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### Witnessing Microaggressions on Campus: Effective and Ineffective Ally Behaviors

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# Witnessing Microaggressions on Campus: Effective and Ineffective Ally Behaviors

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## Introduction

- Microaggressions are common, (un)intentional everyday insults toward a minority group (Sue et al., 2007).
- Experiencing microaggressions are linked with low well-being and academic performance (Keels et al., 2017).
- The present study examined ways students respond to microaggressions based on gender, sexuality, and ethnicity. Building on previous research (Toomey & McGeorge, 2018), we hypothesized that women, ethnic minorities, and sexual minorities will show more effective ally behaviors than those who do not identify as a minority.

## Methods

- We recruited 218 first year college students (74% women, 24% men, 2% trans/non-binary;  $M_{age} = 18$ ) to take a three part online study about campus climate.
- Participants were asked questions about their campus experiences, knowledge about microaggression, and ally behaviors.
- Questions regarding ally behaviors asked participants their typical reaction to a microaggression, such as ineffective (“laugh”), neutral (“wait to hear/see what the victim does”), to effective (“ask the victim if they are okay”) behaviors.

Do people who identify as a minority engage in more effective ally behaviors than people who do not identify as a minority?

When witnessing a microaggression on campus, “who” is more likely to engage in effective ally behaviors?

In a study of 218 first year students, we found that students—regardless of gender, race, and sexual orientation—were likely to engage in effective ally behavior. However, most students identified as a minority, which most likely accounts for these findings.

## Examples of Effective, Neutral, and Ineffective Ally Behaviors

Effective Behaviors	Neutral Behaviors	Ineffective Behaviors
Talk to offender in private later	Pretend I didn't hear/see anything	Encourage the offender to continue
Speak up and defend the victim	Wait to hear or see what someone else does	Engage in a physical altercation with the offender

## Results

- We predicted that students who identify as an underrepresented minority (based on gender, race, and sexual orientation) would engage in a greater number of effective ally behaviors compared to majority members. However, our hypotheses were not supported.
- Instead, we found that students—regardless of gender, sexual orientation, or ethnicity—engaged in similar effective ally behaviors ( $\eta^2$  range 0.06 to 0.43,  $p > 0.05$ ).
- Gender was found to have an effect on neutral strategies such that cis-gendered women reported to be more likely to use neutral strategies against microaggressions than their cis-male counterparts ( $\eta^2 = 0.39$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).

## Conclusion

- Though this study did not yield the expected results, its findings provide some valuable insights.
- The amount of reported use of allyship behavior may be due to a social desirability effect within participants to portray themselves as more likely to be an effective ally than they really are.
- Most participants who completed this survey identified as minority, suggesting a lack of willingness within more privileged individuals to participate in a study aiming to combat micro-aggressions.
- Future studies should include a more representative samples in order to get a more accurate understanding of the general response to microaggressions.



Take a picture to download the abstract.