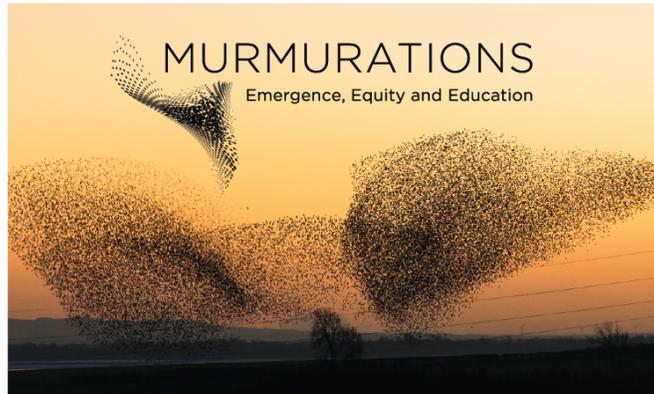


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Murmurations emerged as a project by a community of educators who recognize that education and its results arise from interactions of historical, social, political, psychological, biological and environmental factors. As a U.S. institution, education has most reliably produced inequity. We began *Murmurations* with the intent of dissolving the dynamics that support and re-create inequitable educational outcomes.

We are not separate from the systems we wish to transform.

We invite you to reflect with us, examining the relationship between thought, action and the dynamics of the educational systems in which we participate.

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POEM

They Will Ask You

Poetry about microaggressions

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Abstract

Point of view: I am an African-American Female Engineer in the White-Male dominated field of Engineering.

Value: Insight into invisible experiences and a tool for discussion and unpacking subtleties of systematic disparities and injustices.

Introduction

As an African-American Female Engineer, I have encountered a host of experiences that have either implicitly or explicitly clued me in on how other people are receiving my identities. Often these clues have come in the form of questions with varying levels of intention behind them. These questions usually dismiss and make assumptions about the reality of my identities and their significance to "larger" conversations. The experience of being dismissed and misrepresented has been described by Sue et al. 2007 as "microaggressions."

Though scholarly work has been done to unpack how microaggressions are experienced, I've found myself having repeated conversations with women and students of color about what to expect as they rise through their career. Typically, these students are surprised and baffled by the questions they receive and are therefore seeking strategies for how to respond effectively and progressively. Though the strategies I employ vary widely based on context and power, what is consistent is the coping required to process and organize what is occurring. As an artist and poet, I often turn to expression as a coping mechanism. The following poem is my attempt at coping and summarizing microaggressive questions I've encountered. Though it ends with suggested responses to microaggressive questions, this piece is not intended to suggest that any of these responses will alleviate the experience or sources of microaggressive behavior.

They Will Ask You

They will ask you about your background
in so much detail you think they've been there before.

They will ask you where you get your passion from
like it isn't dripping from your research questions or major, or extracurricular activities.

They will suggest you perform your identities with a bit more "umph"
and ask for more ways to "feel" and "understand" your plight.

They will ask you how you feel about recent offensive events
just to let you know that they agree you should be offended
and offer no action to offset your offense.

They will assume you are international and wealthy
or urban and under resourced,
or black and token.

They will assume before they ask you what makes your story so special.
After all, there must be something special about your anomaly existence –
something unique about this caged bird they've stumbled upon.

They will ask you if you cheated,
or if you struggled,
or if you know the other black girl in the class and if you like Beyoncé.

They will ask you to do the introduction sections,
and if you are sure this is the major for you.

They will ask you if you know Affirmative Action
is the only reason you're here,
and if you know how well you speak for a black... peer.

They will ask without words,
implicitly suggesting your incompetence.

They will ask if you're in the meeting,
running the meeting
or outside of the meeting.

They will ask if they're your boss, colleague or guest.
They will ask you regardless of how well you do on the test.

They will ask, without so many words, who the hell you must have thought you were
when you got up out the shadows of the "diversity" calls they made.
They will ask you, just to establish how the tracks were laid.
They will ask you, just to remind you how "other" they thought you were.

They will ask you with more than words.
They will ask you with rejection letters,
reviewer comments
and lack of suggestions for promotion.
And then they will ask about all the "commotion" and "controversy"
and for your views on their definition of progress.

They won't ask you about the displacement, disenfranchisement or entitlement to your story, presence and culture, but they will ask if you can dance and how you got your hair like that.

No, they will not ask you the important questions, but know that they will ask as many questions as their space and power allows so, ask them questions right back.

Ask them if they've ever thought about the system that generated their questions. Ask them if they think their dichotomous mindset of culture will lead to harmony.

Ask them if they thought about their question before they asked it. Ask them if the only experiences that matter to them are the ones that they have seen and understood without trying and then ask them if they think asking you counts as trying. And then ask them for better questions.

Chanel Beebe 2018

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