that undermined student intelligence in these classrooms serving students from diverse backgrounds. Our study provides a window into the embodiment of low instructor expectations in the form of MAs and the ways in which they may act as a powerful undertow in the poor performances of these students (Riley & Ungerleider, 2012) and has implications for the applications of MA research to classroom climate research.

Limitations and Future Research

Although this study sheds light on how MAs occur in the classroom, there are a number of limitations to this research. One of this study's contributions to the field is the development of a way to observe MAs. Observation of MAs is limited, however, as it cannot capture the individual's experience. Future studies should include member checks in order to triangulate perspectives on events. For example, anxiety and depression, understandable responses to MAs, are not as easily observed as withdrawal or anger is. Nor can one readily observe cognitive responses such as the activation of stereotype threat following repeated assaults on one's perceived intelligence (Steele, 1997) in events like the ones we observed occurring across multiple class contexts that serve visible racial/ethnic minorities. In addition, we were not able to observe the longer term consequences of these events. Thus, observations of MAs should be viewed as one of several tools used in triangulated research on classroom MAs.

For a number of reasons, our findings quite possibly underestimate the frequency of microaggressive actions in classrooms. We likely may have been observing the most obvious and least subtle microaggressive events. MAs are by their very nature highly subjective (Sue et al., 2007) and in no small part born of the burden of cumulative racial battle fatigue (Smith et al., 2007). Hence, observers may have missed the subtler, subjectively distressful comments. Instructors were deeply resistant to allowing researchers into their classrooms to conduct observations. Thus, it is unlikely that we accessed the most toxic classrooms on these campuses. In addition, classroom members were conscious of researchers' presence and may have been on their best behavior, thus censoring themselves. Last, capturing microaggressive events was part of a larger classroom observation protocol that required research assistants to multitask, allowing for the potential for them to miss events; videotaping would have allowed for better fidelity to gather events as they unfolded.

We only collected data in three institutions, and these data were collected in community colleges in one metropolitan area. Community college classrooms have some parallels with other educational settings. Like many public high schools, community colleges are open access, serving students from a broad variety of backgrounds and social circumstances. Like 4-year colleges, these schools are postsecondary settings serving an adult student body. Nonetheless, future studies examining MAs should be conducted in additional educational and geographical settings. Future studies should also include more campuses with greater student diversity.

Though our observational team included male observers, our analysis team was exclusively female. This situation was an artifact of conducting the study out of a school of education where males of color are underrepresented and often overextended. Future research endeavors should strive to achieve better balance of research teams by gender. In addition, the demographics (e.g., gender and race/ethnicity) of the students and instructors in the classrooms observed were recorded by the observers rather than self-reported. In the future, students and instructors of classrooms being observed should fill out a demographics form prior to the observation.

Further, only one observation was done in each class. Thus, we do not know if observations were conducted on a particularly bad or good class session. Future studies should videotape or focus only on observing MAs during the class. The same course should be observed across sessions to determine whether class session climates vary or are stable, and the same instructor should be followed to determine whether he or she habitually initiates MAs in his or her classroom. Future studies should also link observations of MAs to other measures of classroom climate, dropout rates, and academic outcomes. Finally, it will be important for intervention studies designed to enhance teacher development to address this important issue.

The aim of this research was twofold. First, we sought to develop an innovative strategy to capture MAs in vivo in classrooms as they occurred. Second, we sought to shed some initial light on the prevalence and types of MAs. This study is clearly but a first step, and much still needs to be done. We leave readers with this thought: As educators, we must consider the "power of words" (Minikel-Lacoque, 2013) and how they may fall like toxic rain in our classrooms. MAs by definition are often unintentional but nonetheless create distinct discomfort for their victims. As educators, we must reflect upon our statements, create classroom climates that do not foster MAs, and develop strategies for addressing MAs when they occur in the classroom. This issue has potential implications for classroom climates across the educational spectrum—from elementary through higher education classrooms. Examining MAs should be an important component of professional development to encourage and provide skills for culturally responsive teaching in order to create more optimal learning environments (Garibay, 2014).

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AUTHORS

CAROLA SUÁREZ-OROZCO, PhD, is a professor of Human Development and Psychology at University of California, Los Angeles, 405 Hilgard Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90095; *csorozco@ucla.edu*. Her research focuses on the adaptation of immigrant origin children and youth.

SASKIAS CASANOVA, PhD, is an Assistant Professor at the School of Transborder Studies, Arizona State University, P.O. Box 876303, Tempe, AZ 85287-6303; *saskias.casanova@asu.edu*. Her research examines the influence of social identity development, stigmatization, and cultural adaptation on the schooling experiences of diverse, immigrant origin, Latino students.

MARGARY MARTIN, PhD, is a visiting assistant professor at Brown University, Department of Education (Human Development), Box 1938, 340 Brook Street, Providence, RI 02912; *margary_martin@brown.edu*. Her research examines how policies and practices employed in educational settings shape the developmental trajectories of immigrant origin students.

DALAL KATSIAFICAS is a doctoral candidate in the Human Development and Psychology program at the University of California, Los Angeles, 405 Hilgard Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90095; *dalalkat@ucla.edu*. Her research focuses on the role of culture and context in shaping the social development of immigrant youth in educational settings.

VERONICA CUELLAR is an Operations Associate with the Family Rewards Program at the Children's Aid Society, 105 E. 22nd St, New York, NY 10010; *veronica.g.cuellar@gmail.com*. Her research focuses on the economic empowerment and upward mobility of disadvantaged communities.

NAILA ANTONIA SMITH is a PhD candidate in the Department of Psychology at Fordham University, 441 E Fordham Road, Bronx, NY 10458; *nsmith20@fordham.edu*. Her research focuses on how sociocontextual factors (family, peers, classroom climate) influence immigrant youth development.

SANDRA ISABEL DIAS, PhD, is a recent counseling psychology graduate from New York University, 246 Greene St, New York, NY 10003; *sid214@nyu.edu*. Her research interest focuses on the community college setting, immigrant origin emerging adults, and their help-seeking practices and beliefs.