**Did I Really Hear That? Strategies for Responding to Racism that Manifests as Microagressions**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=igG12xJIIZo>

*Begins at minute 4 and 16 seconds.*

All right. You ready to go? Let's do it. all right, so I'll start by introducing myself, and then Dr. Unaka can introduce herself. I'm Jamila Hackworth, and I am an assistant professor at Cincinnati Children's and the University of Cincinnati College of Medicine, and I'm also the Associate Director of the Office of Academic Affairs and Career Development within the Department of Pediatrics.

And I am Ndidi Unaka. I work clinically at Cincinnati Children's as a Pediatric Hospitalist. I'm an associate professor here at Cincinnati Children's, and I'm also the Associate Program Director of our Pediatric Residency Program here in Cincinnati. And we are really excited to be here with all of you today. Thank you for joining us. And the title of our talk, as you can see, is, *Did I Really Hear That? Strategies for Responding to Racism that Manifests as Microagressions.*

We're hoping, over the course of the next 90 or so minutes, to really take a deep dive into why this is so important, give you guys examples of microaggressions, and most importantly, give you ways in which you can combat this in your everyday experiences, both as medical professionals, and in your life outside of the hospital. So, we're really excited to have you all here, and we'll go ahead and get started.

Real quick, a couple of housekeeping items, if that's what we call them when we're doing this on Zoom, we have Rosine and Thomas on the line. They're actually helping us manage the chat feature, the Q and A feature. And then wanted me to let you know that if you have questions as we go along in the presentation, please put those questions in the Q and A, and also use the raise hand feature so that one of them can unmute you and you can ask your question. Okay.?

All right, so just to go over some of our learning objectives for the day, so after participating in this session, we really want all of you to be able to discuss common terms used in conversations about diversity and inclusion. We want you to manage one's own racist, microaggressive and biased tendencies, and we want you all to integrate strategies to interrupt incidents of racism that manifest as microaggressions, both as individuals on the receiving end of bias, microaggressive statements and as co- conspirators.

So, I think it's always important with workshops like this that we start off with some grounding assumptions. So, the first one is the work of equity and diversity is all about creating community. We think this is really important. It involves building trust, careful listening, respectful disagreement and taking risks. We know that this is super uncomfortable for some people, but having these conversations is how we grow and learn. So, remember it's okay to make mistakes, and we all do it. We also know that individuals and organizations can, can and do, grow and change, but we know it doesn't happen overnight, and so these are going to be ongoing discussions that we have, but it's important to, you know, continue to be persistent as we all try and fight for change. And if we are going to change things, we have to engage in deeply honest introspection. So, knowing ourselves is really the first step in creating radically inclusive spaces.

I would like to kick us off with just a little level setting regarding the unique challenges and obstacles that people of color face in the academic environment. So while it seems as if the finish line is the same distance away, there are a number of obstacles that get in the way, including feeling the need to work twice as hard to prove one's value and competence, also marginalization and isolation in the academic environment, and this is socially and professionally, there's also a lack of sponsorship and culturally humble mentorship available for people of color in the academic environment. Many people of color face self-efficacy challenges that often result from the absence of role models from their minoritized groups.

So basically, the lack of representation and also the lack of a critical mass of faculty members of color or students. Excuse me. The angry Black woman, this is what I call this. So, so this, this is the idea that oftentimes people of color, especially Black women, feel the need to assimilate by employing these bi-cultural communication strategies, basically, to avoid being perceived as either silent and non-threatening, which is invisible, right, or vocal and threatening or angry. So, this is like a constant thing. And I mean, if we were in person, so this workshop, we've done it in person a number of times, and heads are nodding, and people are like, yes, yes, this whole idea that you're sort of walking this tightrope, constantly trying to figure out how you can manage how people experience you based on perhaps their own biases about women of color.

Excessive involvement in diversity related activities, or tokenism, and then this idea of the collective representation of all members of our ethnic group, which really makes us feel immense pressure to debunk the stereotypes and generalizations that exist about our groups, which leads to this thing called stereotype-threat. Which basically says that simply the knowing about the stigma and of the stereotypes that exist toward our groups, actually on its own, the awareness and threat of those of the stigma, actually has a damaging effect on our performance.

We see this lot in academics, like when you think about standardized testing is a great place where you when you look at and you can see that, because what happens is, is this manifests as self-doubt and anxiety, that depletes our working memory and leads to poor performance. There are messages that we are receiving as soon as we're born, in the media. Some are covert, some are overt. This is especially true for women and underrepresented minorities. So essentially, you know not you're not good at science. Women aren't good at science. Women are overly emotional. Black people are intellectually inferior. Black people are violent. And these are reinforced day in and day out. And Dr. Unaka is going to share some examples of microaggressions. And so as small children, you know, we're acculturated and assimilated into a space that basically wants to deny us a similar existence as other people. So, I think that that's a struggle that many of us face in the academic environment.

There's also the fact that many of us are constantly, constantly dealing with racism that manifests as microaggressions, both at work or school, from colleagues, classmates, patients and families, and also in society. And so, some of these examples include color blindness, racism, evasive rhetoric. This is especially true, like people don't want to say it's racism, like we can call it everything else, but it's we don't want to say the R word, right. The normalization of the white experience, which often causes people of color, especially, to sort of be silent about our own experiences in order to fit in, be liked or to not be the person who's like making the waves and riding the current right references to reverse racism. Like let me know what that is, when you figure that out. Overhearing negative comments about other people of color, and this is especially true with physicians.

A lot of this comes from my dissertation, and hearing colleagues speak negatively about Black patients and families is micro aggressive. Also, white families not wanting care from Black physicians. So, what happens is people of color are frequently forced to choose when to challenge these instances of racism that sort of play out in the form of micro and macro aggressions. Number one, because we have to choose when we're going to challenge them or disrupt them. One, because the fear of retaliation is real, right? And the fear of labeling is also real. And there's also this thing, you know, the lack of publicly supported co-conspirators, that in order to take on some of this, to reduce, to reduce the burden of disruption that disproportionately lies on our shoulders, right?

So, what happens is, you know, I don't know how many of you and you can, like, raise your hand, or you can, like, raise your finger, like this, how many of you have had, like, in a meeting where you've had to sort of challenge something, and everybody comes to you afterwards, like, they come to your office and they say, oh my God, I'm so glad. See, look, everybody's raising their hands. I'm so glad you brought that up. I'm so glad that I really support that. Or, you know, or when something happens in a meeting and people come to you afterwards and say, oh my God, I'm so sorry. But guess what, nobody said anything in the meeting, no one came to your defense. No one said, oh, I agree with, look at this, it’s going, going, going, right.

This basically is so problematic, because while we know that we're not going to be given the benefit of the doubt, and I'm going to talk later about this threshold that is present to the amount of disruption that's going to be allowed by us, the business of doing it disproportionately rests with us, that responsibility. And then there's also this lack of safe spaces in order to be able to process these experiences without having to sort of debate them, that they actually happened right?

So, this is a couple slides. Ideally, this would have been one big, long slide, but the print would have been too small. So, this is a scale of racism. So essentially, on the far-left side of the scale, you have terrorism, and I'm going to flip flop back and forth. And on the far-right side of the scale, you have abolitionists. Okay? So, this basically, you know, far left is just flat out, like, you know, overt racism, like, I'll kill somebody because they're Black, you know, I, you know, Black face, you know, I just really input. I want to inflict pain and fear, right? And so, as you move along the spectrum, you see at the top you have like overt racism, subconscious racism, and you can, I'm not going to read these to you, because you can look at them as I talk through it. I'll pull out a few.

But when you see subconscious racism, you see like Blacks are naturally more violent or aggressive, right? And less intelligent. We're going to talk a lot about that today, and sort of how those messages come across to us in the academic environment. I'm not racist, but you know, or you know people in Black face, so you know when you end and you move along to indifference, defensiveness. But what about Black-on-Black crime, right? You know, they're killing each other. That's something that we've heard a lot in recent days and weeks. Or justification. So, but what about, you know, Black people can be racist too, can't they? I don't agree with that, but that's something that we've had to debate in different spaces. Oh, wait a minute, we had a Black president, right? So, we're in a post-racial, racial society, aren't we? Does racism really even exist?

So, moving along, you know, you're our white savior, woke justification, so this is, you know, in that when you talk about like, love can conquer all, you know, we just love each other, you know, that kind of thing. And then you have a performative ally, which, if they want my help, they need to be nicer, right? I'll help you, but I need to be the leader, okay? And if I do this, it's going to help my reputation, right? So that's that self-serving part of it. And then you move along and you get, you know, to allyship, which we're going to talk a little bit about, where you have this awareness and awakening that, you know, okay, yeah, you know, like my life was, I was poor, but, you know, it wasn't as hard as if I were poor and Black, right? And then going all the way to abolitionist, which is, you know, using your privilege and putting that on the line in order to really help and take this in people of color and other minoritized groups, but allowing them to take the lead. Right?

One of the things, a couple of things, from the developers of this is one, it's super common for people to sort of move back and forth along the scale, especially in the middle areas, and then the term Blacks, when you look at this, you can basically substitute, substitute that for any other minoritized group, and it stands to speak the same, have the same meaning.

So, now we're going to take a deep dive into microaggressions. And over the course of the next several minutes, not only are we going to dissect this definition, but we're going to go through examples of commonly articulated microaggressions. We're going to highlight the themes that underlie those microaggressions and the messages that those microaggressions send to various marginalized groups.

Some of these microaggressions may be very familiar to some of you, either from a place of experiencing them yourselves, witnessing how those microaggressions impact other people around you, or amaze and be comments that you've said before. And so, I think this is a really important piece of the workshop to really enhance our awareness and for us to learn and grow and self-reflect together.

So, let's start off with the definition. So, when we talk about microaggressions, these are every day, verbal, nonverbal and environmental slights, snubs or insults, which communicate hostile, derogatory or negative messages to target individuals based solely upon their marginalized group membership. So, I think really understanding what a microaggression is, is really, really important. I think the last piece of this is really what underscores how microaggressions can be really harmful. So, let's take our first example.

So how many of you have heard this microaggression before you are so articulate and use the raising your hands, yeah, oh, yes, lots of people. All right, so let's dissect what this what this really means. Okay, so personally, I have been told this on several occasions, right? So, you are so articulate, the underlying theme here is this ascription of intelligence, and the message that this microaggression sends is that it is unusual for someone of your race to be intelligent, right? So, here's another example, I believe the best and brightest person should get the job. Okay? So, the underlying theme here is that this is this is all about a myth of mediocrity, right? And the message that this microaggression is sending is that people of color are given unfair benefits because of their race. How many of you have heard this microaggression before? Yeah, yeah. This is a very common one.

All right, so I want you to keep this microaggression in mind, because on the next slide, we're going to talk about, you know, the very stark reality of the culture and the society that we live in. Okay?

And this is one I'll just add that I hear a lot on screening committees, and I think we have, you know, medical school faculty on here as well. If you're on admission committees, you might hear this type of microaggression. It's super common, absolutely.

So how many of you remember the scandal that broke last March in 2019 around college admissions? Okay, so this scandal became public knowledge last spring and the name or the codeword for this scandal was Operation Varsity Blues. And essentially, this scandal was something that elite families of privilege from 2011 to 2018 were paying millions of dollars. There were 33 families that paid up for $25 million in total to ensure that their kids could get into various colleges and universities around the United States. And not only were they paying to secure admission, but they were also falsifying college entrance, entrance exam scores, right? So, we have the previous microaggression where there's this message that, oh, you know, some qualifications and diversity, you know, can't go hand in hand, right? In order to recruit or retain diverse students, trainees, faculty, you are lowering your standards yet, and still, we have this college admission scandal. And I'm sure this was just the tip of the iceberg. So, I think the irony here is very striking.

So, we also, over the course of several years of given this work, giving this workshop, we've collected microaggressions that people who participated in the workshop have experienced themselves, and they have been really kind and transparent with sharing some of these with us. So, here's one. You're lucky to be Black because it's so easy to get into college. Yeah, lots of people have heard this one, right, right? One of my colleagues shared one that she experienced similar to this. Oh, you don't have to be you don't have to worry ever about losing your job because you're Black, right? So, it's just, it's, it's really just a very interesting mindset that really sends these very negative messages to people. So, here's another one. How many of you have heard this one, or experienced or are aware of this one, a store employee following a customer of color around the store. Oh, yeah, right. So, the underlying theme here is criminality, and the message that it sends to the person who is experiencing this is that you are a criminal, you are going to steal, and you do not along.

So here are some other common microaggressions. How many of you have heard this one? I don't look at you as being Black. You are different from all of the others in your race. Yep. Or your name is so difficult to say, is there something else I can call you? Yes. Okay, you are pretty. You are pretty to be a dark-skinned girl. Yeah. So, here's another microaggression that is super common, when I look at you, I don't see color. And I think this microaggression is one that a lot of people who ascribe to the theme of color blindness struggle with understanding how this can be received in such a negative way. But the message that underlies this microaggression is that you are denying a person, a person of color’s racial or ethnic experiences. And so, while being a person of color, being in a marginalized group, comes with a lot of pain, I want to be seen as a Black woman. I am proud of who I am, and I think when someone diminishes or chooses not to see who you are, it is devaluing. And so that's why this common microaggression of colorblindness can be so demoralizing. I think we need to move towards where we celebrate each other's differences and recognize differences. Does it mean that you are better or worse than me?

And I would just add to this, I became aware of this when you know, I really experienced difficulty with engaging in conversations with people around race. And so, my white colleagues and friends had to sit me down and let me know, like, you know, Jamila, I didn't grow up talking about race. Actually, it was the opposite, right? So, I grew up, and my parents told me, don’t talk about race because you don't want to be offensive, like, just don't even bring it up, right? And so, this notion of colorblindness is actually deeply rooted in white privilege, because people are able to erase someone else's existence, because if you don't see color, then, as Dr. Unaka said, you don't see me, right? The color of my skin really has dictated a lot of my experiences in my life. So, if you strip that away, you sort of strip away who I am and what happens, the dangerous thing about this is, is it stifles the much-needed conversations about race and the Black experience and all of these other things that really, really need to happen. And so, you know, it was a because at my house, we always talk about race every day. I grew up talking about race on a daily basis. So, understanding that, you know, we're starting in two different spaces, and we need to give each other grace and understanding, but we have to have these conversations. Like this is definitely not the answer moving forward if we're really going to make a difference.

So, how many of you have heard this microaggression? You speak good English? Yeah, yep. So, the underlying theme here is being an alien in your own land, and the message associated with this microaggression is that you are not American. And you know, I would say, on a personal level, I am the daughter of immigrants. My family, both of my parents, are from Nigeria. And I remember being a young girl, and my mom would come home so upset, and she would tell stories about how you know her colleagues would say, you know, you have a really thick accent. You have a really thick accent. And my mom would always, her response to that microaggression would be, well to me, you have an accent, right? And so, I think sometimes we think that in our dominant culture, that our perceptions of, you know, how people sound, is the dominating perspective, but we forget what it's like to be on the other end. And so, I think this is a really common microaggression that can be pretty damaging.

What about this one? As the only woman I know exactly what you are going through. How many of you have heard this? Yeah, okay. So, the theme that underlies this microaggression is the denial of individual racism. And the message that this microaggression sends is that your racial oppression is not different than my gender oppression, and I cannot be racist because I'm just like you. And I think this particular microaggression is super important for us to dissect. So, this really highlights the importance of people understanding intersectionality. Okay, so as a Black woman, I am both obviously oppressed from a racism standpoint and a sex and a sexism standpoint. Like I've had both of those experiences. And while you know, a colleague who is a white woman can certainly relate from experiences of sexism, by no means does it, does that negate my experience as just as a Black person. So, intersectionality means that those experiences, having the experience of two or more marginalized groups means that my experiences are compounded. My my my difficulties, my challenges, are compounded because of experiences of racism and sexism. And so, I think this is a really important concept to understand, because I think people in in saying this want to be relatable, but it negates the experience of being a person of color.

So, here's one persons of color being mistaken for service workers. Yeah, yes, okay. So, the theme here is second class citizenship, and the message that it sends is that people of color are servants to whites. They could not possibly occupy high, high stakes positions, right? So, this is something that I see my students, my residents, they get mistaken for service workers all the time. And let's be clear, this is not an indictment on being a service worker, right? I think service workers play an incredibly important role in our society, and there is dignity in every job. But I think the fact that whenever a person of color identifies themselves as a medical student or a trainee or a physician, and people automatically assume, or don't hear that piece, and ascribe them to a role of a service worker, that says a lot about what Black people are allowed to do in their minds, right? And so that really is what's underlying that microaggression.

And so, this is another one that was shared with us during a previous workshop, and okay to share. This one sort of feeds into this misconception that America is a post-racial society. So, I know you're too young to have experienced racism in America, but that's microaggressive. And then, this is a thing that I don't even think it's a microaggression, I just think it's flat-out racism, but I wanted to talk about it because it's a thing, right? It's the thing is, is white people calling the police on Black people for, like, existing? So, on this slide, you can see represented are, you know, the police being called because a Black family is barbecuing in the park. A young man is moving into his apartment, and I guess people assume that he shouldn't have been moving in, or that he was up to something nefarious, and the police were called. The police being called on a Black man whose dog is at the dog park humping on another dog. Or a Black man who's taking a phone call in the lobby of a hotel that he's staying in because his, the people staying with him were asleep, so he didn't want to wake them. A man trying to cash his check at the bank. Starbucks, that's this in the center here. The Black graduate student at Yale University who was taking a nap in the common area of her residence hall, and the police were called on her. I mean, there are so many other examples people trying to do their jobs as delivery workers. Cincinnati just had to pay out about $250,000 because someone called the police on a Black realtor and his client, also a Black man, who were looking at a home on the west side of town, and the police came and botched the response to that, you know. So, the city ended up having to pay out$ 250,000 so, you know this idea of people calling the police on Black people for doing things that you know, we should all just be able to do, is extremely problematic. And I'm going to show a video right now to sort of sort of show you how this weaponization of whiteness against Black people plays out.

Will you please stop? Sir, I’m asking you to stop.

Please don't come close to me.

Sir, I’m asking you stop recording me.

Please don't come close to me.

Please turn you phone off.

Please don't come close to me.

Please don't come close please. Please call the cops. Please call the cops.

I'm gonna tell them there's an African American man threatening my life.

Please tell them whatever you like.

Excuse me. I'm sorry, are you available? And there's a man, African American with a Black lab. He’s recording me and threatening me and my dog. There is an African American man, I’m in Central Park, he's recording me, threatening myself and my dog. I’m sorry, I can’t hear. I’m being threatened by a man and. Please send the cops immediately. I’m in Central Park. I don't know.

Thank you.

Okay, so I just wanted to illustrate that, and I think that video is a perfect illustration for when whiteness is weaponized, and also, you know, Blackness is perceived as a threat, and this is a really dangerous game. It's a dangerous game that many of us are, you know, every day terrified about whether or not my husband or my children will make it home if they have encounters with the police. This is real live anxiety that people of color face on a daily basis. If you're caring for patients and families who are Black or brown, this is our reality, right? Constantly talking with our children, talking about how to respond if you're pulled over by the police. Constantly trying to police yourselves, making sure that you don't put yourself in a situation where this could even happen to you. This is, and this is one of those outside of work things that you know it is extreme, it is an extremely heavy burden. And so, the dangerousness of this game is when you do these things.

These are pictures of some of the unarmed Black people who have been murdered by police, right? So, calling the police in situations where the police really don't need to be called, and there's racism and bias sort of driving that decision and that perception of threat because of the Blackness, or because people are looking out of place. Like we have to really learn how to dissect, you know, the biases that we have, and begin to really think about when those biases are playing out and how they may potentially be damaging or life ending, in some of these cases for individuals. And so that's something that I hope is a call to action. You know, we all have bias. I don't think we can get rid of it. I think we can learn to mitigate it. I think we can learn to accept where we are, understanding it, and then figuring out how we can reduce the likelihood of harming other individuals. And, you know, I always say, my grandmother used to say, when you know better, you do better. And that's why we're all here.

And Dr. Wanaka said, you know, we're going to give ourselves some grace. We always make mistakes. You know, we, you know some of these things we're going to say, people, people come up to me afterwards and they say, oh, my God, I've been doing that one thing. I'm like, it's okay, when you know better, you do better. This is something that we must do better about.

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