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# Microaggressions and Ally Support Among Undergraduate Minority Students

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Microaggressions and Ally Support Among Undergraduate Minority Students

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For my undergraduate honors project, I decided to create something rather than doing a literature review or experiment. I choose to do this because I wanted to create something that had the potential to impact someone other than myself. For this project, I attempted to create a product that would combine what I have learned on an academic, social, and personal level during my time at The University of Akron. I found myself interested in the idea that college provides people the opportunity to grow more conscious and aware of issues they may not have previously considered. This opportunity exists for every student regardless of their major or path. I became aware of this idea during my Psychology of Hate class. In that class I realized how unaware I was of the problems that people who were not exactly like me faced. I have a very specific way I experience life because of things like my race, gender, religious views, social class, etc. I was unaware of the unintentional impact that my actions and words could have on other people of different backgrounds. It was not that I was apathetic and did not care what other people were going through, rather I was uneducated and oblivious. When problems are not overt or obvious it is easy to overlook or minimize them. It is common for individuals to not consider the full effects of their thoughts, feelings, or actions on others if they believe they are not acting in an overly aggressive or ill-intentioned manner. There are a lot of resources that discourage extreme, overtly discriminatory, and offensive behavior, but there are few that explain the impact of unintentional or microlevel aggressions My goal was to collect information on what it looks like to be a good ally to a variety of minority populations and the impact that individuals can have on someone else through both intentional or unintentional means (e.g., unintentionally offensive comments, microaggressions). I collected interviews from four students at The University of Akron and they defined and explained microaggressions and ally behavior in their own words and through their own experiences. The final product, a handout on the information I

collected is meant to be a quick and easy to read resource that will educate college students about microaggressions and how to avoid committing them. It will also serve as a guide to help individuals understand how to support members of non-majority groups.

I collected data and information from four students in two separate interviews that ranged from 30-60 minutes. The purpose of the interviews was to get a realistic perspective on what experiencing microaggressions is like and what having an ally means to different people. I asked the following five prompt questions:

- 1.) After hearing the definition and types of microaggressions, how would you define them yourself?
  - Do you have any personal examples or examples from anyone you know?
- 2.) How could someone witnessing a microaggression in action most support you?
- 3.) What do you wish someone knew about what it is like to experience microaggressions?
- 4.) For you personally, what does it look like to have a good ally?
- 5.) Is there anything that has not been covered that you would like to share?

I used the answers I gathered to create the handout on microaggression and ally behavior. My hope for this project is that I will have created a resource that would educate individuals who have not personally experienced discrimination and do not know how to be an ally. I think that many people have not even heard the term “microaggression” and if nothing else, I would hope that seeing this handout on it would make them aware of what they are and what they look like.

Over the course of the past four years, I have developed an interest in people, relationships, and how the mind works. I have found that Psychology has given me the tools to grow more empathetic, aware, and knowledgeable each day. I am passionate about the skills,

knowledge, and opportunities that Psychology has to offer as an undergraduate major and wanted to create a project that would reflect that. I hope that this handout would start an important conversation about the treatment of minority students in college among both their peers and professors.