Academic Freedom or the Right to Deplete Me?: An Analysis of Microaggressive Language

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Purpose of the Study
1. Does exposure to the word n****r in the context of a historical talk surrounding desegregation deplete cognitive resources in college students?
2. Are there differences in cognitive interference depending on one's status as a person of color and/or gender?

Important Background

Academic Freedom: definitions lack clarity and are multifaceted
• Faculty have autonomy in how they provide instruction and may express views without fear of sanction, unless such expressions impair the rights of others (Nelson, 2010).

Microaggression: verbal/behavioral/environmental slight (Sue et al., 2007)
• Microassault (purposeful), microinvalidation (exclude, negate, nullify)
• Associated Consequences:
  o Racial Battle Fatigue (Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007)
  o Self-control Depletion (Bair & Steele, 2010; Murphy et al., 2012)

Current Events:
• February 2018: students walked out of class at Princeton University after professor says n****r multiple times during lecture on hate speech (Kuruvilla, 2018)

Social Justice

Concept of fair and just relations between individuals in a society achieved through equity
• Gallor (2017) references key components: (a) importance of active participation in the learning process, (b) integration of persona, awareness, social action and advocacy, and (c) utilization of a systems perspective in exploring and understanding psychological and interpersonal dynamics
• Social justice moves beyond multiculturalism, diversity, and inclusion to include action and interaction, critical inquiry, and personal commitment

Social Justice Scale (Torres-Harding, Siers, & Olson, 2012)
• Includes 6 subscales corresponding to the primary constructs: attitudes, perceived behavioral control, subjective norms, and behavioral intentions
• High scores indicate endorsement of social justice attitudes, belief that one's behaviors may make a difference, support of social justice activities, and intention to advocate.

Procedure

Participants: 93 PWI students ages 18-32 (M = 20)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>POC</th>
<th>White</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Microaggression</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>16</td>
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</tbody>
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Dependent Variable: Microaggression

Stroop (1935) color-naming task

Lab Sessions
• Recruited via department participant pool and mass email
• Administered 1 on 1 in research lab
• Random assignment to 1 of 3 conditions
• Stroop (1935) practice
  - 5 minute training video about the desegregation history of the university
  - Condition 1: n****r
  - Condition 2: n-word
  - Condition 3: none
• Stroop (1935) administration
• Demographic and SJS items
• Debriefing

Results

Table 1
Condition x Race x Gender Factorial ANOVA for Interference

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>1.95</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.09</td>
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Table 2
Condition x Race x Gender Factorial ANOVA for Interference

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Discussion

• For Black men, exposure to the word n****r depleted cognitive resources.
• Further research is necessary to examine resilience factors that exist for Black women.
• Contrived laboratory setting and use of a college-age sample are limitations to the current study
• Future research may look to expand to non-college populations and to more thoroughly examine difference variables.

References