More than “Diversity 101”: Addressing Microaggressions and Being an Ally

Medical School, CEC/SFC/CUMED Meeting
October 7, 2016

Learning Objectives

• Understand the Office for Equity and Diversity (OED)’s key frames, including how we can address microaggressions and microinequities by acting as an ally

• Address the complexity and challenges of “being an ally” around issues of equity and diversity

• Practice “acting as an ally” in situations that may arise in a Medical School context

• Identify “next steps” I can take to continue developing as an ally around issues of equity and diversity
Grounding Assumptions for OED Workshops

• The work of equity and diversity is about creating community, which involves building trust through careful listening, respectful disagreement, and taking risks

• We will do our best to be present & minimize distractions

• We respect each other’s confidentiality; pay attention to what is yours to share – and what is not

• We are all doing the best we can

• Growth and learning can be uncomfortable; remember it’s ok to make mistakes - we all do

Adapted from Jamie Washington, Washington Consulting Group

Grounding Assumptions for OED Workshops

• Individuals and organizations can – and do – grow and change, but it doesn’t happen overnight

• We always need to practice self awareness: Think about when you’re speaking up; Think about when you’re not speaking up

• This work is everyone’s responsibility; every person is capable of making equity and diversity a core value in their life

• There are no “quick fixes,” and we don’t have to fix everything

• It’s ok to take care of ourselves; practice forgiveness and letting go, so you can sustain yourself in this work

Adapted from Jamie Washington, Washington Consulting Group
Agenda

Understanding Microaggressions

Think/Pair/Share: Who am I in the Work of Being an Ally?

Bias/Prejudice/Oppression/Privilege & Becoming an Ally

Scenarios

Next Steps

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Microaggressions

*From Microaggressions: Power, Privilege and Everyday Life. microaggressions.com*

This blog seeks to provide a visual representation of the everyday of “microaggressions.” Each event, observation and experience posted is not necessarily particularly striking in and of themselves. Often, they are never meant to hurt - acts done with little conscious awareness of their meanings and effects. Instead, *their slow accumulation during a childhood and over a lifetime is in part what defines a marginalized experience*, making explanation and communication with someone who does not share this identity particularly difficult. *Social others are microaggressed hourly, daily, weekly, monthly.*
Microaggressions

While studying for a medical school parasitology exam about infectious diseases, a classmate says, “Why are we studying all these diseases that are only in Africa? They don’t even have any history.”

My advisor at a top medical school told me that in order to advance professionally, I should act more like what people expect from an Asian woman - more demure.

When taking our biracial son to the emergency room, my African American husband makes mention of his urethra when discussing my son’s illness. The white, middle aged male doctor says to him, “Where did you learn that word?” as if there is no way that my husband could know such a medical term. Made me feel angry, insulted, and degraded.

Microaggressions

I was standing in the cafeteria of a major academic medical center wearing shirt, tie, and the same white coat that all my medical school classmates wear (with stethoscope). An older white lady tapped me on the shoulder and asked “Excuse me do you work here? I’m trying to find the soups...” and even once I fully turned around it never occurred to her that I am a medical student, not a cook.

I am a black male medical student in a major Northeast academic medical center.
Microaggressions

In the hospital where I take classes, there is a resident who never calls me by my name. He always calls me “little wild critter” even though I have told him not to do it, and just laughs it off when I get angry at him for it and tell him to stop. I’m a 21 year old female medical student, he is a 27 year old resident. Makes me feel angry, disrespected, not taken seriously.

In my emergency medical training class, one of the questions on our exams read “What does healthy skin look like?” The expected answer was “pink.” When I’m healthy, my skin isn’t pink. Happened April 2011, I'm 18 & in university class. Made me feel overlooked, marginalized.

Microaggressions

Lecturing physician: “Any of your fathers orthopedic surgeons?” 10 minutes later... “Are any of your mothers or sisters hospice nurses?” In a medical school lecture - made me feel like traditional gender roles still dominate, even in a mixed gender graduate school class.

Male medical student to another: “I didn’t see you paying too much attention during this lecture. What are you gay?” Overheard after anatomy lecture on female genitalia.
Microaggressions

“You must be new, they keep getting such cute nurses! I heard a medical student was coming in to discuss my medications with me, where is he?” Said to me when (I, a female medical student) entered the exam room of this elderly man to discuss his diabetes.

(Any time I see the doctors at my college’s health service clinic.)

**Doctor:** Are you sexually active?  **Me:** Yes.

**Doctor:** Is there any chance you could be pregnant?  **Me:** No.

**Doctor:** Are you taking birth control pills?  **Me:** No.

**Doctor:** Do you use condoms?  **Me:** Nope.

**Doctor (beginning to look concerned):** Is there a medical reason you can’t become pregnant?  **Me:** Not that I’m aware of.

**Doctor (looking even more concerned, now speaking in a condescending tone):** Then how do you know there’s no chance of pregnancy?

**Me:** Last I checked, my female partner would have a hard time pulling that off.

An Ally is someone who is willing to pay attention to – and take action around - the social, economic & political differences and inequities that attend to people based on distinctions of race, ethnicity, age, class, sexual orientation, gender identity & expression, disability, religious or spiritual identity, and nationality (this is not an exhaustive list)
Exercise: Who Am I in the Work of Being an Ally?

Think/Pair/Share:

Consider your own identities, and the communities in which you have lived, worked, and played.

• With what communities are you most comfortable? What identities do you know the most about?
• Are there particular identities and communities with which you are less comfortable and/or familiar?
• Have you ever witnessed or experienced a microaggression? If so, what happened?

Bias/Prejudice/Oppression/Privilege

PREJUDICE: preconceived judgment or opinion; an adverse opinion or leaning formed without just grounds or before sufficient knowledge

OPPRESSION: the exercise of authority or power in a burdensome, cruel, or unjust manner

(from Merriam-Webster)
Bias/Prejudice/Oppression/Privilege

_Institutional Power + Bias/Prejudice = Oppression_

Important to understand the difference between individual bias or prejudice and _institutional racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism_, etc.

All people do not have the same ability to create institutional barriers, such as laws, policies, traditions, media images, etc.

Bias/Prejudice/Oppression/Privilege

_Oppression refers to the (historical) institutional & attitudinal barriers that have been applied unequally to the members of one social group over another, for example:_

- Jim Crow laws (mandating racial segregation for over 80 years under the notion of “separate but equal”)
- Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell military policy (affecting GLBTQ personnel)
- Girls & women’s sports participation before Title IX
- Lack of access prior to Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
Bias/Prejudice/Oppression/Privilege

PRIVILEGE: a right or immunity granted as a peculiar benefit, advantage, or favor

If members of certain social groups face attitudinal, physical, economic, political, and educational barriers (e.g., people of color), then those of us not facing these barriers maintain rights, benefits – privilege – by virtue of not belonging to certain social groups (e.g., people who are white, male, heterosexual, able-bodied, etc.).

“...I think whites are carefully taught not to recognize white privilege, as males are taught not to recognize male privilege. So I have begun in an untutored way to ask what it is like to have white privilege. I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was ‘meant’ to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and blank checks.”

White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack By Peggy McIntosh (1989)
Becoming an Ally

No one person is completely marginalized nor completely privileged. In 21st century U.S. society, *most of us have complex identities involving both marginalization & privilege.*

Allies *move past shame, guilt, and blame, working to understand how privilege works in their life,* as well as how marginalized “others” are perceived through stereotypes & cultural myths.

Becoming an Ally

Anyone can become an ally to people with less privilege & institutional power, but it first requires an understanding of one’s own social identities.

“Being an ally” is an on-going process that involves self-reflection, an openness to new ideas, a willingness to listen to people’s lived experiences, a commitment to on-going education, and a willingness to take action & take risks.
Becoming an Ally – One Example

Joy DeGruy in
*Cracking the Codes: The System of Racial Inequity* (Shakti Butler, 2012)

SCENARIOS
Acting as an Ally: Next Steps

Next Steps Grid

What can I commit to do in one week?

What can I commit to do in the coming year?

How can I hold myself accountable?

Thank you!
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