



Microaggressions in Academic Spaces: What About the Library?

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ABSTRACT

Microaggressions are subtle aggressions, often unintentional, which are usually directed at certain groups of people, generally minorities. Due to their insidious frequency, they cause great discomfort. They can even cause permanent problems with adapting and integrating of various kinds. University libraries, as the social spaces that they are, accommodate a wide variety of people and can be places where microaggressions occur in different directions: librarians towards users, users towards librarians and among these groups. This study analyzes the incidence of various types of microaggressions in the academic library environment from the point of view of one group of users: academics and researchers. An online survey was completed by a large number of academics and researchers from a large geographic area. Data was obtained on both observed and felt or experienced microaggressions in the library, either towards themselves or other users, or towards the librarian. The results indicate that researchers are more aggressive than librarians, making the library space a safer place for diversity than the university. Nevertheless, for certain aspects the library shows some data that invites reflection and an opportunity to further reduce occurrences.

Introduction

Libraries usually receive thousands of people throughout the year interested in the different services they offer. These centers, low risk and quiet in appearance, offer very heterogeneous spaces and services: access to documents in different formats, consultation areas (individual and collective), training rooms, leisure areas, etc. The contact and coexistence between workers and users and vice versa can lead to interactions (or situations) that are not pleasant, or sometimes, not very polite. Some of this contact can be indirect, difficult to perceive or feel, occur in a covert and sometimes unintentional way and where subtle speeches can be used that can hurt the interlocutor.

These actions or comments are referred to as microaggressions (Williams, 2020). They occur in everyday spaces such as, for example: supermarkets, bars or, restaurants (Sue et al., 2007), universities (Yosso et al., 2009) or complex sectors such as the police (Voce & Boxall, 2018), penitentiaries (Martin et al., 2019), and healthcare environments (Mento et al., 2020). They often occur because of issues related to race, background, gender, appearance and sexual orientation (Björkqvist et al., 1994; Sue, 2010). Different types of microaggressions often single out racialized people as foreign, crime-prone, culturally and linguistically deficient, or deserving of socially marginal status (Constantine,

2007; Constantine & Sue, 2007; Sue & Constantine, 2007). The accumulation of racial microaggressions has a serious and long-term impact on the psychological, mental, emotional, and physical health of people of color (Utsey et al., 2008; Pérez Huber & Solorzano, 2015) and those who are exposed to them for other conditions (Utsey & Ponterotto, 1999).

Fusion Comedy (2016) created a video that compared microaggressions to mosquito bites, clearly explaining the effect they have on the sufferer, however well-intentioned they may be.

Literature review

Because of the public and universal service nature of libraries, it is imperative that diversity and inclusion practices are integrated into all aspects of librarianship, including collection development, cataloging and classification, preservation, instruction, service delivery, and space planning (Salmon, 2021). In accordance with this, various bodies have published recommendations. This is the case for the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL, 2012) that published already in 2012, "Diversity Standards: Cultural Competency for Academic Libraries" as a framework to support local efforts. Even so, an increase in cases and incidents in recent years has sparked an interest from members

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of society and the academic community (Harris, 2017; Smith et al., 2011; Sue et al., 2008, 2009). Research on microaggressions in academic libraries can be classified into two groups. On the one hand, those that show and critique misbehaviors focused on aspects of race, primarily, due to the shortage of non-White librarians (of ethnicities other than White), and the barriers they perceive to being hired in academic libraries. The most comprehensive investigation of these behaviors in relation to librarians of color was published by Hankins and Juárez (2015), although studies had previously been published on gender and race biases in employee hiring and promotion (Curry, 1994), on the extra effort Black male librarians had to offer to get hired (Ball, 1995), and exposing how librarians' white skin has prevailed over others for decades (Espinal, 2001; Honma, 2005). In 2015, the top three public service areas (space, staffing, and reference service delivery) where White race culture may be taking hold in U.S. academic libraries were identified (Brook et al., 2015). Espinal et al. (2018) argues that, to reduce the prevalence of white skin, it is necessary to diversify the ranks of librarians through bold initiatives, significantly increasing the number of librarians of color; and to make incisive large-scale structural changes at the organizational level. Very recently, in Britain, the experiences of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) staff working in academic libraries was evaluated (Ishaq & Hussain, 2022).

The other group of research looks into the daily patterns of users of academic libraries. See, for example, the sample of antisocial behaviors and aggressive behavior of users towards staff at the Main Library of the University of the West Indies (Kean & McKoy-Johnson, 2009). In the same vein, the uncivil practices of users, as well as staff reactions to these behaviors, were analyzed in Greek academic libraries (Vraimaki et al., 2019). Incorporating social justice, diversity, equity and inclusion in academic libraries promotes people to take action (Fiedler et al., 2020).

As can be seen, the existing studies focus on a small number of countries, mainly the United States and Great Britain, and show racial microaggressions or misbehaviors of users and workers, on aspects related to hiring, type of work, level of work, workload and behaviors of both groups due to their origin. Therefore, there are certain limitations with this research, such as the situation of racial microaggressions and provenance in the rest of the society. Further, the situation of other typologies of microaggressions, for example, those focused on the behaviors of librarians and users around other behaviors based on gender and sexual orientation in the academic library.

To mitigate the limitations of previous studies, this work was approached with a more global perspective in terms of territorial representation and the typology of possible microaggressions in academic libraries, by conducting a survey of the largest possible number of library users from several countries. However, it was restricted in the first phase to a single type of user, focusing only on the relationship between librarians and researchers, with only the latter being asked. It should be noted that most of the previous works analyzed, carried out in libraries, focus on microaggressions perceived or suffered by librarians (Ishaq & Hussain, 2022; Kean & McKoy-Johnson, 2009; Vraimaki et al., 2019).

Methodology

Given the situation described in the previous paragraph, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. Do academic librarians experience microaggressions by faculty or researchers?
2. Do teachers or researchers experience microaggressions by academic librarians?
3. Which of the two sectors is more exposed to microaggressions?
4. What types of microaggressions are the most frequent in university library environments?

To answer the research questions, an online questionnaire was used

to collect data from academic and research staff who use the libraries that serve their workplaces. Therefore, data was extracted through a stratified random sampling online survey.

The survey was based on the adaptation by Alabi (2015) of the items of the Racial and Ethnic Microaggressions Scale (REMS), described in Nadal (2011), for academic libraries in the USA. In this study, this scale, adapted for microaggressions related to race or origin, is extended to the analysis of other types of microaggressions, those related to gender and sexual orientation. Origin refers mainly to belonging to another country or cultural group perceived as different. To answer the questions in the survey, the Likert scale was used, a 5-option scale: from Never to Always (like Nadal (2011)).

The survey began with a section that collects demographic data. A turning point occurred in question 10 when participants were asked whether their center's library is physical or digital. Those who identified it as digital ended the survey as it is much more difficult to perceive or feel microaggressions via this medium, especially considering that chat help services are now starting to become popular. For participants who used a physical library, a second section began, designed to ascertain their perception and feelings, divided into three sections according to the three main groups of aggressions: those related to race or origin, to gender and to sexual orientation.

Our data source was the Scopus database, a peer-reviewed scientific literature database. Scopus indexes 66.07 % more unique journals compared to Web of Science (Singh et al., 2021). Another advantage of Scopus is that it provides searchable and comprehensive profiles, along with unique identifiers for all authors, institutions, and periodical sources (Pranckutė, 2021). The sample consisted of authors of articles published in academic journals, from a global setting and based on authorship rather than academic affiliation.

The scope of the study included authors of articles published between 2019 and 2020 in Scopus indexed journals. Contact emails were retrieved through an indirect approach. First, the 27 existing subject areas in Scopus were grouped into four different disciplines (Arts & Humanities, Life & Health Sciences, STEM and Social Science). In addition, a fifth category with all journals published in Latin America and Africa was considered to maximize the number of responses from the so-called 'Global South'. It is important to keep in mind this geographical area because there is a significant inequality in terms of scientific production between the north and the south (Collyer, 2018; Haelewaters et al., 2021). This increased the possibility of obtaining data from authors who are less represented in the literature. Discrimination is widespread in the world and has no borders. Drawing attention to its distribution and which typology is most prevalent can encourage professionals to be aware of it, try to detect it and take action to avoid it in their workspace.

Journals were then randomly selected in each category to achieve a 95 % confidence interval and a margin of error of ± 5 % (see Table 1 for details).

Once these journals were extracted, information was downloaded for all articles published in 2019 and 2020, including email information available in the Scopus database. Subsequently, the collected emails were manually reviewed to remove duplicates in each category and between all five categories (see Table 1 for details of the sampling procedure).

The final sample was 82,603 unique scholars identified. A total of 4257 valid responses (response rate = 5.15 %) were collected for the first group of demographic questions. For the second block of questions, it was necessary to physically visit the library. Here 3322 academics or researchers responded (response rate = 4.02 %). The survey was open from March 15 to May 15, 2022. All responses were collected anonymously. The data was analyzed using Microsoft Excel.

Results

A final sample of 82,603 identified unique academics who were

Table 1
Sampling details.

Discipline	Aggregated Scopus categories	Sources	Sources (unique)	Sampled journals	Retrieved emails	Emails (unique)
Arts & Humanities	Arts and Humanities	4182	3501	353	6156	5955
Medicine and Life Sciences	Medicine	5927	4908	357	21,673	18,395
	Biochemistry, Genetics and Molecular Biology					
	Dentistry					
	Health Professions					
	Immunology and Microbiology					
	Neuroscience					
	Nursing					
	Pharmacology, Toxicology and Pharmaceutics					
	Veterinary					
	Computer Science	14,766	10,112	371	41,640	37,244
STEM	Mathematics e Engineering					
	Chemical Engineering					
	Multidisciplinary					
	Chemistry					
	Decision Sciences					
	Earth and Planetary Sciences					
	Energy					
	Environmental Science					
	Materials Science					
	Agricultural and Biological Sciences					
Social Sciences	Physics and Astronomy					
	Social Sciences	11,602	9685	371	19,422	18,800
	Economics, Econometrics and Finance					
	Business, Management and Accounting					
Africa & Latin America	Psychology					
	All journals published in Latin America and Africa	1199	1199	292	6062	4996
Total		37,676	29,405	1744	94,953	85,390 ^a

^a This total decreases to 82,603 when eliminating the duplicates found after extracting the mailings from the journals in the last group of the table (Africa & Latin America).

invited to participate in the survey. For this research, valid responses were collected (response rate = 5.15 %). 3322 of the participants responded that they were physical library users. Therefore, the completion rate represents 4.02 %.

Demographic results

Table 2 shows the distribution by region of the responses. The participants from Europe institutions (East and West) stand out, representing approximately 41 %, followed by Latin Americans, with 18.6 %.

The racial distribution of the responses is shown at Table 3. Most respondents, 56.33 % ($n = 2398$) identified themselves as White/Caucasian.

The racial category “Hispanic” has been retained among the responses in order to keep in line with the previous work analyzed. However, from our perspective, this category is not racial, it is cultural. Hispanic people are defined as such because they are united by the

Table 2
Distribution by region.

Please indicate the region where your institution	N	%
Western Europe	1265	29,71 %
Latin America	792	18,60 %
Northern America	583	13,69 %
Eastern Europe	506	11,88 %
Asiatic Region	495	11,62 %
Africa	220	5,16 %
Middle East	198	4,65 %
Pacific Region	198	4,65 %

Table 3

Distribution into Racial categories.^a

Do you identify with any of the following races?	N	%
White/Caucasian	2398	56,33 %
African American	55	1,29 %
Hispanic	440	10,33 %
African	286	6,71 %
Asian	715	16,79 %
Multi-racial/Two or more races	363	8,52 %

^a Based on previous work, this classification mixes racial, geographic and cultural criteria.

culture of Spanish origin. U.S. Hispanics are only a fraction of the total, which includes several ethnicities, including whites.¹

There are also difficulties with the categories for individuals whose ethnicity can be traced to Sub-Saharan Africa. As in the above case, in previous works cited this category is defined as African American, since the scope is usually restricted to a geographic area. African-Americans live in a minority with white people which makes their experience very different from those living in Africa. As in the previous case, we have retained this category to align with previous work. However, here we must consider that the group of African-Americans includes all those who come from the entire American continent, not just the USA (Brazil, Cuba, Haiti, etc.).

These complexities in making categories based on perceived race and ethnicity mean that they are in fact conditioned by other concepts, such as geographical origin and local cultural traditions, as seen in Table 3.

Table 4 shows how 58.76 % of the participants identified as male ($n = 2481$) and 40.73 % as female, 0.28 % as non-binary or other, and 0.21

¹ The difference in conception becomes clear when looking at the definition that wikipedia in English (en) and in Spanish (es) make of the term “Hispanic”: <https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hispanos>/<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hispanos>.

Table 4

Gender distribution.

What gender do you identify to?	N	%
Male	2481	58,76 %
Female	1720	40,73 %
Non-binary/Other	12	0,28 %
I rather don't say	9	0,21 %

% rather don't say.

Approximately 80 % of the participants were over 36 years of age (see Table 5).

The sector that notably stands out is the university and higher education sector (see Table 6), with a share of 80.36 % ($n = 3421$), followed by the government sector with 12.4 % ($n = 528$) and where they host a student population of <15,000 people in 47.02 % of the participants' institutions (report in Table 7).

Along these lines, >50 % of the participants hold a tenured position ($n = 2332$ –54.78 %) followed by those who are not yet tenured ($n = 902$ –21.18 %) (see Table 8).

Table 9 shows a distribution of responses related to the libraries of the participants' institutions. Here it can be seen that most of the services depend on universities ($n = 3608$ –84.75 %). Table 10 shows the following, most of the respondents usually go with some frequency (occasionally + often + always) to the library ($n = 2541$ –56.68 %).

The results presented in Table 11, generate a change in the sample for the following questions as only those participants (3.322, 78,04 %) who visit libraries physically being able to perceive and feel microaggressions will continue with the questions.

Experiences in physical environments

After the initial demographic and library use questions, the following sections focused directly on microaggressions. First, we sought to know whether the participants perceive that the university, college or workplace offers a discriminatory environment through hostile, derogatory or negative attitudes. 45.36 % ($n = 1507$) answered yes.

When asked if they feel the same harmful environment in the library, such a feeling is detected by a quarter of the respondents, namely 24.84 % ($n = 825$).

Table 12 attempts to specify the categories of microaggressive actions of those who observe or experience such behaviors in the library. The highest percentage (about 80 %) of the participants have never observed these behaviors. In the opposite direction, those academics or researchers who have observed or heard about microaggressions related to gender, appearance and origin stand out with around 20 %. Sexual orientation is the least detected typology.

Based on the perception, feeling or experience of having received an aggression of the identified typologies (see Table 13), the percentage drops slightly. Specifically, almost 16 % of users have experienced on some occasion provocations related to gender and appearance (sum of rarely, sometimes, often and always), 14.5 % reported negative experiences related to race, 12 % to origin and 10 % related to sexual orientation.

Statements of microaggression

After learning about the segmentation of microaggressions observed

Table 5

Age demographics.

How old are you at this moment?	N	%
25 or younger	66	1,55 %
Between 26 and 35	759	17,82 %
Between 36 and 50	1914	44,96 %
51 or older	1518	35,65 %

Table 6

Distribution by sector in the institution.

Sector of your main institution	N	%
Government	528	12,4 %
Health	165	3,87 %
University- Higher Education	3421	80,36 %
Private Company	58	1,36 %
Non-Profit	85	1,99 %

Table 7

Student enrolled.

Student population at your institution	N	%
Fewer than 15,000	2002	47,02 %
15,000-30,000	1232	28,94 %
>30,000	1023	24,03 %

Table 8

Type of position.

Which of the following position better identifies your current position	N	%
Tenured	2332	54,78 %
Tenure-Track	528	12,4 %
Untenured	902	21,18 %
Predoctoral fellow or PHD student	495	11,62 %

Table 9

Library affiliation.

Library is associated with a	N	%
Technical institute or college	341	8,01 %
University	3608	84,75 %
Other	308	7,23 %

Table 10

Library uses.

How often do you go to your library?	N	%
Never	484	11,36 %
Infrequently	1232	28,94 %
Occasionally	1441	33,85 %
Often	858	20,15 %
Always	242	5,68 %

Table 11

Types of libraries in institutions.

The library of your institution is:	N	%
Physical	3322	78,04 %
Digital	935	21,96 %

or felt by the participants at the university and the library, the following sections are classified according to the type of aggression: those related to race, origin, gender and sexual orientation.

Each block of questions was pitched to participants based on whether the microaggressions were directed towards librarians or academics (this group includes teachers, professors and researchers).

Racial microaggressions

The first set of questions asked about the existence of situations of inferiority in academic libraries generated by aspects of race or origin. For this purpose, Table 14 specifies the opinion of academics in this area. Eight options were made to the respondents addressed to the two

Table 12

Library treatment perceptions.

When you go to the library, do you notice or observe any different treatment	Race		Gender or appearance		Origin		Sexual orientation	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Never	2638	79,4 %	2498	75,19 %	2623	78,95 %	2739	82,45 %
Rarely	334	10,05 %	441	13,27 %	320	9,63 %	341	10,26 %
Sometimes	263	7,91 %	275	8,27 %	286	8,6 %	187	5,62 %
Often	52	1,56 %	77	2,31 %	61	1,83 %	31	0,93 %
Always	35	1,05 %	31	0,93 %	32	0,96 %	24	0,72 %

Table 13

Experiences of treatment in the library.

When you go to the library, do you feel or suffer any different treatment?	Race		Gender or appearance		Origin		Sexual orientation	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Never	2836	85,37 %	2791	84,01 %	2829	85,15 %	2989	89,97 %
Rarely	269	8,06 %	264	7,94 %	278	8,36 %	207	6,23 %
Sometimes	161	4,84 %	209	6,29 %	156	4,69 %	95	2,85 %
Often	32	0,96 %	36	1,08 %	30	0,90 %	19	0,57 %
Always	24	0,72 %	22	0,66 %	29	0,87 %	12	0,36 %

sectors: librarians and academics.

In general terms, academics recognized that the professional sector of librarians receives more negative messages about their race or ethnicity. Taken as a whole, the results for the highest frequency of “always” time tend to be double or triple for librarians compared to academics. Thus, there is a clear difference in bullying behaviors (of the bully) towards the victim (the bullied).

In examining the responses, certain results stand out. Approximately 15 % of respondents do not deny ignoring the librarian because of his or her race, compared to 9 % of the undeserving behavior towards academics. Another poignant finding is that 13 % of respondents assume that librarians cannot be intelligent because of their race or background. At a slightly higher percentage than above are those who think that non-white librarians are treated worse by academics and researchers than white librarians.

In short, the academics have thoughts and behaviors that denote a greater differentiation with respect to librarians of color than with respect to their colleagues of color. Further, they believe that the race or origin of the librarian may influence the training, professionalism, quality, and impact of the librarian's work. To the point of being treated differently from white librarians.

Gender-related microaggressions

The second set of questions asked about the existence of gender-related microaggressions in academic libraries. To this end, Table 15 specifies the opinion of academics in this area.

Seven questions were asked to the respondents directed towards the librarians' collective and towards the academics' collective, as in the case of race.

The first question asked what both groups thought about gender bias in the workplace by using the expression “leave gender at the door”. Here the results are equal, both at one extreme and the other. It is striking in both cases that the proportion of the response “always” is high.

The next two questions asked about the behavior (preferential or not) of the two groups when addressing men or women and sought to establish whether stereotypes exist or not. The results show that both groups suggest or exhibit preferential treatment towards men. This is much more prevalent in the academics sector, where they show preferences when interacting with librarians, seeking to talk, discuss or approach male librarians over female librarians. They are even six times more likely to choose the “always” preference (92 vs. 17). This micro-aggression is particularly noteworthy considering that the profession is still majority female.

The next question asked about the acceptance of traditional gender roles related to career plans, personality and leadership. Here, the survey result identifies that academics have a higher degree of leadership. Choosing the result of those who indicated the option “always” within the scale, 98 academics indicated it versus 7 librarians. 14 times more.

The use of sexist language, as a form of discrimination, in society is widespread and therefore, the following question explored the presence of it in the academic library. The result of the question detects a slightly higher use of sexist language among academics than among librarians on the “always”, “often” and “sometimes” options of the Likert scale. On the other hand, the “never” and “rarely” options are higher among librarians than academics.

The next question sought to identify which of the two groups refer to the other with a gender that they do not identify with. The result of the questionnaire sets the academic group above the librarian.

The last question of this set sought to identify whether there is an alleged inferiority of one group over the other. The result shows higher response rates in the academic group compared to the librarian, so it is noted that, slightly, some academics have a feeling of superiority over librarians.

Sexual orientation microaggressions

The third set of questions was about the existence of microaggressions of sexual orientation in academic libraries. Six questions were asked to the respondents directed towards the librarians' collective and towards the academics' collective (Table 16).

In general, the results of the questionnaire show very low rates (over 5 %) that point to the presence of perceptions or microaggressions due to sexual orientation in academic libraries. As has occurred in previous comparisons, the library sector suffers more aggressions than the academics sector.

It is important to mention some behaviors of both groups. For example, to the question “if you would stop talking to someone because of their sexual orientation”, respondents who think they would stop talking, have a passive attitude or even defensive behavior towards librarians more often than towards academics. By the same token, there is a higher percentage of academics who do not believe or accept what they see. Even more tend to think that it is not real or transitory, going so far as to make jokes about different orientations within the LGBTQ+ community.

The behavior of those who place themselves in these options may cause them to change the subject or even stop talking to the librarian.

The lowest or most unlikely indexes to be displayed in a library are in the question related to sexual harassment. As in the previous situations,

Table 14

Frequency of microaggressions of inferiority.

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
Towards the researcher, teacher or academic					
A librarian or employer was unfriendly or unwelcoming towards me because of my race.	3022	165	99	20	16
I was ignored at library because of my race.	3078	154	57	21	12
A librarian or employer treated me differently than White co-workers.	2974	185	116	35	12
Some librarian assumed that I would have a lower education because of my race.	2968	191	102	26	35
Some librarian acted surprised at my professional success because of my race.	3036	115	102	34	35
Some librarian assumed that I would not be intelligent because of my race.	2981	164	121	32	24
Someone assumed that my work would be inferior to people of other racial groups.	3023	162	82	34	21
My opinion was overlooked in a group discussion of librarians because of her/his race.	3102	68	99	39	14
Towards the librarian					
Some researcher/teacher/academician was unfriendly or unwelcoming to a librarian because of their race.	2838	319	119	21	25
Some researcher/teacher/academician ignored the librarian because of his/her race.	2886	220	132	46	38
Some researcher/teacher/academician treated to a librarian differently than their White co-workers.	2882	238	125	35	42
Some researcher/teacher/academician assumed that the librarian would have a lower education due to his/her race	2926	189	129	31	47
Some researcher/teacher/academician was surprised by the librarian's professional success due to his/her race	2935	220	101	30	46
Some researcher/teacher/academician assumed that the librarian would not be intelligent because of his/her race	2884	231	124	34	49
Some researcher/teacher/academician assumed that librarian work would be inferior to people of other racial groups.	2937	187	98	57	43
My opinion was overlooked in a group discussion of librarians because of his/her race	3003	137	105	49	28

Table 15

Frequency of assumptions of gender microaggressions.

	Towards the librarian				
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
Do you perceive that the researcher/teacher/academician leave gender at the door?	2332	198	264	220	308
Do you think the researcher/teacher/academician exhibits behavior that suggests preferential treatment of men?	2427	454	214	135	92
Do you think the researcher/teacher/academician exhibits behavior that suggests preferential treatment of women?	2656	364	198	87	17
Do you feel experiences with assumption of traditional gender roles related to career plans, personality and leadership by researcher/teacher/academician towards the librarian?	2615	186	308	115	98
Do you feel instances of sexist language by researcher/teacher/academician?	2563	319	296	76	68
Do you feel that the researcher/teacher/academician refers to the librarian as a gender with which he/she does not identify or uses incorrect pronouns when referring to him/her?	2845	218	142	65	52
Do you feel assumptions of inferiority in terms of strength and commitment by researcher/teacher/academician towards the librarian?	2822	226	165	62	47
	Towards the researcher, teacher or academic				
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
Do you perceive that the librarian force to leave gender at the door?	2380	210	211	195	326
Do you think the librarian exhibits behavior that suggests preferential treatment of men?	2709	344	197	47	25
Do you think the librarian exhibits behavior that suggests preferential treatment of women?	2765	324	181	34	18
Do you feel experiences with assumption of traditional gender roles related to career plans, personality and leadership by librarian?	2712	285	246	72	7
Do you feel instances of sexist language by librarian?	2993	264	39	24	2
Do you feel that the librarian referring to you as a gender you do not identify as or using incorrect pronouns when referring to you?	2996	184	95	35	12
	2928	221	138	21	14

(continued on next page)

Table 15 (continued)

	Towards the researcher, teacher or academic				
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
Do you feel assumptions of inferiority in terms of strength and commitment by librarian?					

librarians suffered more incidents.

Discussion

The main objective of this research has been to gather the opinions and experiences of academics in relation to different types of microaggressions in the context of university libraries, the space in the institution where there is the greatest coexistence between colleagues and workers of different backgrounds, genders and ways of thinking. The paucity of research that has been conducted in this area, in general, and outside of certain countries, in particular, makes these results novel.

The fact that only users of university libraries were surveyed is a limitation of the study, being the reason that only those microaggressions to librarians that they have witnessed are collected, not those that librarians have suffered directly. However, it should be recalled that the opinion of librarians has been collected in most previous studies.

The breakdown of the questions and answers by each of the eight regions is also a limitation in our study. Our questions are presented as a generic community statement.

Likewise, the inclusion of an additional sample of journals from Latin America and Africa, could produce a bias towards the regions of the Global South. However, the objective was to seek relevant information on the perceptions of professionals in this geographical area.

The data obtained in this study clearly reveals the presence of aggressive acts in the libraries of university educational institutions. The general perception that the university offers environments of harmony, calm, respect and tolerance is not 100 % manifested in the research.

The results are noteworthy because they show a little-known reality since misconduct or non-physical aggression is usually not very visible and little perceived by society as a whole. Likewise, the rates are worrying because approximately 20 % of those surveyed admit to having been present (we do not know whether as participants or not) during microaggressive acts. The detailed analysis of the results obtained allows us to affirm that microaggressions related to race and origin are more frequent than those related to sexual orientation.

The prevalence of microaggressions is higher in the academic-librarian direction than in the opposite direction, where the percentage of negative experiences drops by 20 % (from 45 % to 25 %). This makes libraries less aggressive spaces and therefore safer from microaggressions. This may be due to a greater awareness of librarians as a group of workers, because of their universal service vocation. The library profession has adopted freedom of expression and respect for human rights as a core value of its profession. This implies a commitment to equal access to services and neutrality towards different ways of thinking, which is reflected in their professional codes of ethics ([International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions](#)). These values have supported the promotion of libraries as safe spaces for users in different circumstances ([Vaillancourt, 2013](#); [Wexelbaum, 2016](#); [American Library Association, 2012](#)).

However, despite the fact that librarians seem to be less aggressive than academics in the library environment, we cannot close our eyes to the evidence that there are still significant numbers of some types of microaggressions committed by librarians. The high numbers in race and gender stand out in the “always” response, and in gender especially with the “leave gender at the door” question.

The results support that there is a systemic problem on college

Table 16

Frequency of assumptions of sexual orientation microaggressions.

	Towards the researcher, teacher or academic				
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
A librarian has stopped talking to me after finding out about my sexuality.	3112	114	76	14	6
Do you feel that the librarian of being defensive or sensitive about your gender identity or sexual orientation?	3056	136	98	20	12
Have you ever felt that the librarian suggests that your sexual orientation or gender identity is just a phase, a choice or not real?	3073	98	32	14	5
Do you feel that the librarian changing the subject/topic when reference to your sexual orientation or gender identity comes up?	3024	105	61	21	11
Do you feel sexual harassment or gender-based bullying by librarian?	3036	129	35	15	7
Do you feel that the librarian have made negative comments or jokes about LGBTQ people in my presence without realizing my sexual orientation?	3066	162	54	25	15

	Towards the librarian				
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
A researcher/teacher/academician has stopped talking to the librarian after finding out about his/her sexuality.	3010	174	94	24	20
Do you feel that the researcher/teacher/academician of being defensive or sensitive about the gender identity or sexual orientation of the librarian?	2945	241	78	43	15
Have you ever felt that the researcher/teacher/academician suggests that sexual orientation or gender identity of the librarian is just a phase, a choice or not real?	3011	165	97	35	14
Do you feel that the researcher/teacher/academician changing the subject/topic when reference to the librarian's sexual orientation or gender identity comes up?	3003	198	61	45	15
Do you feel sexual harassment or gender-based bullying by researcher/teacher/academician towards librarian?	2948	275	64	21	14
Do you feel that the researcher/teacher/academician has made negative comments or jokes about LGBTQ people in the presence of the librarian without realizing	2889	297	79	36	21

(continued on next page)

Table 16 (continued)

	Towards the librarian				
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
his/her sexual orientation?					

campuses. It is impossible to eliminate aggressive episodes, but it is feasible to reduce them, especially the unintentional ones, by making people aware of the harm they do. Policies and programs that can improve coexistence are necessary in order to reduce the hostile culture of higher education institutions. These efforts should be twofold: to avoid aggression, and to learn to neutralize aggression in an effective and non-aggressive way. Policies can be specific, focused on each of the microaggressive areas detected, or integrated, since there are experiences of multiple microaggressions on campuses (people who experience microaggression for various reasons).

The possibilities for action can be multiple and complementary to each other. Awareness campaigns directed at all users from time to time can remind them of what microaggressions are and how to avoid them. The creation of a trained counselor or advisor to help library users who have experienced an episode of microaggression can be helpful in identifying difficult situations, addressing them, and offering strategies for dealing with incidents. An impactful initiative could be the creation of virtual spaces with experiences and resources to prevent microaggressions, similar to [Microaggressions in librarianship \(2022\) https://lismicroaggressions.com/](https://lismicroaggressions.com/), with multiple data and editable documents.

This topic should also be included in staff training plans, especially for those who perform customer service tasks.

The magnitude of the data analyzed suggests the refusal to consider them in isolation. It is important that they are known by the academic community, since usually, violence can escalate from behaviors at previous stages, or even extend out from the academic and research centers themselves. To this end, preventive strategies can become an effective alternative solution.

Conclusion

The largest percentage of the literature focused on microaggressions in libraries is located in racially mixed geographic areas to determine whether librarians of color experience microaggressions from patrons, peers, and even their managers. However, microaggressions are not only focused on racial or origin typology and are not only located in certain geographic areas, but to a greater or lesser extent, it is a global problem with varied forms of hurt and offense.

Faced with this situation, the research has been open to the experiences of hundreds of academics from a large number of higher education institutions where they were asked through a survey if they had seen or suffered microaggressions directed at them by librarians and vice versa, related to their race, origin, gender or sexual orientation.

The first result is alarming. About 45 % of the respondents answered that they experience microaggressions in universities and research centers. On the other hand, they do not perceive libraries in the same way, as the number drops to 20 %. Therefore, about 80 % of respondents consider the library space as a safe and aggression-free zone. It is undeniable that in many libraries efforts have been made to train librarians to respond to unwanted episodes related to the aggressions identified. In the same way, it is possible to extend the training programs to the rest of the public, users and other workers of educational institutions, in a productive, agile and effective way so that they too, can respond in an appropriate manner.

Within the three types of microaggressions studied, it is important to note that the rates are lower in libraries than in universities. Likewise, and in general, the frequency of manifestations is higher when the

victims are librarians than when they are academics.

Gender-related microaggressions are the most visible by respondents for both groups as aggressors, by indicating in a higher percentage the central frequency of occurrence values sometimes and often. These figures indicate that we should not let our guard down yet on the library side in general terms.

It would be advisable to undertake new studies by asking librarians from a wide geographical area, as has been done here, and to analyze the situation with respect to other users, especially students, since they are the most numerous and vulnerable group.

Future surveys could measure the specific disaggregation of each geographical region and possibly minimize the possible bias. Also, it is necessary to better define ethnic categories so that a person's self-classification is adjusted to reflect their geographic and cultural reality.

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