Using a Mobile App to Address Microaggressions on Campus

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What are microaggressions?

- Microaggressions are subtle and often unintentional verbal or nonverbal slights that demean an individual based on their membership in a marginalized group (Sue, 2010).

- Examples
  - Being stared at in the dining hall
  - Someone asking to touch your hair because it is "exotic"
  - Being told you speak English well when it is your first language
  - Being mistaken for someone in a service role

# What are the effects of experiencing microaggressions?

- Psychological effects
  - Anxiety
  - Depressive symptoms
  - Self-esteem
- Academic effects
  - Lower feelings of belonging
  - Lack of confidence in abilities
  - Poor performance

What are the limitations in the existing research literature?

- Research relies on recall weeks or months later - may be inaccurate and underestimate impact
- Need to examine how different groups are affected differently
- Daily diary studies are expensive and fatiguing
- No existing research on effectiveness of different responses
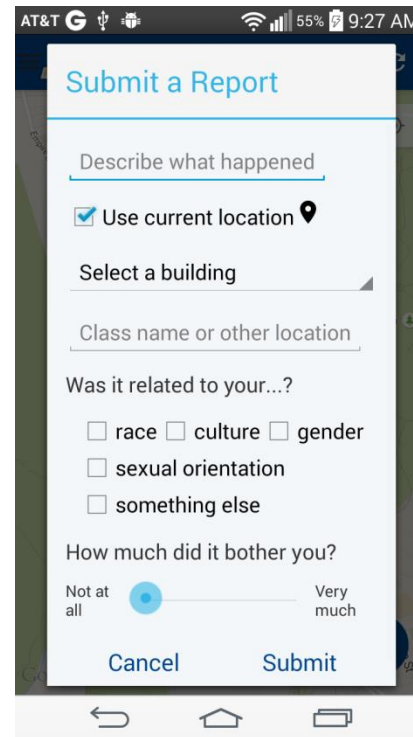- No existing research on intervention strategies

What is MicroReport?

- A mobile app for Android and iOS phones developed at UCSC
- Users can report microaggressions and view others' reports
- Reports are anonymous
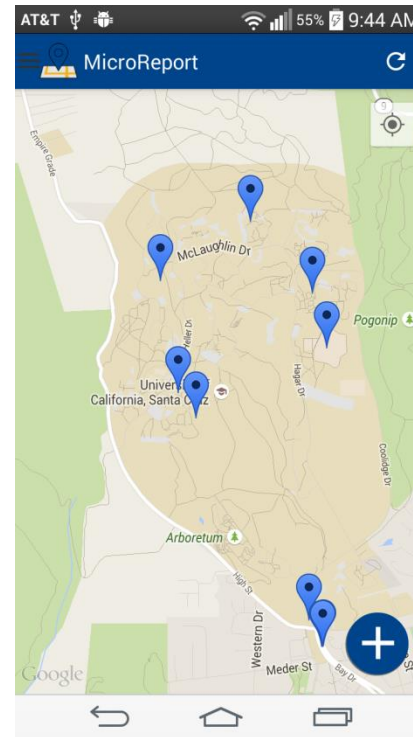
What is the structure of the study?

- Use the app for one academic year
- Complete 4 surveys
  - Perceptions of campus
  - Academic outcomes
  - Psychological well-being
  - Identity beliefs
- Invited to 2 workshops each quarter
  - Basics
  - Responding to microaggressions

Who are the participants?

- 294 UCSC undergraduate and graduate students (71% women)
- 31% Android users, 68% iPhone users
- About 25% each class year and 6 graduate students
- 3.4% transgender
- 18% lesbian, gay, or bisexual
- 25% Asian American, 5.8% Black, 31% Latino, 27% White, 9% Multiracial
- 57% first generation college student
- 14% not born in United States

What are the advantages of MicroReport compared to other programs?

- Both targets and aggressors can benefit from using the app
- The app is easy to use and feels similar to commonly-used social media sites, so participants are more likely to engage with it
- The app is all real experiences with no facilitator to "preach" or encourage a particular point of view
- The workshops not only offer opportunities to discuss experiences, they offer specific, research-supported strategies for responding to them

What are the expected benefits?

- Active coping:
  - Seeking social support
  - Confrontation
- Increased empathy
- Community building

What are some findings so far?

Frequency of Identity-Based Discrimination

Legend: non-STEM majors (blue), STEM majors (yellow)

Categories: Gender, Race/ethnicity, Culture, Social class, Religion*, Sexual orientation, Immigrant status, Physical or mental disability
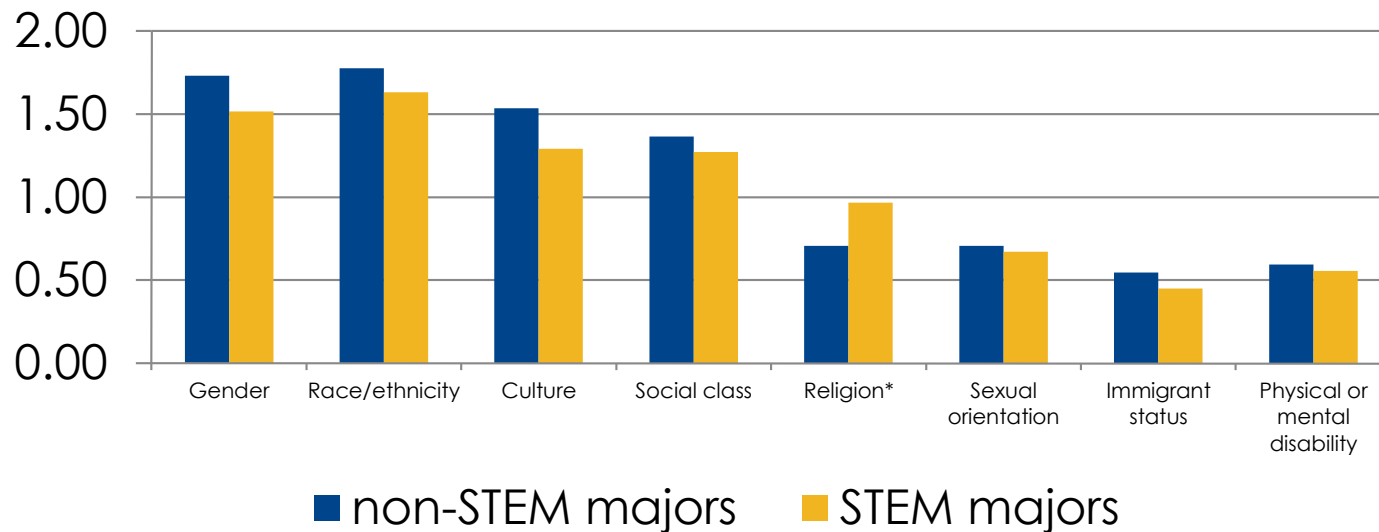
Correlations between racial microaggressions and outcomes

	College Satisfaction	Belonging	Competence	Happiness	Depressive Symptoms	Stress	Self-Esteem
Non-STEM	-.228	-.254	-.183 (ns)	-.327	.476	.419	-.236
STEM	-.174	-.181	-.014 (ns)	-.193	.343	.138 (ns)	-.071
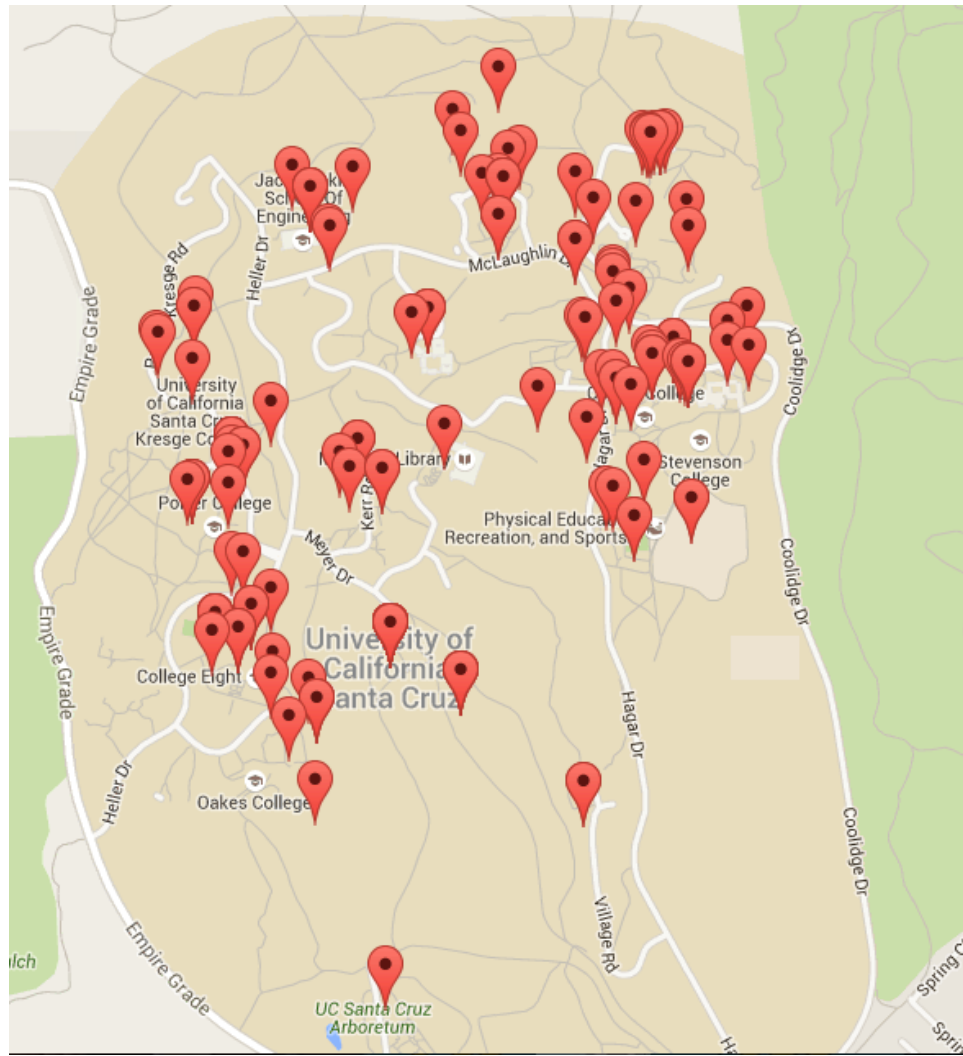
Reports as of Jan 25

Reports from November 2015 to January 2016

- 336 Total
- Targeted identity (self-report):
  - 30% Race
  - 13% Gender
  - 13% Culture
  - 6% Sexual orientation
- How much it bothered them (0-100 scale): Mean = 53.87, SD = 31.90

- Examples (from pilot study)
- A woman asked only White and Asian men for help with her programming homework and avoided women and African Americans.
- "My friend asked if I was drinking for 'Cinco de Drinko'"
- "My friend asked me to wrap her burrito because it's something I should be good at"
- "I told a male identified friend that I am taking a class called 'Women's Lives'. He jokingly said, 'So are you going to learn how to make a sandwich or what'?"

Logistical Considerations

- Difficult to find students willing to commit to 8-month study
- Working with student government, Residential Life, and student organizations to find individuals invested in understanding microaggressions
- Psychology students were easiest to recruit because of intrinsic interest
- Staff to administer surveys and monitor reports

What are the next steps?

- Expanding the research
- Specific samples: race/ethnicity, LGBTQIAP, first generation students, undocumented students
- Exploring effects on: academic performance (official GPA), depressive symptoms, feelings of belonging
- New measures: motivation, academic skills, involvement in student organizations
- Role of mindfulness training

MicroReport and Beyond

- Changes to the app
- Broader access
- Interactivity (comments, etc.)
- Involvement in the community
- Working with campus units and organizations to teach about and address microaggressions
- Involvement with the public
- Research on public, non-academic spaces (malls, libraries, public transportation, etc.)

Thanks to…

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- Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

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