A NEW GENDER MICROAGGRESSIONS TAXONOMY FOR UNDERGRADUATE WOMEN ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES: A QUALITATIVE EXAMINATION

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Abstract

Gender microaggressions are everyday slights, insults, and invalidations theorized to create and sustain environments in which sexual harassment and assault of women is normative and permissible. Establishing a gender microaggressions taxonomy for undergraduate women may support efforts to improve campus climate and reduce sexual violence. This study aims to identify a gender microaggressions taxonomy for undergraduate women on college campuses. Five qualitative semi-structured focus groups (*N*=23) were conducted with 18–25-year-old undergraduate women. Purposive sampling was employed and directed content analysis was performed. Seven themes emerged: invisibility, intersectionality, caretaker and nurturer, women-dominated occupations, presumed incompetence, sexual objectification, environmental invalidations.

INTRO

Sexual violence is a substantial problem on college campuses, particularly for undergraduate women who consistently report higher rates of nonconsensual sexual contact (23.1% v. 11.7%) and sexual harassment (61.9% v. 47.7%) during their college careers when compared to the general student population (Cantor et al., 2015). The exclusion of subtle gender-based slights and invalidations, known as gender microaggressions, represents a notable gap in the campus sexual violence literature. Specifically, microaggressions are defined as conscious or unconscious verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities that communicate slights or insults to a targeted group (e.g., racial minorities, women, sexual minorities, gender identity minorities; Sue et al., 2007). The study of gender microaggressions, particularly on college campuses, is nascent with a strong reliance on research and theory targeting other marginalized identities (e.g., racial microaggressions) and a small body of empirical work serving as the foundation for gender microaggressions research. Gaining a deeper understanding of gender microaggressions as experienced by undergraduate women has the

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potential to address the substantial disparity in sexual violence prevalence while nurturing healthier and more supportive campus climates for women.

In comparison to overt acts of sexual harassment and assault, gender microaggressions are common, everyday experiences that help to create and sustain environments in which the sexual harassment and assault of women is made normative and permissible (Gartner & Sterzing, 2016). Historically, overt sexual violence, including sexual assault, has been subsumed under the gender microaggressions umbrella (Sue, 2010); however, the categorization of experiences like sexual assault as, in any way, "micro" has been questioned in the gender microaggressions literature (Author et al., In Press). Gender microaggressions' potential contribution to the campus sexual violence literature lies in their subtilty and chronicity. Gender microaggressions have been theorized to be a part of a spectrum of campus sexual violence, with behaviors ranging from chronic and subtle microaggressions to less frequent and overt sexual assault (Gartner & Sterzing, 2016). Gender microaggressions can thus be understood as potential environmental antecedents to sexual violence, such that curbing their frequency would serve to foster more gender-inclusive college campuses and lower rates of more severe sexual violence.

The power of gender microaggressions is rooted in the deeper systems of oppression from which they arise as they both reinforce and mirror a gendered hierarchy (Gartner & Sterzing, 2016). As Hill Collins (2000) writes, "those individuals who stand at the margins of society clarify its boundaries" (p. 77). Through the construction of the Other as outsider and marginal entity, oppression is both justified and necessitated. Binary thinking creates spheres of opposition with the Other defined not only as different, but opposed (Hill Collins, 2000). According to this binary thinking male opposes female, white opposes black, reason opposes emotion. These constructions are not natural or accidental they represent a weaving of male economic self-interest and Western imperialism that restricts access to power, inflicts violence, and systematically disadvantages women, people of color, and those whose position on the margins solidifies and articulates white male privilege (McClintock, 2013). These binary constructions lead to narrowly defined scripts for permissible behaviors. Sexual and gender scripts act like blueprints, specifying the whos, whats, whens, wheres, and whys for behavior and thought, particularly as it relates to gender and sexuality (Simon & Gagnon, 1986). While more overt discrimination and active gender policing may use force and violence (such as sexual assault), gender microaggressions subtly mold thought and behavior through everyday slights, insults, and invalidations reminding women of their prescribed roles while maintaining the ruse of individualism and choice.

Foundational Gender Microaggressions Research

Gender microaggressions research has harnessed prior studies of sexism (Swim & Cohen, 1997) and sexual objectification (Davidson & Gervais, 2015; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) to understand the role that chronic but subtle forms of gender-based oversight and regulation play in establishing and maintaining compulsory and rigid gender roles and stereotypes. Expanding on Sue and colleagues' (2007) original racial microaggressions taxonomy (i.e., common themes), Capodilupo and colleagues (2010) developed a gender microaggressions taxonomy utilizing qualitative data from adult women. Their gender microaggressions

taxonomy included six themes: (1) sexual objectification (i.e., when a woman is treated as a sexual object), (2) second-class citizenship (i.e., when a woman is overlooked or men get preferential treatment), (3) assumption of inferiority (i.e., when women are assumed to be less competent than men), (4) assumption of traditional gender roles (i.e., when it is assumed that women maintain traditional gender roles), (5) use of sexist language (i.e., when language is used to degrade women), and (6) environmental invalidations (i.e., ambient or indirect aggressions that occur on a systematic or environmental level) as the predominate finding of their analysis (Capodilupo et al., 2010). They also propose two new and less developed themes: denial of the reality of sexism (i.e., when sexism is downplayed or negated when brought to light) and leaving gender at the door (i.e., when a woman must act like a man to be taken seriously). This study helped to advance gender microaggressions research by adding increased conceptual clarity and nuance; however, it has important limitations when applied to understanding gender microaggressions for undergraduate women. Namely, while the majority of Capodilupo and colleague's sample consisted of college students (10 out of 12 participants), they did not speak specifically to the unique experiences of emerging adults (e.g., living and working outside of the nuclear family) or the college context (e.g., developing professional path and career aspirations). The gender socialization taking place in university is likely different from other contexts such as the workplace. Understanding the unique scripting and policing taking place on campuses is thus critical to conceptualizing campus gender microaggressions as a phenomenon and ultimately understanding their potential impact.

Currently, there are very few studies that examine gender microaggressions on college campuses, and those that do differ from the current study in a few important ways. A body of literature has emerged examining gendered racial microaggressions on college campuses (Hamilton, 2016; Lewis et al., 2013; Lewis & Neville, 2015). The themes from these studies are notably different from those of Capodilupo and colleagues (2010), as they focus on gendered racial microaggressions and, in the case of Lewis and colleagues (2013), examine coping specifically rather than victimization. Researchers have also used college campuses as sites to examine constructs related to gender microaggressions such as benevolent sexism (Fitz & Zucker, 2015; Kuchynka et al., 2018), "chilly campus climates" (Hall & Sandler, 1984; Heller et al., 1985), and microaggressions experienced by faculty (Yang & Carroll, 2018). While crucial to understanding subtle gender discrimination on campuses, these studies do not build the foundational knowledge needed to simultaneously operationalize gender microaggressions as a construct and address undergraduate women's distinct contextual needs.

Gender Microaggressions on College Campus

College campuses represent unique spaces in students' lives. In the case of residential campuses (like University of California, Berkeley [UCB]) students live, study, take classes, recreate, and carry out their daily lives in the campus context. Gendered violence and discrimination can substantially impact students' mobility and comfort on campus, with 27% of college women reporting staying away from particular buildings or places on campus as a result of sexual harassment experiences (Hill & Silva, 2005). Despite the impact

of campus sexual violence on students' comfort, behaviors, and academic success, relatively little research has explored gender microaggressions impact on campuses.

Hall and Sandler's (1982, 1984) seminal work on "chilly campus climates" introduces the concept that gender based slights, subtle behaviors devaluing women, and unequal opportunities afforded women may have a broader impact on climate and women's experiences of college campuses. Studies have found that sexism, even well-intentioned benevolent sexism, can lead to poorer academic outcomes for women, particularly in STEM fields (Kuchynka et al., 2018; Naphan, 2016). Subsequent research has also extended the "chilly campus climates" literature to understand the impact of chilly campus climates on college women's perceptions of safety, finding that subtle gendered behaviors perpetuate cultures of fear (Kelly & Torres, 2006). According to Kelly and Torres (2006), women learn to fear certain locations and types of behaviors through both direct education (e.g., sexual violence prevention education) and indirect hostility (e.g., sexual harassment and microaggressions), leading to reduced mobility and decreased access to campus resources.

Understanding the unique taxonomy of gender microaggressions on college campuses, as everyday forms of gender-based aggressions, has substantial implications for campus climate and the prevention of campus sexual violence. Much of the current research, however, either builds on a taxonomy that is not specific to undergraduate women on college campuses or focuses on related constructs without advancing the conceptual clarity of gender microaggressions. To address these gaps, the current study conducted campus-based focus groups to identify a taxonomy of gender microaggressions for undergraduate women on college campuses.

METHODS

I conducted five qualitative semi-structured focus groups ($N = 23$) with undergraduate women on UCB campus (additional details may be found in Gartner, 2019). Study procedures were approved by the Institutional Review Board at UCB. Focus groups are the dominant method for examining gender microaggressions in the extant literature (e.g., Capodilupo et al., 2010; Lewis et al., 2013). They also create a space for members of marginalized groups to share their accounts in a generative setting with support in framing their experiences, countering the inherent ambiguity that may lead women to doubt their microaggression experiences (Fine, 1992; Lewis et al., 2013). The inclusion criteria for focus group participation was (a) 18–25 years old, (b) self-identify as a woman, (c) currently enrolled at UCB as an undergraduate student, and (d) fluent in English. Transgender women were eligible to participate; however, no quotas were set for transgender women or specific recruitment efforts implemented. Because no participants identified as transgender women, the sample only includes cisgender women.

Procedure

I recruited participants to the study by fliers and quarter sheets posted on UCB campus and announcements in undergraduate courses. To participate in focus groups, interested students entered the URL from the fliers and quarter sheets into their web browser to complete a brief online questionnaire. First, these students were presented with a consent

form. Potential participants were then presented with the questionnaire hosted by Qualtrics software, collecting basic demographic and contact information. Participants were asked their name, email address, phone number, and scheduling availability to contact them for the focus group. This information was never connected to transcripts. Participants were also asked their sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, age, gender identity, year in school, and international student status. For sexual orientation, participants were presented the question: "How do you identify your sexual orientation?" with response options, *straight/ heterosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, questioning, pansexual, a sexual orientation not listed here* which included a free response box. For race and ethnicity participants were asked "Describe your race/ethnicity? (please check all that apply) with response options, *Black or African American, White, Asian or Asian American, Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, Native American or Alaskan Native, Hispanic or Latin@, a race or ethnicity not listed here* which included a free response box. Participants who selected more than one box were categorized as multiracial. The demographic information reported in the results section is drawn from this screening survey.

Students were purposively selected for participation in the focus groups. I employed targeted identity-based groups, such that focus groups were held for (1) Asian[1], (2) White, (3) Under Represented Minority (URM)[2], and (4) sexual minority students. The sexual minority group was comprised of participants who identified as a sexual orientation that was not heterosexual when completing the demographic screener. Groups were not entirely exclusive, for example, a participant who identified as bisexual and URM could have been placed in the URM or the sexual minority group. A fifth, non-targeted group was conducted without sampling for particular demographic characteristics. Clustering was done to facilitate a more comfortable environment for participants to discuss topics related to race/ethnicity and sexual orientation and to make it easier to examine differences between groups (Krueger & Casey, 2009).

Site—Focus groups were conducted on UCB campus. UCB is a large, public, research university with over 30,000 undergraduate students, approximately 52% of which identify as women (Division of Equity & Inclusion, 2016). In 2017–2018, 38.9% of UCB undergraduate population identified as Asian/Pacific Islander, 29.7% as White, and 18.5% as underrepresented minorities (i.e., African American, Chicano/Latino, and Native American/ Alaskan Native; "Student Enrollments," 2017). Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) degree programs comprise 50% of undergraduate enrollment (UC STEM degree pipeline, 2016).

Sample: A total of 23 women participated in five focus groups. Each focus group consisted of 4 to 5 participants. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 24 (M = 19.7, SD = 1.7). Their racial/ethnic identities were self-reported as, White ($n = 11$), Asian/Asian American ($n = 5$), Latina ($n = 3$), Black ($n = 2$), and multiracial ($n = 2$). The majority of participants identified as heterosexual ($n = 14$), followed by bisexual ($n = 5$), pansexual ($n = 1$), queer ($n = 1$),

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[1]As 38.9% of UCB undergraduate population identified as Asian/Pacific Islander, their unique experience was sought through a designated group.
[2]Category used at UCB to group African American, Chicano/Latino, and Native American/Alaskan Native

heteroflexible ($n = 1$), and demi-heterosexual (i.e., heterosexual attraction to people with whom there is a close emotional connection; $n = 1$). With regard to year in school, the group was comprised of first years ($n = 9$), second years ($n = 4$), third years ($n = 5$), fourth years ($n = 2$), and fifth years ($n = 1$). One participant, who identified her race/ethnicity as Asian, identified as an international student.

Facilitation: I lead the focus groups with a dedicated undergraduate note taker. I am a White, cisgender, queer, femme woman in my 30's and the undergraduate note taker is an Asian, cisgender, heterosexual, woman in her early 20's. The notetaker and I made conscious efforts to make explicit the power relations inherent in the research process (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002). We discussed both the power differentials in our own relationships (i.e., PI and research assistant) and the power we had in the context of our research subjects. This was particularly important as we wanted to examine the impact of both my power, as PI and non-undergraduate while also examining the potential impact of the notetaker's similar social position to many of our participants and how that might impact their comfort with her and her interpretation of their contributions. I met with the note taker extensively prior to conducting focus groups to establish rapport and develop a process for engagement. We examined our positionality and discussed how it might impact our interpretation of data. We independently constructed memos after each meeting and used these to support our assertions during times of differing interpretation. We met before and after each focus group to discuss process, as well as reactions.

I conducted focus groups on UCB campus in a private classroom that was reserved and closed to the public during each focus group session to maximize participant privacy. I employed a semi-structured interview guide informed by Capodilupo and colleagues (2010). The protocol for the current study began with a detailed overview of the study's purpose and provided an opportunity for all participants to introduce themselves. The guide then consisted of nine open ended questions that sought examples of gender microaggressions. For example, "Describe a situation since you started at UCB, when you felt pressured to act a certain way because you are a woman." Each of these nine items were followed by questions to increase understanding of context (e.g., "where did this happen to you" or "where do these types of things happen on campus"), interpretation (e.g., "What do you think was the message being conveyed to you?"), and impact (e.g., "How did the event change your experience of campus?").

After each of these core questions, I asked two broader questions about gender microaggressions in general (e.g., "What impact do these experiences of subtle gender discrimination have on your mental health?"). While the focus group guide was informed by Capodilupo's (2010) taxonomy, questions were general enough to allow participants to share new and emerging themes. Focus group sessions were recorded with participant permission and notes were taken throughout. Focus groups lasted approximately 90 minutes in duration and participants received a $20 gift card for their participation.

Data Analysis

Focus groups recordings were transcribed verbatim by a professional transcription service (rev.com). I assigned each focus group member a unique identifier. I then reviewed each transcript to ensure that wording was correct, text was appropriately attributed to each focus group member, and the transcripts were blinded of all identifying information (i.e., only the unique identifier was used). I used directed content analysis as a data analytic framework as it allows for the application of theory and existing research findings for the use of a priori codes, as well as an inductive approach for newly identified categories (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Directed content analysis is guided by a structured process (Hickey & Kipping, 1996), using existing research to identify key concepts or variables as initial coding categories (Potter et al., 1999). Consequently, the coding process began by applying predetermined codes based on Capodilupo and colleagues (2010) taxonomy. Data that could not be coded with a priori codes was identified and analyzed later to determine if they represented a new category or subcategory of an existing code (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Due to the broad nature of the a priori codes developed based on Capodilupo and colleagues (2010) gender microaggressions taxonomy, coded excerpts were reexamined by coders to identify possible sub-themes (i.e., child codes) that may have co-occurred with a priori codes.

An undergraduate research assistant and I read through each transcript prior to code application, noting first impressions which we recorded in memos. As described above, coding was tiered with primary (broad themes – parent codes) and secondary (sub-themes – child codes) codes applied. We utilized a multi-round coding process, beginning with primary, a priori codes followed by newly identified child codes, or sub-themes. For example, the parent code assumption of traditional gender roles was very broad and applied across many participant examples. New child codes, such as women dominated occupations and caretaker and nurturer clarified participants' experiences of gender roles assumptions within this particular context. After this, we applied new parent codes, identified during the analysis (e.g., intersectionality), and finally we applied newly identified child codes. We independently coded each focus group transcript and met after each round of coding was complete to note all discrepancies. We reexamined each passage with a coding discrepancy, discussed why we chose the particular codes we employed, and reached consensus on all incongruities. When necessary, we employed our first impression memos and/or focus group memos to help us engage with the data.

Following coding, I reviewed and synthesized code excerpt reports to identify salient themes and patterns in the data. Codes were assessed to ensure that excerpts contained therein were conceptually distinct and directly contributed to understandings of microaggressions. The most salient themes and sub-themes were selected to comprise the new taxonomy.

RESULTS

I identified seven gender microaggressions themes as the most relevant to undergraduate women in a college campus environment: (1) invisibility, (2) intersectionality, (3) caretaker and nurturer, (4) women-dominated occupations, (5) presumed incompetence, (6) sexual objectification, (7) environmental invalidations. For more details see Appendix A.

Invisibility

Participants described feeling unseen and unheard in their interactions with men on campus. They described situations in which their peers would completely ignore their contribution, or capacity to contribute, but would seek out input and assistance from men. One participant described sitting in a mathematics[3] study room and having the table at which she was sitting, which included many men, approached for help by other male classmates. She explained,

> They come up to me, sitting, usually with all guys and, "Oh, did anybody get this one? Does anybody know how to do this one?" And I'll stand up and be, like, "Yeah, here. I'll show you on the chalk board." and, get ignored and I'm, like, holy shit. That's just incredibly blatant… for some reason, you don't think that I have the answer. I've been sitting in the same lecture that you've been sitting in. We've been all going to the same discussion. I'm reading the same textbook as you. I just don't understand. I mean it's just really ridiculous. (R[4], second year, White, heterosexual)

Participants spoke about their confusion that, even after gaining entrance to an elite institution, they were still treated like they knew less than men, had fewer valuable contributions, and lacked credibility. These devaluations functioned like an invisibility cloak, rendering women voiceless among their peers.

Participants described experiences in which men dominated interactions and ignored them, whether in classrooms or peer groups. They discussed feeling like there was no space for them to contribute or being actively discouraged from contributing. One participant described a pattern of behavior in her friend group saying,

> I'll be with a certain group of guy friends, then I notice that when they're talking about ideas they always just talk to each other and don't really let me speak… Sometimes it really bugs me that they don't even make eye contact [with me] during these conversations, when there's clearly three of us there. And then it's, like, "Oh, wait but I have stuff to say too." And they sometimes talk over me." (E, third year, White, heterosexual)

Women described feeling invisible as men dominated classroom spaces, office hours, club meetings, and social settings. In the above scenario, the participant's friends did not directly confront her or verbally demean her, they used nonverbal cues and indirect communication to send the message that her contribution was not welcome.

Intersectionality

Participants described microaggressions that tapped not only into gender, but to other marginalized identities and characteristics. Women of color spoke to the salience of race in their experiences on campus and the ways in which race often made gender feel less central to their experiences of slights, insults, and invalidations. In response to a question to the group about being treated differently because of gender, a Black participant stated, "I always

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[3]All majors, departmental affiliations, and course names changed to protect participant confidentiality.
[4]All initials tied to pseudonyms to protect participant identity.

assume that the microaggressions I face are honed in on because of my color" (H, third year, Black, heterosexual). After I explained that the study is not looking at gender in a vacuum or in isolation the participant went on to share highly racialized gendered experiences. She described going to a café, late at night, with a friend, who was also a Black woman, and being approached,

> This man approaches me and he's like, "Hey, I really want to take you and your friend out, but which one should I choose? The thinner one?" which is my friend, "or the thicker one? I like thick women." I'm like, you know what? It's late at night. Maybe he's drunk. I'm really giving him the benefit of the doubt, but when he got in my face again and asked me, "You didn't hear me talking to you?" and I was like, "Sir. I heard you, but I don't want to respond. Can you leave me alone?" He was like, "You guys are all the same." What? My friend is also Black and she was ordering, so she didn't really hear the altercation. (H, third year, Black, heterosexual)

The participant described feeling challenged by stereotypes of being the "angry Black woman" or being "too Berkeley" in calibrating her response. The man who approached assumed that he had access to both her and her friend and that he was entitled to her time and responsiveness. When his needs were not met, he let her know that her rejection was not confined to their interaction but that she was functioning as a stereotype of all Black women.

Another participant, who was Latina, described an experience with her roommate who capitalized on the intersecting marginalities of race and gender to make her feel unwelcome in her dorm room. She described her roommate, who was also a woman, as "passive aggressive" because she would not yell or scream, but would do more subtle behaviors like, leaving notes or making jokes. She explained that this roommate, who was not a Spanish speaker, called her a "puta" (derogatory term meaning slut or bitch) and told her that she belongs in the kitchen. In these experiences, the participant explained that her roommate capitalized on race and gender to make her feel uncomfortable in her own space. She leveraged racist and sexist stereotypes, derogatory language, and subtilties to create a hostile and unwelcome living environment.

Caretaker and Nurturer

In discussing the roles that they were expected to maintain, women often spoke about nurturance and caretaking. This expectation was communicated across contexts, such as residence halls, jobs, clubs, and classrooms. Participants described how women always cleaned common spaces in residence halls, brought snacks to club meetings, and put the chairs back in order after group work in classes. One participant exemplified this experience, discussing the ways in which caretaking seemed to be expected of her regardless of her desire or willingness to take it on. She said, "People often assume that I'm going to be the one that's going to clean things or take care of certain things. Or if someone's upset, I'm gonna be the one to comfort them. Or I'm gonna be the one to organize certain things. I get that in a lot of different settings" (M, fourth year, white, heterosexual). Undergraduate women expressed frustration when their nurturance felt mandatory. This mandatory nurturance happened in situations in which participants were told that caretaking

was their role. One participant described moving into housing with a mixture of men and women. When talking about the benefits of sharing a house with women, the male roommates said, "They'll clean up after us." This statement served to establish gender roles in the house, asserting that women living in the space would be responsible for maintaining cleanliness. Participants also described mandatory nurturance in situations in which they were left with responsibilities because no one else was willing to take them on. For example, when all of the men left the class potluck without contributing to cleanup.

Women-dominated Occupations

Undergraduate women discussed the ways in which the expectations that they stay in stereotypically feminine occupations felt like "getting bumped down" and described a consistent communication that they choose "softer" professions that would allow them to have a family or move home after graduating. As one participant explained,

> I've noticed that no matter how hard women push we're always encouraged to do something softer. You've got to go to school? Okay, don't get a doctorate… You want to be a surgeon? No, you could be something softer... I've noticed that we just keep getting bumped down. No matter how far we aim to go. (A, first year, Asian, heterosexual),

Messages like these were communicated by family, faculty, and friends as participants navigated challenging coursework, selected their majors, and sought the connections that could support their future careers.

Participants described being taken less seriously in male dominated spaces and majors because they were women. This theme was particularly salient among women in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) who described always being pushed to channel their degrees differently than their male peers. A woman of color, studying physics, explained her frustration that her advisor, whom she had met with on multiple occasions to discuss her desires to enter a PhD program, still relied on stereotypes when thinking of her career aspirations. She shared a memory of being the only woman in a small, upper-level seminar in which her advisor was discussing the diversity of career options available to physics majors. After listing jobs in academia and industry he turned to her, as the only woman in the room and said, "L, aren't you in Physics for Teachers?" He was referring to a course for physics majors who want to become educators. She explained, "We're all studying electromagnetism. This is a very high-level course and yet, for some reason he assumed that I was the only one in the room who was planning to be a K through 12 teacher" (L, fifth year, multiracial, bisexual). Scenarios like the one described above were not only discouraging, but also communicated hierarchy. The participant and all of her peers got the message that the expected path for her was to teach children, not to become a scholar as was her plan.

Presumed Incompetence

Women described being treated as less competent than their male peers, despite their expertise, training, and track record. When they did achieve positions of power, like leading a class, they were often overshadowed, assigned administrative tasks, or ignored completely.

One participant described her experience of working with a male co-facilitator who insisted that she be note taker and administrator because she was "good at organizing" despite the reality that she had technical background in the area of interest. She explained,

> I'm involved in [peer lead class], and I feel like I get treated differently for being a woman. It's never anything explicit… Like the first couple of weeks he [the cofacilitator] wanted me to take notes all the time, and I have more experience than him… He generally just treats me like I'm incompetent, even though I have the technical background, I have research background that he does not have, and that's why I'm there. But he doesn't seem to process that. I think partially because I'm a woman. There are students who have similar background, but they're guys and he asked them for recommendations. (D, third year, Asian, heterosexual)

In this scenario, the male cofacilitator automatically takes on the lead-facilitator role and assigns D (the participant) tasks. The assumptions about the areas in which she could make the greatest contribution ignore her expertise, confining her to an administrative role.

In addition to being ascribed subordinate roles without consensus or deliberation, participants described scenarios in which men controlled or dominated spaces in a way that indirectly communicated messages about competence and worthiness, but also centered male entitlement. Participants described experiencing mansplaining (Solnit, 2015), or being spoken to like they were children, being interrupted, and being corrected despite having accurate answers. One participant explained,

> I'm in a study group for chemistry, and there's this guy who literally explains everything to us, even though we're all in the same class… He literally gets up to the whiteboard, and then he explains things to us that are like, obviously not helpful, because he's on the same level as us, so like, what's the point? (S, second year, Asian, bisexual)

In addition to patronizing speech, participants also spoke about men dominating interactions, whether in classrooms or peer groups.

Sexual Objectification

Participants described being treated like their worth was tied to their ability to capitalize on their sexuality or serve men sexually. This message was not only communicated to them in social settings (e.g., at parties), but in academic settings (e.g., in study groups) as well. Women describe feeling like they could not leave the house without being catcalled, could not go to the gym without being leered at, and could not go to parties without being groped. In describing a conversation with a male classmate, one participant explained that it was assumed she would need to use her body for academic success,

> I was in my [Class Name] discussion and I was talking about a grade for a class saying, "Oh, I really wanna do well on this final." And the guy that I was talking to was just somebody that I normally sit with. And he was like, "Oh, you should just sleep with your [Teaching Assistant] and you'll get a good grade. That's what I would do if I was a girl." And he was joking, he was trying to be funny but I was like "I don't need to sleep with my [Teaching Assistant], I can do it myself"…

> I mean, I didn't say that out loud. I kind of wish I did. (Z, first year, White, heterosexual)

Additionally, a participant described a broader culture that she noticed that sexualizes women on campus. She recounted overhearing men talk about women based solely on their bodies, seeing them as conquests,

> I hear that language all the time. Much more than I would expect, or I did expect, coming to Berkeley… I've been at a yoga class and had guys sitting next to me that were commenting on all of the women walking in, and commenting on their bodies and what they were wearing. (M, fourth year, White, heterosexual)

Women described feeling like UCB is more progressive than other schools; however, they also described a palpable culture of sexualization and objectification. The discordance between the university's reputation as one of the most socially progressive institutions in the country and their experiences, often made women question the veracity of their feelings and added to the ambiguity of the microaggressive behavior.

Environmental Invalidations

Participants described ways in which they encountered microaggressions that were systemic in nature. These were experiences in which they noted environmental invalidations, or larger power structures that were disempowering, unfriendly, or fully exclusionary to women. One of the dominant ways that environmental invalidations was experienced was through gender power differentials at the departmental level. For example, participants – both in STEM and other disciplines – described not seeing women represented in faculty positions in their fields. Participants also noticed that women tended to hold lecturer positions, do more service work, and be less likely to have tenure. One participant explained,

> It actually makes me really sad how many female lecturers I've had compared to full tenure faculty members. That representation is so disproportionate, even in the anthropology department. And, just, you know, it doesn't feel all that encouraging, as someone who might want to pursue academia. (J, fourth year, White, queer)

This lack of representation impacted how women understood who had access to power and tenure in their disciplines and the opportunities available to them. For those considering a career as a researcher and/or academic, it sent a strong message about their future prospects.

Participants also spoke about the inadequacies of campus safety services such as lighting, emergency phones, campus night escort services, and security. Unlike many other campuses, UCB has large trees, creeks, bridges, and wooded areas that comprise its landscape. The campus also has fuzzy boundaries, with academic and residential buildings outside of the main campus area. Participants spoke to an incongruity between how the school portrays itself, as investing in safety infrastructure and valuing student safety needs, and their experiences on the ground. The campus night safety escort service came under a great deal of scrutiny. Participants described not feeling like they had access to the service because the wait times were so long – often exceeding 45 minutes – that they had to choose between leaving the library early or paying for a ride. One of the major reasons that participants spoke about needing a night safety escort, was a sense that the campus did not have the

infrastructure needed to ensure student safety. From broken blue light phones to lack of lighting, campus after dark was a threatening place. Participants spoke to feeling like they were, "jeopardizing" their academics because they could not study on campus safely at night. When describing needing to leave the library to walk home one participant explained,

> [Campus escort service] takes forever. I've been trying to make a conscious effort of using them more just because, if I'm unsafe, there's an obvious solution to that but, there's just routine problems that come up with it and there's just times where I don't wanna wait 40 minutes for someone to come pick me up. And it's just the idea of having to walk home by myself a lot of times. I get really uncomfortable. And I know that I have guy friends who walk home around the place where I live and they don't care. (B, second year, White, heterosexual)

Participants shared that they felt uncomfortable studying late at night. Many commented that their male friends walked home after dark and that they, as women, were far more impacted by the infrastructure inadequacies than their male peers.

DISCUSSION

The current study established a contextually anchored gender microaggressions taxonomy for undergraduate women on UCB campus. Seven themes emerged based on focus group interviews, (1) invisibility, (2) intersectionality, (3) caretaker and nurturer, (4) women-dominated occupations, (5) presumed incompetence, (6) sexual objectification, and (7) environmental invalidations.

Across settings, participants described being ignored or treated like they did not exist. A common factor in these experiences was that the participants were seeking acknowledgement and/or recognition outside of prescribed norms for women. Whether asserting expertise in male-dominated STEM spaces or contributing to a social conversation between men, women's outsider status was clearly communicated through their invisibility and served to remind them of their prescribed roles. Sue (2010) explains that sexism has not necessarily decreased, but has gone underground, manifesting in more socially acceptable and nebulous ways. While formal policies like Title IX have increased women's access to educational spaces and programs by prohibiting gender discrimination (Title IX, Education Amendments of 1972, n.d.), covert behaviors persist to enforce the social order. Participants were not expressly prohibited from participation in conversations or activities but were made to feel unwelcome through non-verbal cues like avoiding eye contact and indirect behaviors, like talking over. This invisibility can reinforce women's status at the margins (Hill Collins, 2000), constructing them as "nonpeople" and thereby making it even more permissible to discount their contributions (Star, 1999).

Women of color participants described microaggressions that existed at the intersection of race and gender. As Hill Collins and Bilge (2016) discuss, single-focus lenses may be insufficient to capture the complexity of experiences for people who are multiply marginalized (e.g., black and women). Microaggressions rely on systems of oppression for their power. These larger systemic oppressions are born of a historical hierarchy designed to maintain white male colonizers as hegemonic power (McClintock, 2013). Women of

color participants described being made to feel like they did not belong – their status as "Other" was exaggerated at the intersection of their multiple marginalized identities. In their discussion of gendered racial microaggressions among Black women, Lewis and colleagues (2013) highlight how these types of microaggressions are uniquely experienced stressors that vary from racial or gender microaggressions when viewed in isolation. For the women of color who participated in the study, the notion that their identities could be deconstructed to focus on single marginalities (i.e., gender only) did not match their experiences. Once they understood that gender did not need to be discussed in isolation, they spoke to "controlling images" specific to Black women, Latinas, and Asian women (Hill Collins, 2000). They discussed stereotypes deeply entrenched in a gendered racism founded in entwined racist and sexist expectations for their behavior and roles in the social order (Essed, 1991; Lewis et al., 2013).

Microaggressions scholarship examines the ways in which assumptions that women will adhere to traditional gender roles can limit their options (Capodilupo et al., 2010). The themes, caretaker and nurturer and women-dominated occupations were identified as roles that participants found themselves pushed towards during their time at university. According to the narrowly defined scripts for women's behavior, femininity exists in service of masculinity, positioning women who step outside of their roles as threats to masculinity and the status quo (Hill Collins, 2000). As undergraduates at a predominately residential university, participants were engrossed in the critical developmental tasks of living outside of their families of origin for the first time, selecting majors and career paths, and navigating a new city. The gender role expectations that participants faced were directly tied to these major tasks. For example, the transition into shared housing required establishing a distribution of labor, which often expected women to function as matriarchs or caretakers. It is in these developmentally normative transitions that entrenched systems of gender inequality can be rarefied and new patterns and approaches can be developed.

As women navigated selecting majors and career paths, those entering STEM and other male-dominated fields were met with prejudice for stepping outside of sanctioned, women-dominated professions. The choice to participate in STEM, for example, is incongruous with the gender role dichotomy that positions men as intellectual, inclined towards math and science, and destined to be doctors and engineers and women as emotional, women of the home (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Glenn (2012) writes about the ways in which universities can socialize outsiders (e.g., women, people of color) *out* of desired professions by questioning them, making them feel unwelcome, and subjecting them to confining stereotypes. These microaggressions served a function in participants career socialization, sending strong messages about where they would be welcome and where they would be swimming against the current.

The theme, presumed incompetence, was drawn from participant statements like, "he generally just treats me like I'm incompetent." The theme was also informed by the work of women of color in the academy who address the ways in which race, class, and gender power hierarchies in academia lead to impossible standards and presumptions for marginalized groups (Muhs et al., 2012). Participants described feeling confused by the presumptions made about their lack of capacity to hold or produce knowledge. For

male hegemony and dominance to be maintained, women's incompetence is necessary as it is used to counterpose and define male competence (Hill Collins, 2000). The gender microaggressions described are examples of the reinforcement of this imperative of control (Hill Collins, 2000). In presuming that women participants did not have the knowledge, skills, or capacity to make meaningful contributions, the men with whom they interacted elevated themselves as gatekeepers and holders of knowledge.

The theme, sexual objectification, was very conceptually consistent with prior objectification (Fredrickson et al., 1997) and microaggressions literature (Capodilupo et al., 2010). Women described ways in which their worth was tied to their bodies or capacity to serve men sexually. This sexualization changed their experience of campus as they braced themselves before leaving the house with statements like, "get ready to be sexualized." They also described questioning their outfits, walking routes, and activities because they expected to be objectified. Women primed to think about their body in objectified ways perform less well on tests and have increased body shame and restrained eating (Fredrickson et al., 1998). Thus, while the manifestation of sexual objectification microaggressions at UCB was conceptually consistent with prior gender microaggressions scholarship, contextualizing this theme in the university setting is crucial. In a setting in which women are being tested on a regular basis and individuating, microaggressions that are sexually objectifying have the potential to have both immediate and lasting effects.

Environmental invalidations was the only theme that explicitly captured experiences at a structural level. Consistent with previous microaggressions scholarship (Capodilupo et al., 2010; Gartner & Sterzing, 2018; Sue et al., 2007; Woodford et al., 2015), participants described witnessing or being subject to university policies and practices that disadvantaged women. They described the physical (e.g., inadequate lighting) and space-based (e.g., male-dominated weight room) constraints that the university was not actively addressing. While other themes (e.g., presumed incompetence) limit women's options through confined, oppositional scripts, environmental invalidations shrink their physical space and access to support services (e.g., campus escort services) and academic resources (e.g., libraries) through policy and practice.

Limitations

In keeping with microaggressions research conventions, this study employed focus group methods with purposive sampling to examine gender microaggressions themes among undergraduate women. Lilienfeld (2017) discusses the ways in which focus group approaches, while common, may bias groups toward interpreting innocuous behaviors as aggressive and exerting social pressure on individuals, who may not otherwise view an experience as microaggressive, to agree with larger group interpretations. Unlike the studies Lilienfeld (2017) critiques, the purposive sampling strategies used for this study strove toward inclusivity of racial and sexual minorities and did not necessitate reporting microaggressive experiences. With this approach, undergraduate women with a substantial microaggressions history and those with no or few gender microaggressions experiences participated in groups together.

While not striving to be a representative sample, it should be noted that the current study had a relatively small ($N = 23$) sample and sampled from a single university. While diverse in many ways, this university is not representative of all university contexts. This may pose challenges in applying the current taxonomy to non-residential universities, rural universities, gender segregated universities, and universities with fewer STEM students. In addition, while the current study strove to hear the voices of underrepresented minorities, we had a very small number of students who identified as Black with none identifying in some categories such as Native or Indigenous. While this limitation may be an accurate reflection of UCB demographics (3% Black/African American and 1% Native American; Division of Equity & Inclusion, 2016), it has major limitations representing the experiences of Black women and other women of color in university settings. In addition, the grouping of underrepresented minority (URM) women in one focus group may have decreased the specificity and nuance of findings for subgroups within this category and limited the study's ability to capture microaggressions at the intersection of race and gender. For example, Lewis and colleagues (2013) write about the gendered racial microaggressions experienced by Black women as conceptually distinct from those experienced by other groups. Further, due to level of interest in the study, from sexual minority women, this category represented a wide array of different sexual minority identities. Gender microaggressions experiences for non-monosexuals (e.g., bisexual, pansexual) and monosexual (e.g., lesbian, gay) may differ (Dyar et al., 2017). Further, while the study was open to anyone who self-identified as a woman, no one in the focus groups identified as transgender; therefore, these data do not speak to the experiences of transgender women. A substantial body of literature examines gender identity microaggressions as experienced in the trans community as a separate phenomenon from gender microaggressions as experienced by cisgender women (Chang & Chung, 2015; Fisher et al., 2018).

Conclusion

Microaggressions on college campuses have been the source of both controversy and criticism. Both scholarly and popular press literature have spoken to the ways in which the increased visibility of microaggressions on college campuses is part of the emergence of a victimhood culture (Campbell & Manning, 2014). These critiques come with challenges to microaggressions conceptual and empirical foundation (Lilienfeld, 2017). Identifying a gender microaggressions taxonomy with population specific (e.g., undergraduate women) qualitative data is critical to developing the comprehensive conceptualization necessary to counter such critiques. This type of concept operationalization also enables much needed rigorous empirical study and measurement design. A refined campus gender microaggressions taxonomy establishes a framework for measure development and testing, increasing the capacity of researchers and practitioners to assess and address campus climate. Understanding the types of gender microaggression experiences common to women on college campuses equips researchers and practitioners with the information needed to advance prevention, intervention, and scholarship to enact lasting change. Disrupting gender microaggressive climates holds the possibility of improving undergraduate women's sense of safety and belonging on campus, increasing the accessibility of majors and career paths traditionally dominated by men, and improving their academic performance. When we promote campus environments in which women are valued and discrimination is confronted,

we can begin to dismantle gender microaggressive culture on college campuses that may maintain inequality and enable sexual violence.

Acknowledgments

APPENDIX A: Undergraduate Gender Microaggressions Themes

Theme and Definition	Example
Invisibility	*I was yelling and yelling. And then, all of a sudden, the guy who's co-chair [with me] lifts his head up and goes, "Okay. Let's start." And everyone listened to him. He didn't yell. He just said let's go and everyone was down.* (T, second year, Latina, heterosexual) *I took a seminar for a sociology class. And at first I was really excited to take this class. And then I was just kind of disappointed… there were 10 of us. And, there were five guys who would contribute and one girl… The only way to get into the conversation would be to talk over them. I was like, "This is just kind of sad. I feel like my opinion's not valued. There are four other girls that I just don't hear from. I want to know what they're thinking."* (E, third year, White, heterosexual)
Intersectionality	*I'm really into football… I remember these guys were talking about football first semester. And they brought up David Bakhtiari and I was like, "Oh yeah, he's Persian." I know all about him because I'm Persian and anytime I see another Persian, you're, like, wow, we're related (laughs). And he just looked at me, and said, "How do you know what we're talking about?" I'm like, "Because I watch sports." and he's like, "Yeah, but you're wrong, he's not Persian." I was like, "Yeah he is, I know my sports and my culture." And he's like, "No, he's not." and he Googles him and he's like, "No. It says he's Iranian or Iranian." (laughs) and I was like, "Dude, that's the same thing." He's like, "Okay, yeah. Whatever"… I thought, first of all, you didn't believe what I said, clearly because I was a girl and even when you were proven wrong it didn't make you trust me.* (P, first year, White, heterosexual) *It's a little bit hard to separate the identities. Definitely being Black is a huge identity. It's way different here. But, when I was taking a computer science course, because I'm nowhere near a computer science major, the teachers were all fine, but other male students… It's like, I'm not a four-year-old.* (N, Fourth year, Black, heteroflexible) *He was always, "You're really beautiful. What are you?"* (Y, second year, Latina, heterosexual)
Caretaker and Nurturer	*We had a study night type thing and so we all went over to one of the [club] member's apartments… and I brought food, like snacks. And then they [male club members] were like 'oh, you're so prepared with all the stuff.' And I was like, "yeah, I usually do this stuff with my sorority." And then one of them was like "oh, that's such a girl thing to do." And I was like, "being kind is a girl thing?"* (T, second year, Latina, heterosexual) *I am on a sports team and we do a lot of group meals and stuff… But I just feel like women are always expected to be nurturers in some way and always expected to clean up other people's messes* (M, fourth year, white, heterosexual)
Women-dominated Occupations	*I'm premed and one of my close guy friends is also premed, and everyone seems to ignore the fact that I am.* (V, first year, White, Pansexual) *I'm a freshman, so a lot of us were still deciding majors in the beginning of the year and there were more STEM women than guys on the floor, and I remember this one guy. He was like "women shouldn't be this intelligent because you guys are meant to stay home."* (A, first year, Asian, heterosexual)
Presumed Incompetence	*In my class we're building a car using circuits, and I've noticed that some of my friends, when they didn't know how to wire something, they would ask one of their guy friends, even if I or another [woman] friend of mine was right there.* (A, first year, Asian, heterosexual)

Theme and Definition	Example
	I usually will try and tell them [men in the group], "Okay, yeah, I understand it now. I get it." And then they'll just keep going and they'll even make it simpler from there… Maybe it's a male friend or a peer. Let's say it's math. They'll take me back way farther than they need to go when they're trying to explain the first steps. And then I'm like, "really, okay, I understand algebra. Let's go… move on." (C, first year, White, bisexual) *Especially in upper divisions… You say something wrong, you're scared that the teacher or everyone else will think," why is she here? Is she really capable of going here?" Things like that.* (K, third year, Asian, heterosexual)
Sexual Objectification	*I feel like sex is like so commonplace in a place like the gym. It's not even weird anymore. Get ready to be sexualized if you walk into the gym. If you want to go on the rowing machine you have to wear tight pants. Wear tight pants, you're going to get sexualized.* (A, first year, Asian, heterosexual) *[Referring to men in dorms] And then there'll be a little bit creepy, almost... like I heard like one guy on my floor talking behind my back about like who I was with, or not with, and being very, I would say, possessive about me, even though like I had no relationship at all with him, which was like it was very like scary for me.* (C, first year, White, bisexual)
Environmental Invalidations	*I know that at the beginning, you have to do this online course on drinking and stuff like that. And I'm sure that a high majority of the people who do that [the course], just click through the entire thing and don't even watch it. And so it's this interesting thing where they [the University] acknowledge that this is a problem and they're trying to fix it in a way that they think is, you know, easiest.* (B, second year, White, heterosexual) *I really am disappointed in the number of times that I have had to have a conversation about sexism on this campus. And the only thing anyone can ever even really bring themselves to address is the most egregious of crimes, which is robbing us of bodily autonomy. You know what I mean? We're not even scratching the surface of professors. We're not even scratching the surface of students in our classrooms, and stuff like that.* (J, fourth year, White, queer) *When I started going to the [University Gym], they have three rooms that are weight rooms. They have one with a huge amount of weights and the other two are off to the side. When I first started going, I felt like the big one was the guy's room, because you never saw any girls in there. And it was really scary… And I just really didn't want to go in there. And it was … a kind of terror … not, not scared, but, I don't know what the words is I'm trying to find, but I didn't want to go in there. I would just use the smaller room.* (N, fourth year, Black, heteroflexible)

BIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

Dr. Rachel E. Gartner is an assistant professor in the School of Social Work at the University of Pittsburgh. Dr. Gartner's prevention-focused scholarship aims to address gaps in the literature regarding how we conceptualize and measure sexual violence, microaggressions, and other forms of victimization for marginalized groups such as women, sexual and gender minority individuals, people of color, and those with intersecting, marginalized identities. She received her BA and her MSW from Washington University in St. Louis. Dr. Gartner completed her PhD in Social Welfare with a Designated Emphasis in Women, Gender, and Sexuality at the University of California, Berkeley.

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