

Video: Factual Feminist Is Macro-annoyed with Microaggression Theory

As if there were not enough real aggression in the world, the hothouse climate of American universities has bred infestations of “microaggression”. This noxious weed is causing countless students and staff to break out in a rash of indignation and hurt feelings, and is spreading rapidly through society. The remedy seems to be to bring back the inquisition.

Christina Hoff Sommers, aka The Factual Feminist, is a former philosophy professor and currently a scholar with the American Enterprise Institute. She was recently subjected to one (real) slight, which, as she explains in the video below, qualifies as a classic microaggression.

She brushed it off, as any sane person would do, but remains concerned about how this new bias-sensitive regime “appears to be empowering spies, busybodies, and scolds.”

The following is abridged from Ms Hoff Sommers commentary:

According to Columbia Teacher's College professor Derald Wing Sue, microaggressions are those everyday comments or quips used by the privileged to keep others in their place. Some examples: Asking someone who appears to be Asian or Hispanic where they were born. Using words such as "crazy," or "lame." Calling the United States a melting pot, or referring to a group of women as "you guys." Experts say these comments are "otherizing" and hurtful.

Sue and colleagues argue that microaggressions accumulate to form an invisible, relentless, and degrading system of control. "They deplete psychic energy...produce physical health problems, shorten life expectancy—and deny equal access to education..."

As it turns out, there's no real research to back it up. In a recent paper, Emory University psychologist Scott Lilienfeld exposes at least three fatal flaws in microaggression scholarship:

ONE: Lilienfeld could not find a coherent definition of the term "microaggression." It appears to be anything Dr. Sue and his followers say it is.

TWO: The researchers never bothered to find out if African-American, Hispanics, Asians, Women, are actually OFFENDED by the items on their lists. Members of marginalized groups don't all think or react alike.

THREE: Sue and company claim that microaggressions exact a devastating toll over time. He even mentioned a shortened lifespan. But Lilienfeld couldn't find a single well-designed study linking microaggressions to such outcomes.

Derald Wing Sue replied to Lilienfeld's critique. He concedes

all of Lilienfeld's major points. But he faults Lilienfeld's for his fixation on elitist research methods favored by the "dominant society". By demanding things like valid measurements and evidence of causality, Sue says Lilienfeld is dismissing the "the lived experiences of marginalized groups."

In sum: Sue finds Lilienfeld critique of microaggression theory to be—microaggressive!

But, wait a minute. I am a woman, and I find microaggression theory to be macro-annoying. I'm not bothered when someone addresses my friends and me as "You Guys." Or when they tell lame jokes, pardon the expression.

Who cares? Not me—and I suspect—not most women. So I'm calling out Sue for mansplaining my lived experience as a female identified person. Am I calling Sue and his colleagues microaggressors?

Yes, and that's exactly the problem. The theory is so amorphous that it's meaningless—it can be used by anyone, anywhere, for anything. It's a game we all can play, but none can win. So why play it? Look, I sympathize with school officials want students to be respectful of one another. I want that too. But as the American Civil Liberties Union says, "Verbal purity is not social change."

Bias response teams, anonymous informants, mobile apps—these threaten free expression and suppress normal human interaction. Friendship is the best way to overcome bigotry, real or imagined. Maybe the only way.

A word to university administrators: There's no evidence that microaggressions are hurting your students. But your attempts to eradicate them are hurting freedom and friendship.

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