Narrator:

The Missouri State Journal, a weekly program keeping you in touch with Missouri State University.

Nicki Donnelson:

Microaggressions, by definition, can be invisible or unintentional, but it doesn’t mean they are a victimless crime. They hurt, invalidate, and build upon systemic racism rather than tearing it down. I’m Nicki Donnelson for the Missouri State Journal. In this second of a two-part series on the subject, Dr. Adena Young-Jones, psychology professor at Missouri State University, will share findings from her study on perceived microaggressions in hopes that we can all shed light on some areas in our own lives that we might be making these same blunders completely unaware. She tells us more about the study.

Dr. Adena Young-Jones:

We created eighteen scenarios presented as fictional situations, such as, a female student is lifting weights at the rec center, a male student comes in a exclaims, “Wow! You lift a ton of weight for a girl”. Or a group of young black men walk into a store, and you notice that they’re watched closely by the workers to make sure they aren’t stealing anything. So, participants then responded to twelve statements rating they’re opinions of the scenario that included: level of offensiveness, likelihood of a similar situation happening, accuracy of the stereotypes portrayed, and awareness of the microaggressions impacting their group and also other marginalized groups.

Nicki Donnelson:

Young-Jones tells us what they found.

Dr. Adena Young-Jones:

Based on the low number of underrepresented individuals in rural populations, we hypothesized that those from the rural locations, which show less awareness, than participants from urban or suburban areas. This hypothesis was partially supported by apparent differences in awareness of gender microaggressions between men and women from either suburban or rural settings. Men from the suburban or rural locations were less aware of these types of microaggressions than women from the same locations. But, men and women from the urban settings were equally aware of those microaggressions. This is an interesting finding because women comprise a unique category of underrepresented individuals since they’re actually the majority in number. Our findings may be due to the fact that in rural and suburban areas women may be exposed more often to subtle slights, or that such slights are viewed as accurate. So, from the other two microaggression categories, sexual orientation and racial ethnic groups, we found no differences in microaggression awareness based on where that person was from. Unfortunately, based on sample size, it is possible that there are simply just not enough students in the marginalized groups for sexual orientation or race ethnicity to accurately compare these groups. Also, in comparison of students from a historically diverse campus and those from here at Missouri State, which is a less diverse campus, we found no differences between campus location for perception of awareness, offensiveness, and frequency of experiencing microaggressions. So, this is good to know for those of us who live here and are part of the Missouri State community.

Nicki Donnelson:

In regards to awareness, they found that if you are a member of a group that is commonly targeted, you are more likely to identify microaggressions aimed at your group. However, those who are marginalized based on sexual orientation were more apt at identifying microaggressions across the board.

Dr. Adena Young-Jones:

We feel that these findings support the necessity of increased awareness of microaggressions as the awareness of one’s acts of microaggressions is one of the identified means of combating this problem. Finally, regarding offensiveness, we only found differences in perceptions in the sexual orientation category between the historically underrepresented and majority individuals in that particular group. So, an explanation for why women and racially underrepresented students did not perceive a higher level of offensiveness compared to the majority groups could be a result of the relative novelty of microaggressions toward those in the stigmatized category for sexual orientation. That is, the marginalized individuals in the gender and racial ethnic groups have been historically disfavored and maybe even more accustomed to experiencing microaggressions. This familiarity may then lead to desensitization, and in turn, that desensitization could lead to decreased perceptions of offensiveness overall.

Nicki Donnelson:

That was Dr. Adena Young-Jones. I'm Nicki Donnelson for the Missouri State Journal.

Narrator:

For more information, contact the Office of Strategic Communication at 417-836-6397. The Missouri State Journal is available online at ksmu.org.