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Why can't you control your own sexism? The interactional anatomy of gender microaggressions in a professional organization

This talk responds to Cameron's (2020: 29) call for broadening "the scope of an inquiry into sexism in language" as "the real-world problem". It argues for adopting an analytical concept that recognizes both more subtle as well as overt forms of gender discrimination to explore a spectrum of seemingly disconnected discriminatory behaviors and practices.

In this talk I will be using the concept of gender microaggressions – encompassing both (subtle) gender microinvalidations and (overt) microassaults (Capodilupo et al. 2010) – to explore various harassing practices professional women face and ultimately need to manage because of their gender. Specifically, I will be looking at the context of the U.S. military but will apply the findings to contemporary professional organizations, many of which officially boast their merit-based status and policies.

By scrutinizing open-ended, semi-structured interviews with U.S. military women and men at different stages of their professional careers, I will identify the practices used to produce (invisible) gender bias in an organization and focus on their content, forms and the situated occurrence (i.e. explore the anatomy of gender microaggressions). The analysis of the interviews will also reveal various gender(ed) ideologies permeating the organization as well as systemic and pervasive yet unrecognized character of gender bias. It will demonstrate the relevance and application of interactional sociolinguistics and discourse analytic approaches in identifying the macro social problems and phenomena – such as, for example, various forms of sexism – by analyzing the micro-level details of discourse and interaction.

I will conclude by underlining the crucial role of examining language (use) in context to identify and name social problems and ultimately seek relevant solutions.

References

Cameron, Deborah. 2020. "The gender respect gap", in Carmen Rosa Caldas-Coulthard (ed.), *Innovations and challenges. Women, language and sexism*. London: Routledge, 19-33.

Capodilupo, Christina M., Kevin M. Nadal, Lindsay Corman, Sarah Hamit, Oliver B. Lyons and Alexa Weinberg. 2010. "The manifestation of gender microaggressions", in Derald Wing Sue (ed.), *Microaggressions and marginality: Manifestation, dynamics, and impact*. John Wiley & Sons, 193-216.