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“Starting the Conversation: Addressing Racial Microaggressions in the Writing Center”

Abstract

In the two years of isolation due to COVID-19, racially charged crimes, including robbery, assault, and murder, rose exponentially; additionally, when returning to in-person work at the Writing Center, we noticed handling racially linguistic microaggressions - verbalized and written “indignities,...slights and insults” upon racial identities - were primarily at the expense of the tutor (Sue et al. 2007). Given these observations of our nation’s inadequacy in responding to racial injustices, reimagining the ways in which we solve such conflicts is essential to reclaiming the Writing Center as a safe and welcoming space for all individuals. In order to do so, we will develop ideas to protect tutors’ well-being when faced with racially oppressive language in the form of linguistic microaggressions, which will be done through a literature review of our selected sources reflecting on our own personal experiences. We will present our proposed methods for identifying and preventing the emergence of this type of racism in our workspace through a virtual poster.

Proposal

Establishing a supportive, all-inclusive, and collaborative environment for students and tutors alike is a priority for any Writing Center (Lunsford 1991). However, this requires the elimination of harmful practices such as oppressive language, which Suhr-Sytsma and Brown define as “systemic inequalities and discrimination based on sites of difference[s]” (2011). Suhr-Sytsma and Brown formulate heuristics to address these injustices; their work consists of two lists: one identifying the types of oppressive language utilized by tutees and the other providing techniques for writing advisers to mitigate such language. We intend to build off of our selected sources and start the conversation of addressing linguistic microaggressions — verbalized and written “indignities,...slights and insults”—upon racial identities (Sue et al. 2007).

Our project, then, entails in-depth reviews upon our selected sources. To maximize the accuracy, depth, and breadth of our results, we will additionally reflect on our own personal experiences as advisers of color. Through an accumulation of multiple perspectives, our group will be able to develop ideas for identifying racially linguistic microaggressions in the Writing Center and subsequent strategies to best support those who are experiencing them. We will present our final reviews, reflections, and future steps through a visual poster, as this format is ideal for providing an easily-accessible reference for the broader Writing Center community.

References

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