



Creative Intervention

Pose... You Have Been Microaggressed!

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Context

As a queer racialized scholar, I have spent over nine years teaching in academia across various departments and programs, including Conflict Resolution, Sociology, Criminal Justice, Religion and Culture, and Women's and Gender Studies. Although diversity has ostensibly increased in some institutions, the academic landscape remains predominantly white and European-centric. Instructors of color are constantly tokenized as their representation in most departments is still insufficient.

Several years ago, a student of mine approached me with excitement, and she said, "When I saw your name on the registrar's site, I wasn't sure how a name like Mehmet could teach Gender and Sexuality, but it turned out to be a great class, thank you!" While the student's intention may have been to express appreciation, the comment was deeply unsettling; it was shocking for me to digest it in many ways. I froze and had an awkward smile on my face until the student left the classroom. However, what I heard from the student did not leave me for so many years, and only now, years later, am I able to write about it.

This student (probably like many others) saw my name on the Registrar's website and implicitly assumed that someone with an ethnic(!) name, presumably from a background where gender and sexuality are viewed as troubling, could not possibly be qualified to teach the course. In other words, she only saw my name and appearance attached to my name before I had a chance to stand at the classroom podium and "prove!" myself. I could not help but reflect on Edward Said's (2004) *Orientalism* and how it "is very much tied to the tumultuous dynamics of contemporary history" (p. 870). As Said (2004) succinctly notes, "neither the term Orient nor the concept of the West has any ontological stability; each is made up of human effort, partly affirmation, partly identification of the Other" (p. 870). The misrepresented picture of the Other leads to "fear, hatred, disgust, resurgent self-pride and arrogance" (p. 870). My

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experience motivated me to write this intervention after years of analysis of microaggression, exclusion, and prejudice in academia.

After this experience, I began to pay closer attention to my own position as a racialized person in academic spaces and started connecting with racialized colleagues who shared similar struggles. Unsurprisingly, my experience was not unique, as many racialized academics have encountered similar dynamics. The more I engaged with these colleagues, the more lifted I felt.

In 2025, I attended the International Studies Association (ISA) Conference in Chicago. On the conference program, I noticed a session that sounded particularly fascinating. After the session chair introduced the speakers, one of them began their presentation with a poem. To me, it was a beautiful and powerful opening. However, I noticed a few people left immediately after the poem was read. It wasn't offensive; rather, it challenged us to think critically about space, identity, and belonging in academia.

As I watched them leave, I couldn't help but think that those who walked out were perhaps unwilling to engage deeply with the importance of poetry in academic practice, both as a method of resistance and as reimagining knowledge production through oral history. To them, that particular poem was, perhaps, less credible. Poetry is indeed a vital aspect of academia; it must be! It disrupts binary thinking and invites emotional, interconnected ways of bringing people together while allowing knowledge to be expressed differently. That poem at the ISA conference disrupted the so-called traditional mode of presenting research that is supposed to be neutral, but what does that even mean? Is it acceptable if neutrality serves to silence or discredit the emotions to be expressed? Knowledge is transformative if alive and embodied by emotions, so neutral is never neutral. When I read a poem in my teaching and praxis, it invites experiences and emotions. A poem opens a critical door for us to regenerate knowledge and be present in the space through oral history. This is particularly important when we, as scholars and practitioners, engage with communities whose stories have been historically silenced. Stories hold power when they are told by ordinary people who have lived experiences, and their mode of presentation is not the same as that of academics.

I dedicate this poem to all colleagues who have been marginalized, dismissed, silenced, and subjected to microaggressions and any forms of discrimination in academic institutions. This poem is a call for global decolonial solidarity. I hope that there will be days when we exist in these spaces without interruption.

Pose... You Have Been Microaggressed!

A student approached with excitement and said:
“When I saw your name on the registrar’s site,
I wasn’t sure how such a name could make this class rise?”
Pose... You have been microaggressed!
I took a slow, deep breath.
My excitement faded into quiet unrest, miserable thinking,
A sinking weight of thought:
Did they see my name before I walked up to the podium?
Was I expected to prove what others are simply granted?
Pose... You have been microaggressed.
When I introduce myself as Mehmet,
A colleague asks if it is all right for them to call me Matt.
Because it is convenient for them?!
And do I exist at this institution for their convenience?!
The same colleague I know everything about...
How to pronounce their full name,
Their research area, and more...
When I introduce myself as Mehmet,
A colleague suddenly wants to guess where I am from.
Uninvited, unprompted.
“Wait, let me guess! Are you from Egypt?” they asked.
Pose... You have been microaggressed!
Pose... You have been microaggressed!
But hear this:
Spatial justice is where a place welcomes you with dignity,
Where your name and actions sound authentic without interruption,
Where your identity is neither questioned nor dismissed.
Pose...? Not anymore!
You deserve to take up space without apology.
Your presence is welcome, Mehmet.
Your presence is not an exception.

References

Said, E. (2004). Orientalism once more. *Development and Change*, 35(5), 869-879.