# The Davidson Microaggressions Project

Dr. Amanda R. Martinez, Isabel Ballester '18, Itziri Gonzalez-Barcenas '19, Jacob Hege '18

#### What is a microaggression?

"Derogatory (non)verbal, behavioral, and environmental messages and experiences by members of marginalized groups" (Sue, Capodilupo,

Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, & Esquilin, 2007)

### Davidson College's website states a clear commitment to diversity and inclusion:

"Davidson's commitment to diversity and inclusivity is grounded in the college's Statement of Purpose and extends to the entire Davidson community. The college seeks to foster mutual respect and understanding among and for all people of different cultures, ethnicities, races, religions, sexual orientations, genders, ages, national origins, socio-economic backgrounds, and physical abilities."

# DMP Statement of Purpose:

- Raise awareness about campus climate as experienced by diverse members of the College community.
- Demonstrate how microaggressions manifest around campus and the broader communities in which we live and work.
- Define and describe microaggressions and provide a space for resources and additional information on relevant topics.

# Anonymity & Identifiers

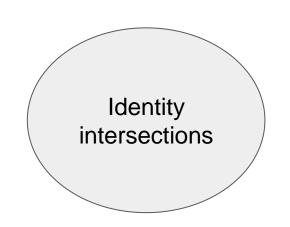
Important features of our project's design



Examples

#### Chinese class

My first year at Davidson another first-year male student said I looked familiar and said he probably knew me from his Chinese class.



#### **Pronouns**

In the classroom

Microaggressions around correct usage of pronouns and preferred/chosen names are frequently committed by faculty and students at Davidson. Some professors openly mock the use of gender-neutral pronouns, refuse to use them, etc. In a similar vein, there is an assumption that if someone understands what a pronoun is, they are automatically being inclusive in their language and actions, which is incorrect and often harmful.

### Acting

In the classroom

One time in a class, the professor had us act out a dialogue. He assigned me the role of the mother because I would "make a good mother," and asked me to hold a baby doll. Then he asked for a volunteer to play my husband. He told us we were a beautiful couple. I'm gay and it was gross.



# "the stereotypical privileged white person"

Identity intersections

Although I do not fit into the usual marginalized group, I have experienced microaggressions. I am a white, female and due to that everyone lumps me into the stereotypical privileged white person at Davidson who gets whatever she wants and is very rich. I have encountered this when I made mentions of how expensive an item is, me: "\$20?! No way" other person: "oh that's nothing for you" I do not receive money from my parents, everything I spend is my own earned money through work. I am not wealthy, but am consistently seen as such. Also, as a female, people have marked me as weak and not as smart. I am an athlete and it's laughable how many times men will assume that I am not as strong as them or capable of doing physical labor on my own. In some instances, it has been politely offered and others the role of a 'weaker female' has been forced upon me.



### Icebreakers

In the classroom

On my first ever day of classes at Davidson, my class went around and give icebreakers. Having experience with people assuming I'm born or raised in East Asia, I specifically mentioned being born and raised in [the United States] without mentioning anywhere else. After class, the professor came up to me and asked in [an Asian language] if I was from Beijing. He received tenure a year later.



#### kiddo

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Despite my depth of professional experience, my manager has on multiple occasions called me "kiddo."

#### "sassy"

For months, in meetings or after meetings, I have been told I am "sassy" or "have an attitude."

#### "the mean one"

I am the only woman of color in my office, and my manager regularly refers to me as "the mean one."



# angry, uncivil, and unreasonable

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If I raise my voice or speak passionately about an issue, I am framed as angry, uncivil, unreasonable, as someone who "clearly has some problem(s)," and who is not interested in getting along with or seeing the perspectives of others. These "others" are typically white, ablebodied, cis-hetero or otherwise privileged. I am angry. Because this treatment would not happen if I were a white man. I see that it does not happen to white men because the framing for the exact same interaction is completely different.



#### \*could be\* a student

During my first few weeks at Davidson, about a half dozen faculty members assumed that I was a student, and when I introduced myself as a new colleague, I was repeatedly told that I "looked like I \*could be\* a student." This didn't happen on the two days I wore jeans and a t-shirt to move and unpack boxes of books. Rather, I was told this on days when I was wearing office-appropriate and professional clothing. In other words, this isn't about how I dress or how I look: it is a reflection of their beliefs about who is entitled to be here and what accomplishment looks like. Can a person be something other than middle-aged or older and male and "look like" a professor? To some faculty here, the answer

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is no.



#### transfers

In my first two years teaching at Davidson, I got to know two students who eventually transferred out. Completely separately and unrelated to one another, each student told me that they gave others common excuses to transfer. But behind those closed doors both times in my office, they told me that, honestly, the weight of being a black student and a biracial (and ambiguous "exotic") student respectively had just become too much. They were tired of people imposing identities on them and making snap attributions about their attitudes or actions based on racial (and sometimes sexual) stereotypes. It had become so much that they felt constantly defensive and angry. I affirmed their frustration, told them I, as a person of color, knew that feeling well, and I supported their decisions to leave.

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#### moving in

When the moving truck showed up at our new home in Davidson, an older white woman with a child in a stroller stopped, waited for us to come back outside from inside the house, and barked at us without so much as a simple 'hello': "Moving out, or moving in?" We said, "Moving in." She walked away without saying a word. That was my first experience with what I now joke about as peak Lake Norman white women's entitlement. To spaces, to places, to answers to their demanding questions. I knew we might not love the town after all even if we did just move here for my dream job. Because on moving day, we were made aware of our hypervisibility and undesirability

Davidson town community climate



### toxic waste dump

Davidson town community climate

If one more person talks about how "beautiful" and "great" the Town of Davidson is, I'm going to come unglued. It's a white flight suburb that actively excludes and marginalizes people of color. We get pulled over, our children are excluded in the schools, and the only poc left are actually living in a toxic waste dump. Stop saying how much you enjoy living here. It's super racist.



Identity intersections

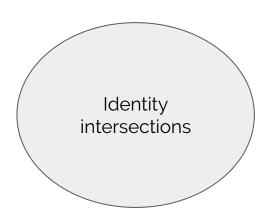
#### fellow white students

I'm a white first generation student from a working class family. I am often frustrated with the assumption that whiteness equals socioeconomic privilege (which sometimes simply means middle class stability, certainly a privilege). I am included among other white people as socioeconomically privileged in the way people talk about SES class-based things but I am always shocked to realize my whiteness provides me the automatic assumption of not having money problems. I don't identify with many fellow white students because of my lower income upbringing and current realities. But I experience white privilege and it is uncomfortable.



#### hey guys!

I was advertising this project, and in an email to a group of all women wrote, "hey guys!" I am usually conscious of this minor microaggression and try to say "everyone" or "y'all," but sometimes I still fall back on masculine language.





### they all have the same names

Sometimes I have trouble telling white people apart. And they all have the same names. It's really hard for me. I'm not sure they notice, though, and if they do I don't think they know it's a racial thing. It is.

#### Resources

http://davidsonmicroaggressionsproject.org/

# **Q 8 A**