Topical Seminar - Friday, February 2, 1:30 pm at the Lewes Library

FROM MICRO-AGGRESSIONS TO FREE SPEECH

ANNE FERBER – DISCUSSION LEADER

 Please read the following articles for reference, as well as any other material you feel will further and enlighten the conversation. Don't forget to view the videos associated with this issue

Dr. Derald Wing Sue
https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/microaggressions-in-everyday-life/201010/racial-microaggressions-in-everyday-life

Derald Wing Sue, Ph.D.
Microagressions in Everyday Life

Not too long ago, I (Asian American) boarded a small plane with an African American colleague in the early hours of the morning. As there were few passengers, the flight attendant told us to sit anywhere, so we choose seats near the front of the plane and across the aisle from one another.

At the last minute, three White men entered the plane and took seats in front of us. Just before takeoff, the flight attendant, who is White, asked if we would mind moving to the back of the aircraft to better balance the plane's weight. We grudgingly complied but felt singled out as passengers of color in being told to "move to the back of the bus." When we expressed these feelings to the attendant, she indignantly denied the charge, became defensive, stated that her intent was to ensure the flight's safety, and wanted to give us some privacy.

Since we had entered the plane first, I asked why she did not ask the White men to move instead of us. She became indignant, stated that we had misunderstood her intentions, claimed she did not see "color," suggested that we were being "oversensitive," and refused to talk about the matter any further.

Were we being overly sensitive, or was the flight attendant being racist? That is a question that people of color are constantly faced with in their day-to-day interactions with well-intentioned White folks who experience themselves as good, moral and decent human beings.

The Common Experience of Racial Microaggressions

Such incidents have become a common-place experience for many people of color because they seem to occur constantly in our daily lives.

- When a White couple (man and women) passes a Black man on the sidewalk, the woman automatically clutches her purse more tightly, while the White man checks for his wallet in the back pocket. (Hidden Message: Blacks are prone to crime and up to no good.)
- A third generation Asian American is complimented by a taxi cab driver for speaking such good English. (Hidden Message: Asian Americans are perceived as perpetual aliens in their own country and not "real Americans.")
- Police stop a Latino male driver for no apparent reason but to subtly check his driver's license to determine immigration status. (Hidden message: Latinas/os are illegal aliens.)
- American Indian students at the University of Illinois see Native American symbols and mascots - exemplified by Chief Illiniwek dancing and whooping fiercely during football games. (Hidden Message: American Indians are savages, blood-thirsty and their culture and traditions are demeaned.)

In our 8-year research at Teachers College, Columbia University, we have found that these racial microaggressions may on the surface, appear like a compliment or seem quite innocent and harmless, but nevertheless, they contain what we call demeaning meta-communications or hidden messages.

What Are Racial Microaggressions?

The term racial microaggressions, was first coined by psychiatrist Chester Pierce, MD, in the 1970s. But the concept is also rooted in the work of Jack Dovidio, Ph.D. (Yale University) and Samuel Gaertner, Ph.D. (University of Delaware) in their formulation of aversive racism - many well-intentioned Whites consciously believe in and profess equality, but unconsciously act in a racist manner, particularly in ambiguous situations.

Racial microaggressions are the brief and everyday slights, insults, indignities and denigrating messages sent to people of color by well-intentioned White people who are unaware of the hidden messages being communicated. These messages may be sent verbally ("You speak good English."), nonverbally (clutching one's purse more tightly) or environmentally (symbols like the confederate flag or using American Indian mascots). Such communications are usually outside the level of conscious awareness of perpetrators. In the case of the flight attendant, I am sure that she believed she was acting with the best of intentions and probably felt aghast that someone would accuse her of such a horrendous act.

Our research and those of many social psychologists suggest that most people like the flight attendant, harbor unconscious biases and prejudices that leak out in many interpersonal situations and decision points. In other words, the attendant was acting with bias-she just didn't know it. Getting perpetrators to realize that they are acting in a biased manner is a monumental task because (a) on a conscious level they see themselves as fair minded individuals who would never consciously discriminate, (b) they are genuinely not aware of their biases, and (c) their self image of being "a good moral human being" is assailed if they realize and acknowledge that they possess biased thoughts, attitudes and feelings that harm people of color.

To better understand the type and range of these incidents, my research team and other researchers are exploring the manifestation, dynamics and impact of microaggressions. We have begun documenting how African Americans, Asian Americans, American Indians and Latina(o) Americans who receive these everyday psychological slings and arrows experience an erosion of their mental health, job performance, classroom learning, the quality of social experience, and ultimately their standard of living.

Classifying Microaggressions

In my book, Racial Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender and Sexual Orientation (John Wiley & Sons, 2010), I summarize research conducted at Teachers College, Columbia University which led us to propose a classification of racial microaggressions. Three types of current racial transgressions were described:

• Microassaults: Conscious and intentional discriminatory actions: using racial epithets, displaying White supremacist symbols - swastikas, or preventing one's son or daughter from dating outside of their race.

• Microinsults: Verbal, nonverbal, and environmental communications that subtly convey rudeness and insensitivity that demean a person's racial heritage or identity. An example is an employee who asks a co-worker of color how he/she got his/her job, implying he/she may have landed it through an affirmative action or quota system.

• Microinvalidations: Communications that subtly exclude negate or nullify the thoughts, feelings or experiential reality of a person of color. For instance, White people often ask Latinos where they were born, conveying the message that they are perpetual foreigners in their own land.

Our research suggests that microinsults and microinvalidiations are potentially more harmful because of their invisibility, which puts people of color in a psychological bind: While people of color may feel insulted, they are often uncertain why, and perpetrators are unaware that anything has happened and are not aware they have been offensive. For people of color, they are caught in a Catch-22. If they question the perpetrator, as in the case of the flight attendant, denials are likely to follow. Indeed, they may be labeled "oversensitive" or even "paranoid." If they choose not to confront perpetrators, the turmoil stews and percolates in the psyche of the person taking a huge emotional toll. In other words, they are damned if they do and damned if they don't.

Note that the denials by perpetrators are usually not conscious attempts to deceive; they honestly believe they have done no wrong. Microaggressions hold their power because they are invisible, and therefore they don't allow Whites to see that their actions and attitudes may be discriminatory. Therein lays the dilemma. The person of color is left to question what actually happened. The result is confusion, anger and an overall draining of energy.

Ironically, some research and testimony from people of color indicate they are better able to handle overt, conscious and deliberate acts of racism than the unconscious, subtle and less obvious forms. That is because there is no guesswork involved in overt forms of racism.

Harmful Impact

Many racial microaggressions are so subtle that neither target nor perpetrator may entirely understand what is happening. The invisibility of racial microaggressions may be more harmful to people of color than hate crimes or the overt and deliberate acts of White supremacists such as the Klan and Skinheads. Studies support the fact that people of color frequently experience microaggressions, that it is a continuing reality in their day-to-day interactions with friends, neighbors, co-workers, teachers, and employers in academic, social and public settings.

They are often made to feel excluded, untrustworthy, second-class citizens, and abnormal. People of color often describe the terrible feeling of being watched suspiciously in stores, that any slipup they make would negatively impact every person of color, that they felt pressured to represent the group in positive ways, and that they feel trapped in a stereotype. The burden of constant vigilance drains and saps psychological and spiritual energies of targets and contributes to chronic fatigue and a feeling of racial frustration and anger.

Space does not allow me to elaborate the harmful impact of racial microaggressions, but I summarize what the research literature reveals. Although they may appear like insignificant slights, or banal and trivial in nature, studies reveal that racial microaggressions have powerful detrimental consequences to people of color. They have been found to: (a) assail the mental health of recipients, (b) create a hostile and invalidating work or campus climate, (c) perpetuate stereotype threat, (d) create physical health problems, (e) saturate the broader society with cues that signal devaluation of social group identities, (f) lower work productivity and problem solving abilities, and (g) be partially responsible for creating inequities in education, employment and health care.

Future Blogs

I realize that I have left many questions unanswered with this posting, but my research team and I plan to continue updating our findings for readers to consider. For readers who desire a more thorough understanding of microaggressions, I recommend two major sources on the topic published this year (2010): Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation and Microaggressions and Marginality: Manifestation, Dynamics and Impact. Both can be accessed through the John Wiley & Sons, publisher's website.

Future blogs will deal with questions such as: How do people of color cope with the daily onslaught of racial microaggressions? Are some coping strategies better than others? How do we help perpetrators to become aware of microaggressions? What are the best ways to prevent them at an individual, institutional and societal level? Do other socially marginalized groups like women, LGBTs, those with disabilities, and religious minorities experience

microaggressions? In what ways are they similar or different? Is it possible for any of us to be born and raised in the United States without inheriting the racial, [gender](#) and [sexual orientation](#) biases of our ancestors? Are you personally a racist, sexist, or heterosexist? What is the best way for the average U.S. citizen to overcome these biases?

The first step in eliminating microaggressions is to make the "invisible" visible. I realize how controversial topics of race and racism, gender and sexism and sexual orientation and heterosexism push emotional hot buttons in all of us. I am hopeful that our blogs will stimulate discussion, debate, self reflection, and helpful dialogue directed at increasing mutual respect and understanding of the multiple social identities we all possess.

[Click here](#) to watch a short video about microaggressions featuring Dr. Derald Wing Sue.
To view a detailed description, including a chapter excerpt, or to purchase Dr. Sue's books, click on the title links below:
[Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation](#)
[Microaggressions and Marginality: Manifestation, Dynamics and Impact](#).

Jonathan Haidt
http://righteousmind.com/where-microaggressions-really-come-from/

Where microaggressions really come from: A sociological account

Posted by Jonathan Haidt in Civility, Social trends

I just read the most extraordinary paper by two sociologists — Bradley Campbell and Jason Manning — explaining why concerns about microaggressions have erupted on many American college campuses in just the past few years. In brief: We're beginning a second transition of moral cultures. The first major transition happened in the 18th and 19th centuries when most Western societies moved away from cultures of *honor* (where people must earn honor and must therefore avenge insults on their own) to cultures of *dignity* in which people are assumed to have dignity and don't need to earn it. They foreswear violence, turn to courts or administrative bodies to respond to major transgressions, and for minor transgressions they either ignore them or attempt to resolve them by social means. There's no more dueling.

Campbell and Manning describe how this culture of dignity is now giving way to a new *culture of victimhood* in which people are encouraged to respond to even the slightest unintentional offense, as in an honor culture. But they must not obtain redress on their own; they must appeal for help to powerful others or administrative bodies, to whom they must make the case that they have been victimized. *It is the very presence of such administrative bodies, within a culture that is highly egalitarian and diverse (i.e., many college campuses) that gives rise to intense efforts to identify oneself as a fragile and aggrieved victim*. This is why we have seen the recent explosion of concerns about microaggressions, combined with demands for trigger warnings and safe spaces, that Greg Lukianoff and I wrote about in The Coddling of the American Mind.

Later this month I will write a blog post laying out the implications of this extraordinary article. But first I want to make the ideas in the article widely available. It's a fairly long article, so I provide below an outline of its main sections with extensive quotations from each section. My hope is that you can read the text below and get 80% of the value of the article in just 7 minutes.

In what follows, all text is copied and pasted directly from the published article, [except for comments from me, which are in brackets.] **I have also bolded** the lines that are most important for understanding the phenomena described in The Coddling of the American Mind. **The key idea is that the new moral culture of victimhood fosters "moral dependence" and an atrophying of the ability to handle small interpersonal matters on one's own. At the same time that it weakens individuals, it creates a society of constant and intense moral conflict as people compete for status as victims or as defenders of victims**.

Here's the full citation: Campbell, B., & Manning, J. (2014). Microaggression and moral cultures. *Comparative sociology, 13*, 692-726. [Link to journal online; Here is a link to an ungated copy at Academia.edu]

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1) INTRODUCTION
Conflict occurs when someone defines another's behavior as deviant – as immoral or otherwise objectionable…. Conflict and social control are both ubiquitous and diverse, as the issues that spark grievances and ways of handling them vary enormously across social settings. Here we address changing patterns of conflict in modern societies by focusing on a new species of social control that is increasingly common at American colleges and

universities: the publicizing of micro aggressions.[p.693]… As we dissect this phenomenon, then, we first address how it fits into a **larger class of conflict tactics in which the aggrieved seek to attract and mobilize the support of third parties. We note that these tactics sometimes involve building a case for action by documenting, exaggerating, or even falsifying offenses. We address the social logic by which such tactics operate and the social conditions likely to produce them – those that encourage aggrieved individuals to rely on third parties to manage their conflicts, but make obtaining third party support problematic.** We then turn to the content of the grievances expressed in microaggression complaints and related forms of social control, which focus on inequality and emphasize the dominance of <u>offenders</u> and the oppression of the aggrieved.

We argue that the social conditions that promote complaints of oppression and victimization overlap with those that promote case-building attempts to attract third parties. When such social conditions are all present in high degrees, the result is a culture of victimhood in which individuals and groups display high sensitivity to slight, have a tendency to handle conflicts through complaints to third parties, and seek to cultivate an image of being victims who deserve assistance. [See <u>DeScioli & Kurzban</u> for more on the urgency of appealing to third parties] We contrast the culture of victimhood with cultures of honor and cultures of dignity.[p.695]

2) DEPENDENCE ON THIRD PARTIES
A) Gossip, Protest, and Complaint
Of the many ways people bring their grievances to the attention of third parties, perhaps the most common is to complain privately to family, friends, co-workers, and acquaintances. This is called gossip – "evaluative talk about a person who is not present." … Both individualized and collective conflicts might be brought to the attention of authority figures asked to punish the offender or otherwise handle the case. **Small children often bring their complaints to adults, for example, while adults might bring their complaints to the legal system** (e.g., Baumgartner 1992). Explaining the rise of microaggression complaints, then, **requires that we explain the conditions that lead individuals to bring their problems before third parties.** We suggest that the same factors that increase reliance on third parties in general encourage the public documenting of grievances in particular.

B) The Structural Logic of Moral Dependence
There are several circumstances that make individuals more likely to rely on third parties rather than their own devices. One factor is law. Historically, the growth of law has undermined various forms of unilateral social control. In times and places with little or no legal authority to protect property, settle disputes, or punish wrongdoers, people frequently handle such problems on their own through violent aggression – a phenomenon that students of law and social control refer to as "self-help"… Legal authority can potentially supplant other mechanisms of social control, from milder forms of self-help to negotiated compromise and mediation. **Insofar as people come to depend on law alone, their willingness or ability to use other forms of conflict <u>management</u> may atrophy, leading to a condition Black refers to as "legal overdependency"** (1989:77).[p.697]

Similarly, a college or university administration might handle conflicts among students and faculty. **Educational institutions not only police such academic misconduct as cheating and plagiarism, but increasingly enact codes forbidding interpersonal offenses**…. But note that reliance on third parties extends beyond reliance on authorities. Even if no authoritative action is taken, gossip and public shaming can be powerful sanctions. And even those who ultimately seek authoritative action might have to mobilize the support of additional third parties to convince authorities to act. **Indeed, the core of much modern activism, from protest rallies to leaflet campaigns to publicizing offenses on websites, appears to be concerned with rallying enough public support to convince authorities to act.** [p.698]

3)CAMPAIGNING FOR SUPPORT
A second notable feature of microaggression websites is that they do not merely call attention to a single offense,

but seek to document a series of offenses that, taken together, are more severe than any individual incident. As the term "micro" implies, the slights and insults are acts that many would consider to be only minor offenses and that others might not deem offensive at all. As noted on the Oberlin Microaggressions site, for example, its purpose is to show that acts of "racist, heterosexist/ homophobic, anti-Semitic, classist, ableists, sexist/cissexist speech etc." are "not simply isolated incidents, but rather part of structural inequalities" (Oberlin Microaggressions 2013). **These sites hope to mobilize and sustain support for a moral crusade against such injustice by showing that the injustices are more severe than observers might realize.**

A) The Structural Logic of Partisanship
Black's theory of partisanship identifies two conditions that make support from third parties more likely. First, third parties are more likely to act as partisans when they are socially closer to one side of the conflict than to the other, as they take the side of the socially closer disputant (Black 1998:126)… Any social tie or social similarity a third party shares with one disputant but not the other increases the chance of partisanship. Second, third parties are more likely to act as partisans when one side of a conflict is higher in status than the other, as they take the side of the higher-status disputant (Black 1998:126). [p.700]… But note that these campaigns for support do not necessarily emanate from the lowest reaches of society – that they are not primarily stocked or led by those who are completely lacking in property, respectability, education, or other forms of social status. **Rather, such forms as microaggression complaints and protest demonstrations appear to flourish among the relatively educated and affluent populations of American colleges and universities**. The socially down and out are so inferior to third parties that they are unlikely to campaign for their support, just as they are unlikely to receive it. [p.701].

B) Partisanship and Conflict Severity
[This is a long section on how partisanship leads some participants to magnify, exaggerate, or even invent transgressions that never happened]

4) DOMINATION AS DEVIANCE
A third notable feature of microaggression complaints is that the grievances focus on inequality and oppression – especially inequality and oppression based on cultural characteristics such as gender or ethnicity. Conduct is offensive because it perpetuates or increases the domination of some persons and groups by others.

A) Microaggression as Overstratification
According to Black (2011), as noted above, changes in stratification, intimacy, and diversity cause conflict. Microaggression complaints are largely about changes in stratification. They document actions said to increase the level of inequality in a social relationship – actions Black refers to as "overstratification." **Overstratification offenses occur whenever anyone rises above or falls below others in status. [Therefore…] a morality that privileges equality and condemns oppression is most likely to arise precisely in settings that already have relatively high degrees of equality**… **In modern Western societies, egalitarian ethics have developed alongside actual political and economic equality.** As women moved into the workforce in large numbers, became increasingly educated, made inroads into highly paid professions such as law and medicine, and became increasingly prominent in local, state, and national politics, **sexism became increasingly deviant**. The taboo has grown so strong that making racist statements, even in private, might jeopardize the careers of celebrities or the assets of businessmen (e.g., Fenno, Christensen, and Rainey 2014; Lynch 2013). [p.706-707] **[In other words, as progress is made toward a more equal and humane society, it takes a smaller and smaller offense to trigger a high level of outrage. The goalposts shift, allowing participants to maintain a constant level of anger and constant level of perceived victimization.]**

B) Microaggression as underdiversity
Microaggression offenses also tend to involve what Black calls "underdiversity" – the rejection of a culture. Large acts of underdiversity include things like genocide or political oppression, while smaller acts include ethnic jokes or insults. The publicizers of microaggressions are concerned with the latter, as well as more subtle, perhaps

inadvertent, cultural slights…. Just as overstratification conflict varies inversely with stratification, **underdiversity conflict varies directly with diversity** (Black 2011:139). Attempts to increase stratification, we saw, are more deviant where stratification is at a minimum; **likewise, attempts to decrease diversity are more deviant where diversity is at a maximum**. In modern Western societies, an ethic of cultural tolerance – and often incompatibly, intolerance of intolerance – has developed in tandem with increasing diversity. Since microaggression offenses normally involve overstratification and underdiversity, intense concern about such offenses occurs at the intersection of the social conditions conducive to the seriousness of each. **It is in egalitarian and diverse settings – such as at modern American universities – that equality and diversity are most valued, and it is in these settings that perceived offenses against these values are most deviant. [p.707]. [Again, the paradox: places that make the most progress toward equality and diversity can expect to have the "lowest bar" for what counts as an offense against equality and inclusivity. Some colleges have lowered the bar so far that an innocent question, motivated by curiosity, such as "where are you from" is now branded as an act of aggression.]**

C) Victimhood as Virtue
When the victims publicize microaggressions they call attention to what they see as the deviant behavior of the offenders. In doing so they also call attention to their own victimization. Indeed, many ways of attracting the attention and sympathy of third parties emphasize or exacerbate the low status of the aggrieved. People portray themselves as oppressed by the powerful – as damaged, disadvantaged, and needy. [They describe such practices going back to ancient Rome and India] … **But why emphasize one's victimization?** Certainly the distinction between offender and victim always has moral significance, lowering the offender's moral status. **In the settings such as those that generate microaggression catalogs, though, where offenders are oppressors and victims are the oppressed, it also raises the moral status of the victims. This only increases the incentive to publicize grievances, and it means aggrieved parties are especially likely to highlight their identity as victims, emphasizing their own suffering and innocence. Their adversaries are privileged and blameworthy, but they themselves are pitiable and blameless.** [p.707-708] **[This is the great tragedy: the culture of victimization rewards people for taking on a personal identity as one who is damaged, weak, and aggrieved. This is a recipe for failure — and constant litigation — after students graduate from college and attempt to enter the workforce]**

[Reminder: All text not in brackets is from Campbell, B., & Manning, J. (2014). Microaggression and moral cultures. *Comparative sociology, 13*, 692-726]

5) THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF MICROAGGRESSION
In sum, microaggression catalogs are a form of social control in which the aggrieved collect and publicize accounts of intercollective offenses, making the case that relatively minor slights are part of a larger pattern of injustice and that those who suffer them are socially marginalized and deserving of sympathy. **[The social conditions that give rise to this form of social control] include a social setting with cultural diversity and relatively high levels of equality, though with the presence of strongly superior third parties such as legal officials and organizational administrators… Under these conditions, individuals are likely to express grievances about oppression, and aggrieved individuals are likely to depend on the aid of third parties, to cast a wide net in their attempt to find supporters, and to campaign for support by emphasizing their own need against a bullying adversary.** [p.710]

Several social trends encourage the growth of these forms of social control, particularly in the United States. **Since the rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s, racial, sexual, and other forms of intercollective inequality have declined, resulting in a more egalitarian society in which members are much more sensitive to those inequalities that remain.** The last few decades have seen **the continued growth of legal and administrative authority, including growth in the size and scope of university administrations and in the salaries of top administrators and the creation of specialized agencies of social control, such as offices whose sole purpose to increase "social justice" by combatting racial, ethnic, or other intercollective offenses** (Lukianoff 2012:69–73). Social atomization has increased, undermining the solidary networks that once encouraged confrontational modes of social control and provided individuals with strong partisans, while at the same time **modern technology has allowed for mass communication to a virtual sea of weak partisans. This last trend has been especially dramatic during the past decade, with the result that aggrieved individuals can potentially appeal to millions of third parties.** [P. 710] …As

social media becomes ever more ubiquitous, the ready availability of the court of public opinion may make public disclosure of offenses an increasingly likely course of action. As advertising one's victimization becomes an increasingly reliable way to attract attention and support, modern conditions may even lead to the emergence of a new moral culture. **[In other words: progress toward greater equality and inclusiveness, combined with the enormous growth of administrators and other "adults" on campus charged with adjudicating complaints about verbal behavior, plus social atomization, multiplied by the power of social media, explains why charges of "microaggression" have emerged so rapidly on some college campuses just in the last few years.]**

6) THE EVOLUTION OF MORAL CULTURE
Social scientists have long recognized a distinction between societies with a "culture of honor" and those with a "culture of dignity".... The moral evolution of modern Western society can be understood as a transition between these two cultures. [p. 711-712]

A) A Culture of Honor
Honor is a kind of status attached to physical bravery and the unwillingness to be dominated by anyone. Honor in this sense is a status that depends on the evaluations of others, and members of honor societies are expected to display their bravery by engaging in violent retaliation against those who offend them (Cooney 1998:108–109; Leung and Cohen 2011). Accordingly, those who engage in such violence often say that the opinions of others left them no choice at all.... In honor cultures, it is one's reputation that makes one honorable or not, and one must respond aggressively to insults, aggressions, and challenges or lose honor. Not to fight back is itself a kind of moral failing, such that "in honor cultures, people are shunned or criticized not for exacting vengeance but for failing to do so" (Cooney 1998:110). Honorable people must guard their reputations, so they are highly sensitive to insult, often responding aggressively to what might seem to outsiders as minor slights (Cohen et al. 1996; Cooney 1998:115–119; Leung and Cohen 2011)... Cultures of honor tend to arise in places where legal authority is weak or nonexistent and where a reputation for toughness is perhaps the only effective deterrent against predation or attack (Cooney 1998:122; Leung and Cohen 2011:510). **Because of their belief in the value of personal bravery and capability, people socialized into a culture of honor will often shun reliance on law or any other authority even when it is available, refusing to lower their standing by depending on another to handle their affairs** (Cooney 1998:122–129). But historically, as state authority has expanded and reliance on the law has increased, honor culture has given way to something else: a culture of dignity. [p. 712-713]

B) A Culture of Dignity
The prevailing culture in the modern West is one whose moral code is nearly the exact opposite of that of an honor culture. Rather than honor, a status based primarily on public opinion, people are said to have dignity, a kind of inherent worth that cannot be alienated by others (Berger 1970; see also Leung and Cohen 2011). Dignity exists independently of what others think, so a culture of dignity is one in which public reputation is less important. Insults might provoke offense, but they no longer have the same importance as a way of establishing or destroying a reputation for bravery. **It is even commendable to have "thick skin" that allows one to shrug off slights and even serious insults, and in a dignity-based society parents might teach children some version of "sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me" – an idea that would be alien in a culture of honor** (Leung and Cohen 2011:509). P**eople are to avoid insulting others, too, whether intentionally or not, and in general an ethic of self-restraint prevails**.

When intolerable conflicts do arise, dignity cultures prescribe direct but non-violent actions, such as negotiated compromise geared toward solving the problem (Aslani et al. 2012). Failing this, or if the offense is sufficiently severe, people are to go to the police or appeal to the courts. Unlike the honorable, the dignified approve of appeals to third parties and condemn those who "take the law into their own hands." For offenses like theft, assault, or breach of contract, people in a dignity culture will use law without shame. **But in keeping with their ethic of restraint and toleration, it is not necessarily their first resort, and they might condemn many uses of the authorities as frivolous. People might even be expected to tolerate serious but accidental personal injuries....**

The ideal in dignity cultures is thus to use the courts as quickly, quietly, and rarely as possible. The growth of law, order, and commerce in the modern world facilitated the rise of the culture of dignity, which largely supplanted the culture of honor among the middle and upper classes of the West…. But the rise of microaggression complaints suggests a new direction in the evolution of moral culture.

C) A Culture of Victimhood
Microaggression complaints have characteristics that put them at odds with both honor and dignity cultures. Honorable people are sensitive to insult, and so they would understand that microaggressions, even if unintentional, are severe offenses that demand a serious response. But honor cultures value unilateral aggression and disparage appeals for help. **Public complaints that advertise or even exaggerate one's own victimization and need for sympathy would be anathema to a person of honor – tantamount to showing that one had no honor at all. Members of a dignity culture, on the other hand, would see no shame in appealing to third parties, but they would not approve of such appeals for minor and merely verbal offenses. Instead they would likely counsel either confronting the offender directly to discuss the issue, or better yet, ignoring the remarks altogether**.[p.714-715]

A culture of victimhood is one characterized by concern with status and sensitivity to slight combined with a heavy reliance on third parties. People are intolerant of insults, even if unintentional, and react by bringing them to the attention of authorities or to the public at large. Domination is the main form of deviance, and victimization a way of attracting sympathy, so rather than emphasize either their strength or inner worth, the aggrieved emphasize their oppression and social marginalization. … Under such conditions complaint to third parties has supplanted both toleration and negotiation. People increasingly demand help from others, and advertise their oppression as evidence that they deserve respect and assistance. **Thus we might call this moral culture a culture of victimhood because the moral status of the victim, at its nadir in honor cultures, has risen to new heights**.[p.715]

The culture of victimhood is currently most entrenched on college campuses, where microaggression complaints are most prevalent. Other ways of campaigning for support from third parties and emphasizing one's own oppression – from protest demonstrations to the invented victimization of hate-crime hoaxes – are prevalent in this setting as well. **That victimhood culture is so evident among campus activists might lead the reader to believe this is entirely a phenomenon of the political left, and indeed, the narrative of oppression and victimization is especially congenial to the leftist worldview (Haidt 2012:296; Kling 2013; Smith 2003:82). But insofar as they share a social environment, the same conditions that lead the aggrieved to use a tactic against their adversaries encourage their adversaries to use that tactic as wel**l. For instance, hate crime hoaxes do not all come from the left. [gives examples] … **Naturally, whenever victimhood (or honor, or anything else) confers status, all sorts of people will want to claim it.** As clinical psychologist David J. Ley notes, the response of those labeled as oppressors is frequently to "assert that they are a victim as well." Thus, "men criticized as sexist for challenging radical feminism defend themselves as victims of reverse sexism, [and] people criticized as being unsympathetic proclaim their own history of victimization."[p.715] **[In this way, victimhood culture causes a downward spiral of competitive victimhood. Young people on the left and the right get sucked into its vortex of grievance. We can expect political polarization to get steadily worse in the coming decades as this moral culture of victimhood spreads]**

7) CONCLUSIONS
The emerging victimhood culture appears to share [dignity culture's] disdain for risk, but it does condone calling attention to oneself [as in an honor culture] as long as one is **calling attention to one's own hardships – to weaknesses rather than strengths and to exploitation rather than exploits**. For example, students writing personal statements as part of their applications for colleges and graduate schools often write not of their academic achievements but instead – with the encouragement of the universities – about overcoming adversity such as a parent's job loss or having to shop at thrift stores (Lieber 2014). And in a setting where people

increasingly eschew toleration and publicly air complaints to compel official action, personal discomfort looms large in official policy. For example, consider recent calls for "trigger warnings" in college classes or on course syllabuses to forewarn students they are about to exposed to topics that cause them distress… [**This is a clear link between microaggressions and trigger warnings — both make sense in a moral culture of victimhood**]

What we are seeing in these controversies is the clash between dignity and victimhood, much as in earlier times there was a clash between honor and dignity…. At universities and many other environments within modern America and, increasingly, other Western nations, the clash between dignity and victimhood engenders a similar kind of moral confusion: One person's standard provokes another's grievance, acts of social control themselves are treated as deviant, and unintentional offenses abound. And the conflict will continue. As it does each side will make its case, attracting supporters and winning or losing various battles. But remember that the moral concepts each side invokes are not free-floating ideas; they are reflections of social organization. Microaggression complaints and other specimens of victimhood occur in atomized and diverse settings that are fairly egalitarian except for the presence of strong and stable authority. In these settings behaviors that jeopardize equality or demean minority cultures are rare and those that occur mostly minor, but in this context even minor offenses – or perceived offenses – cause much anguish. And while the authorities and others might be sympathetic, their support is not automatic. Add to this mix modern communication technologies that make it easy to publicize grievances, and the result, as we have seen, is the rise of a victimhood culture.[p.718]

From the Stone

By Ulrich Baer

April 24, 2017

This article has been updated to add a disclaimer.

At one of the premieres of his landmark Holocaust documentary, "Shoah" (1985), the filmmaker Claude Lanzmann was challenged by a member of the audience, a woman who identified herself as a Holocaust survivor. Lanzmann listened politely as the woman recounted her harrowing personal account of the Holocaust to make the point that the film failed to fully represent the recollections of survivors. When she finished, Lanzmann waited a bit, and then said, "Madame, you are an experience, but not an argument."

This exchange, conveyed to me by the Russian literature scholar Victor Erlich some years ago, has stayed with me, and it has taken on renewed significance as the struggles on American campuses to negotiate issues of free speech have intensified — most recently in protests at Auburn University against a visit by the white nationalist Richard Spencer.

Lanzmann's blunt reply favored reasoned analysis over personal memory. In light of his painstaking research into the Holocaust, his comment must have seemed insensitive but necessary at the time. Ironically, "Shoah" eventually helped usher in an era of testimony that elevated stories of trauma to a new level of importance, especially in cultural production and universities.

During the 1980s and '90s, a shift occurred in American culture; personal experience and testimony, especially of suffering and oppression, began to challenge the primacy of argument. Freedom of expression became a flash point in this shift. Then as now, both liberals and conservatives were wary of the privileging of personal experience, with its powerful emotional impact, over reason and argument, which some fear will bring an end to civilization, or at least to freedom of speech.

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My view (and, like all the views expressed here, it does not represent the views or policies of my employer, New York University) is that we should resist the temptation to rehash these debates. Doing so would overlook the fact that a thorough generational shift has occurred. Widespread caricatures of students as overly sensitive, vulnerable and entitled "snowflakes" fail to acknowledge the philosophical work that was carried out, especially in the 1980s and '90s, to legitimate experience — especially traumatic experience — which had been dismissed for decades as unreliable, untrustworthy and inaccessible to understanding.

The philosopher [Jean-François Lyotard](), best known for his prescient analysis in "The Postmodern Condition" of how public discourse discards the categories of true/false and just/unjust in favor of valuing the mere fact that something is being communicated, examined the tension between experience and argument in a different way.

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Instead of defining freedom of expression as guaranteeing the robust debate from which the truth emerges, Lyotard focused on the asymmetry of different positions when personal experience is challenged by abstract arguments. His extreme example was Holocaust denial, where invidious but often well-publicized cranks

confronted survivors with the absurd challenge to produce incontrovertible eyewitness evidence of their experience of the killing machines set up by the Nazis to exterminate the Jews of Europe. Not only was such evidence unavailable, but it also challenged the Jewish survivors to produce evidence of their own legitimacy in a discourse that had systematically denied their humanity.

Lyotard shifted attention away from the content of free speech to the way certain topics restrict speech as a public good. Some things are unmentionable and undebatable, but not because they offend the sensibilities of the sheltered young. Some topics, such as claims that some human beings are by definition inferior to others, or illegal or unworthy of legal standing, are not open to debate because such people cannot debate them on the same terms.

The recent student demonstrations at Auburn against Spencer's visit — as well as protests on other campuses against Charles Murray, Milo Yiannopoulos and others — should be understood as an attempt to ensure the conditions of free speech for a greater group of people, rather than censorship. Liberal free-speech advocates rush to point out that the views of these individuals must be heard first to be rejected. But this is not the case. Universities invite speakers not chiefly to present otherwise unavailable discoveries, but to present to the public views they have presented elsewhere. When those views invalidate the humanity of some people, they restrict speech as a public good.

In such cases there is no inherent value to be gained from debating them in public. In today's age, we also have a simple solution that should appease all those concerned that students are insufficiently exposed to controversial views. It is called the internet, where all kinds of offensive expression flourish unfettered on a vast platform available to nearly all.

The great value and importance of freedom of expression, for higher education and for democracy, is hard to overestimate. But it has been regrettably easy for commentators to create a simple dichotomy between a younger generation's oversensitivity and free speech as an absolute good that leads to the truth. We would do better to focus on a more sophisticated understanding, such as the one provided by Lyotard, of the necessary conditions for speech to be a common, public good. This requires the realization that in politics, the parameters of public speech must be continually redrawn to accommodate those who previously had no standing.

The rights of transgender people for legal equality and protection against discrimination are a current example in a long history of such redefinitions. It is only when trans people are recognized as fully human, rather than as men and women in disguise, as Ben Carson, the current secretary of housing and urban development claims, that their rights can be fully recognized in policy decisions.

The idea of freedom of speech does not mean a blanket permission to say anything anybody thinks. It means balancing the inherent value of a given view with the obligation to ensure that other members of a given community can participate in discourse as fully recognized members of that community. Free-speech protections — not only but especially in universities, which aim to educate students in how to belong to various communities — should not mean that someone's humanity, or their right to participate in political speech as political agents, can be freely attacked, demeaned or questioned.

THE STUDENT ACTIVISM that has roiled campuses — at Auburn, Missouri, Yale, Berkeley, Middlebury and elsewhere — is an opportunity to take stock of free speech issues in a changed world. It is also an opportunity to take into account the past few decades of scholarship that has honed our understanding of the rights to expression in higher education, which maintains particularly high standards of what is worthy of debate.

The recent controversies over the conflict between freedom of expression and granting everyone access to speech hark back to another telling moment. In 1963, Yale University had rescinded an invitation to Alabama's segregationist governor, George C. Wallace. In 1974, after unruly protests prevented William Shockley from

debating his recommendation for voluntary sterilization of people with low I.Q.s, and other related incidents, Yale issued a report on how best to uphold the value of free speech on campus that remains the gold standard for many other institutions.

Unlike today's somewhat reflexive defenders of free speech, the Yale report situated the issue of free speech on campus within the context of an increasingly inclusive university and the changing demographics of society at large. While Yale bemoaned the occasional "paranoid intolerance" of student protesters, the university also criticized the "arrogant insensitivity" of free speech advocates who failed to acknowledge that requiring of someone in public debate to defend their human worth conflicts with the community's obligation to assure all of its members equal access to public speech.

It is perhaps telling that in the 1980s and '90s, while I was also a doctoral student there, Yale ultimately became the hotbed of philosophical thinking that acknowledged the claims of people who had not been granted full participation in public discourse. Their accounts, previously dismissed as "unspeakable" or "unimaginable," now gained legitimacy in redefining the rules of what counts as public speech. Lyotard taught at Yale in early 1990s, and his and others' thoughts on how to resolve the asymmetry in discussions between perpetrators and victims of systemic or personal violence, without curtailing speech too much, seeped into other disciplines.

Lyotard and others were interested in expanding the frames of discourse, as they had been before, when married women were granted full legal status after centuries of having their very being legally suspended upon marriage.

When Yale issued its guidelines about free speech, it did so to account for a new reality, in the early 1970s, when increasing numbers of minority students and women enrolled at elite college campuses. We live in a new reality as well. We should recognize that the current generation of students, roundly ridiculed by an unholy alliance of so-called alt-right demagogues and campus liberals as coddled snowflakes, realized something important about this country before the pundits and professors figured it out.

What is under severe attack, in the name of an absolute notion of free speech, are the rights, both legal and cultural, of minorities to participate in public discourse. The snowflakes sensed, a good year before the election of President Trump, that insults and direct threats could once again become sanctioned by the most powerful office in the land. They grasped that racial and sexual equality is not so deep in the DNA of the American public that even some of its legal safeguards could not be undone.

The issues to which the students are so sensitive might be benign when they occur within the ivory tower. Coming from the campaign trail and now the White House, the threats are not meant to merely offend. Like President Trump's attacks on the liberal media as the "enemies of the American people," his insults are meant to discredit and delegitimize whole groups as less worthy of participation in the public exchange of ideas.

As a college professor and university administrator with over two decades of direct experience of campus politics, I am not overly worried that even the shrillest heckler's vetoes will end free speech in America. As a scholar of literature, history and politics, I am especially attuned to the next generation's demands to revise existing definitions of free speech to accommodate previously delegitimized experiences. Freedom of expression is not an unchanging absolute. When its proponents forget that it requires the vigilant and continuing examination of its parameters, and instead invoke a pure model of free speech that has never existed, the dangers to our democracy are clear and present.

We should thank the student protestors, the activists in Black Lives Matter and other "overly sensitive" souls for keeping watch over the soul of our republic.

Ulrich Baer is vice provost for faculty, arts, humanities, and diversity, and professor of comparative literature at New York University, and the author of "We Are But a Moment," a novel.

ARTICLE FROM WASHINGTON POST

Professor told he's not safe on campus after college protests at Evergreen State College (Washington)

By Eugene Volokh May 26, 2017

As reported by KING-5, a Washington TV station:

"I have been told by the Chief of Police it's not safe for me to be on campus," said [Evergreen State College professor Bret] Weinstein, who held his Thursday class in a downtown Olympia[, Wash.,] park.

An administrator confirmed the police department advised Weinstein it "might be best to stay off campus for a day or so."

Demonstrations involving as many as 200 students filled classrooms and the President's office on campus on Tuesday and Wednesday. Protesters are upset over what they believe are racist policies at the college, and some called for Weinstein to resign.

Earlier this school year Weinstein raised concerns about proposed policy changes, including one that would have race play a larger role in the hiring process.

The Washington Times (Bradford Richardson) reports that part of the hostility toward Weinstein also seems to stem from his objection to a "Day of Absence" "in which white people were invited to leave campus for a day"; see also Heat Street (Lukas Mikelionis). Here is Weinstein's email objecting to the proposed day-long ejection of whites, as reproduced by Heat Street:

Dear Rashida,

When you first described the new structure for Day of Absence / Day of Presence at a past faculty meeting (where no room was left for questions), I thought I must have misunderstood what you said. Later emails seemed to muddy the waters further, while inviting commitments to participate. I now see from the boldfaced text in this email that I had indeed understood your words correctly.

There is a huge difference between a group or coalition deciding to voluntarily absent themselves from a shared space in order to highlight their vital and under-appreciated roles (the theme of the Douglas Turner Ward play *Day of Absence*, as well as the recent Women's Day walkout), and a group or coalition encouraging another group to go away. The first is a forceful call to consciousness which is, of course, crippling to the logic of oppression. The second is a show of force, and an act of oppression in and of itself.

You may take this letter as a formal protest of this year's structure, and you may assume I will be on campus on the Day of Absence. I would encourage others to put phenotype aside and reject this new formulation, whether they have 'registered' for it already or not. On a college campus, one's right to speak — or to be — must never be based on skin color.

If there was interest in a public presentation and discussion of race through a scientific / evolutionary lens, I would be quite willing to organize such an event (it is material I have taught in my own programs, and guest lectured on at Evergreen and elsewhere). Everyone would be equally welcome and encouraged to attend such a forum, irrespective of ethnicity, belief structure, native language, political leanings, or position at the college. My only requirement would be that people attend with an open mind, and a willingness to act in good faith.

If there is interest in such an event, please let me know

View the following youtube videos related to this incident:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LTnDpoQLNaY

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-st73zhZL3A