Microaggressions: When It’s Not You, It’s Them

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Disclosures

Healio: Consultant
MagellanRx: Consultant
What are Microaggressions?

Derald Wing Sue PhD - 2010
Chester Pierce MD - 1970

- Initially coined 1970 by Dr. Chester Pierce
  - Microassaults, microinsults, microinvalidations, and environmental microaggressions specifically by African Americans

- Brief and often subtle comments, behaviors or environmental cues

- Communicate derogatory, hostile or unwelcoming messages

- Directed towards members of (historically) underrepresented groups
Microaggression: History

- **Modern Day Definition by Dr. Sue and colleagues**
  - Subtle snubs, slights, insults directed towards minorities, women and other historically stigmatized groups that implicitly communicate or at least engender hostility.
  - Verbal, general disrespect, devaluation, exclusion.

- **What is the impact:**
  - Indirect expressions of prejudice, contribute to the maintenance of existing power structures
  - May limit the hiring, promotion, and retention of women and underrepresented minorities.
Characteristics of Microaggressions

• Experienced frequently and persistently

• Often stated without ill intentions, but impacts the target negatively

• Often informed by stereotypes and biases
Examples of Microaggressions

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“you are a credit to your race”                                               | It is unusual for someone of your race to be intelligent                |
| “I always thought you might be gay, you are always so nicely dressed!”       | All gay men are nicely dressed or can’t be gay if you are not “nicely dressed” |
Physician moms continue to struggle in male-dominated culture

‘Are You Actually an M.D.?’: A Black Doctor Is Questioned as She Intervenes on a Delta Flight

By Christine Hauser

Women Physicians in Academic Medicine — New Insights from Cohort Studies

Women in Academic Medicine — Progress and Challenges

Mary Beth Hamel, M.D., M.P.H., Julie R. Ingefield, M.D., Elizabeth Phimister, Ph.D., and Caren G. Solomon, M.D., M.P.H.
## Comparing How Male and Female Entrepreneurs Are Described by Venture Capitalists

These gendered personas are illustrated with quotes from Swedish government VCs who observed discussing a total of 125 applications for funding between 2009 and 2010.

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<td>&quot;Young and promising&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Young, but inexperienced&quot;</td>
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<td>&quot;Arrogant, but very impressive competence&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Lacks network contacts and in need of help to develop her business concept&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Aggressive, but a really good entrepreneur&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Enthusiastic, but weak&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Experienced and knowledgeable&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Experienced, but worried&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Very competent innovator and already has money to play with&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Good-looking and careless with money&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Cautious, sensible, and level-headed&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Too cautious and does not dare&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Extremely capable and very driven&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Lacks ability for venturing and growth&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Educated engineer at a prestigious university and has run businesses before&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;Visionary, but with no knowledge of the market&quot;</td>
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Malmstrom, Joansson, Wincent. HBR. May 17, 2017
Female speakers were less likely than male speakers to receive a formal address (61% vs 81%).

Female speakers were more likely to be introduced by first name only (17% vs 3%).

Black speakers of both genders were less likely to receive a professional address than non-Hispanic whites.

No gender differences in professional address were observed for female introducers.
Microaggression: A newer field of study

- Initial studies completed with small focus groups
- Subjective
- Still being understood the exact impacts on those who experience microaggressions
- Precise science is being further studied and understood, it is clear that they have a negative impact
Microaggressions: Example

“I did a case this morning and spoke to the family after the procedure while wearing my jacket with my name, MD, and ‘Chair of Surgery.’ Family tells the postanesthesia care unit they haven’t talked to the surgeon so I was paged to come speak to them.” — Female surgical department chair
Recognizing and Reacting to Microaggressions in Medicine and Surgery

Madeline B. Torres, MD; Arghavan Saless, MD, PhD; Amalia Cochran, MD

Figure. Summary of the 4 Types of Microaggressions

- **Microassault**
  - Often conscious; "old-fashioned" discrimination

- **Microinsult**
  - Often unconscious; demeaning messages about an aspect of a person's identity

- **Microinvalidation**
  - Often unconscious; exclusion and dismissal of the recipient's feelings, thoughts, and reality

- **Environmental microaggressions**
  - Macro-level; workplace reflections of microaggressions
Microassaults

- “Old fashioned” discriminatory statements
- Often intentional
- Most blatant of microaggressions
- Verbal or nonverbal attacks to offend recipient
  - “You people are all the same, claiming your minority status to take the spots that belong to someone else”
  - “They are letting women be doctors now?”
- Differ from blatant racism and discrimination: focus on individual rather than a group (although racism likely still contributing factor)
  - Refusal to work with woman or URM team member
  - Suggesting women and URMs not competent physicians/surgeons
Microinsults

- Subtle snubs or humiliations
- Convey demeaning message to recipient that may be unintentional to perpetrator
  - Women or URM physicians confused for the nurse, the janitor, an interpreter or other nonmedical role because they do not fit the traditional image of a physician
  - Black physicians being called inarticulate, discouraged from wearing their natural hair style
  - Latinx physicians being told to “tone down” their behavior
  - Suggest affirmative action is the reason for certain people have their position
Microinvalidations

- Exclude, negate, dismiss the personal thoughts, feelings, experiential reality of a person
- Perpetrators stated “inability to see color or race”
- Denying concerns about fairness
- Myth of meritocracy: belief that hard work pays off and race or sex plays no role in determining success
- Invalidating a woman or URM’s experience by calling them oversensitive
Environmental Microaggressions

- Microassaults, microinsults, microinvalidations are reflected in the culture, process and climate of a workplace
- Often occur at a macro level
- Hallways decorated with white male physicians
- Inequitable application of promotion and tenure criteria resulting in the leaky pipeline
- Lack of diversity in leadership that can be perceived as unwelcoming
- Unintentional exclusion or minimizing identities of URMs and women by excluding accomplishments and portraits
- Lack of childcare and proper rooms for breastfeeding mothers at national conferences and within hospitals → unwelcoming environment
Impact of Microaggressions

- Affects psychological and physical health of recipients
- Low self-esteem, increased stress, depression, trauma response.
- Has been associated in college students of color to anxiety and alcohol use.
- Racial and ethnic discrimination may lay role in health disparities.
- Somatic manifestations- stomach aches, headaches, sleep disturbances, hypertension
- Psychological and physical toll
- Disrupt student’s ability to engage in the learning process- feeling of belonging brought into question
- Societal risk of harming the already fragile pipeline of women and minority physicians in academia
Bias, Burnout, and Imposter Phenomenon: The Negative Impact of Under-Recognized Intersectionality

Kelly A. Cawcutt, Pauline Clance, and Shikha Jain

THE IP BURNOUT CYCLE

THE IMPOSTOR PHENOMENON BURNOUT CYCLE

CYCLE DIAGRAMS SHOWS THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN IMPLICIT BIAS, IMPOSTOR PHENOMENON AND BURNOUT.
Impostor Phenomenon

Feelings of inadequacy

Inequities

Awards Publications Promotions
Leadership Speaking Grants

Emotional Exhaustion

“Biological clock phenomenon"
Family care (elder, child, home, sandwich gen)
Impact of These Inequities

• Lack of opportunities ➔
  • Long term impact on advancement of women.
  • Reinforce the perception of lower status ➔ Fuels Impostor Phenomenon

• Unconscious bias ➔
  • Amplify isolation, marginalization, professional discomfiture. ➔
    • Burnout, decreased job satisfaction.

• Link between the advancement of women's health and the advancement of women in academic medicine. (Office for Research on Women's Health (ORWH) at NIH)
Facts from the #BeEthical Campaign

- Documented disparities have profoundly hindered the careers of women in medicine.
- Workforce discrimination jeopardizes patient care and scientific discovery.
- Disparities tend to be greatest for women with intersectionality (e.g. women of color).
- Workforce disparities contribute to physician burnout and physician burnout is more prevalent in women.
- Historical explanations such as lack of highly qualified women physicians can not account for today’s disparities.
- Tokenism has been cited as being harmful, particularly to the token individual.

Julie Silver, MD
What Can You Do?
Microaggressions: How to Respond

- Open The Front Door (Ganote et al)
  - Observe: Concrete, factual and observable
  - Think: Thoughts based on observations
  - Feel: Emotions “I feel..”
  - Desire: Specific request or inquires about a desired outcome

Don’t Remain Silent! Strategies for Supporting Yourself and Your Colleagues via Microresistance and Ally Development

Dr. Cynthia Ganote, Saint Mary’s College of California, cmg3@stmarys-ca.edu
Dr. Floyd Cheung, Smith College, fcheung@smith.edu
Dr. Tasha Souza, Boise State University, tashasouza@boisestate.edu

@ShikhaJainMD
Microaggressions: Open The Front Door

- Example: “Let’s pause for a moment here. I noticed (Observe) some raised eyebrows and other non-verbals that make me think people might be reacting strongly to something that was said. I think (Think) we need to explore this because I feel uncomfortable (Feeling) moving forward with the discussion. Following our ground rules, I am hoping someone can share (Desire) what they are thinking or feeling right now so we can have a productive conversation about this”

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Microaggressions: ACTION

- Ask clarifying questions
- Come from curiosity not judgement
- Tell me what you observed in a factual manner
- Impact exploration – discuss what the impact of the statement was
- Own your own thoughts and feelings around the situation
- Next steps
Microaggressions: ACTION

- Example: “I am not sure that I understood what you meant when you said [comment]. I want to better understand; can you explain that to me?”
- The recipient can then follow up with their observation of the facts of what happened, followed by a statement such as, “When I hear comments like that, it makes me feel like you think I am only here because I am a minority, not because I can do the work.”
- The discussion can then close with actions items for follow-up by those involved in the dialogue.
Microaggressions: XYZ

- “I feel X when you say Y because Z”

Journal of the International Ombudsman Association, 2009, 2 (1), p1

Bystander Training within Organizations
Maureen Scully and Mary Rowe

@ShikhaJainMD
### You can act—in the moment or later

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<th>You witnessed a microaggression</th>
<th>You received a microaggression</th>
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<td>- If you recognize it, apologize (now or later)</td>
<td>- Interrupt the behavior (e.g., say “ouch!”)</td>
<td>- Choose to speak up or not</td>
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<td>- If it is pointed out to you, believe the person</td>
<td>- Support the target publicly (e.g., “that’s not funny”) or privately (e.g., “I’m so sorry the patient said that to you”)</td>
<td>- Rely on allies</td>
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<td>- Don’t get defensive, resist the urge to deny/explain</td>
<td>- Support someone else who is speaking up</td>
<td>- File a complaint</td>
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<td>- Learn more about why your action was a microaggression</td>
<td>- Talk privately with the offender later</td>
<td>- Seek out a community of support</td>
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<td>- It is our OWN work to gain awareness. It is not the job or ‘work’ of the target of the microaggression to explain it to you</td>
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Allyship: Be an Upstander not a Bystander

- Once you realize these issues exist, critically analyze the decisions you make.
- Make a conscious effort to identify practices to reduce unconscious bias from an individual or systems aspect.
- If someone is speaking and someone else tries to speak over them, politely “nip it in the bud.” Be an “upstander” not a “bystander.”
- If someone has an idea and voices it, and someone else repeats the same idea and tries to take credit, bring it back to the original person who spoke.
Consider the 5 Ds of Bystander Intervention—If you are comfortable doing so

- **Direct** → directly intervene, speak up, interrupt the behavior, be firm and clear

- **Delegate** → Ask/Allow someone who feels more comfortable/more able to speak up (often in context of power/seniority)

- **Delay** → It’s ok to react later both to the person who committed the microaggression OR to the target

- **Distract** → Take an indirect approach to de-escalate the situation. Distracting attention away from the person causing harm to give the person experiencing harm time to move away.

- **Display Discomfort** → Express nonverbal discomfort or concern in response to the incident.

Be Ethical: Calling on All Leaders to be Ethical

- Make workforce gender equity an ethical imperative.
- Prioritize and properly fund initiatives to close gender equity gaps.
- Avoid critical thinking errors.
- Use a systemic process and systemic metrics to evaluate disparities.
- Implement strategic interventions.
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<td>Identify your own implicit/unconscious bias</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Set up annual reviews with standardized questions</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Identify barriers that exist in your system and find solutions.</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Mentor AND Sponsor</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Advocate for pay equity</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Fix the system, not the women</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Identify your own impostor phenomenon, use it to your advantage to propel yourself upwards.</td>
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<td>Don’t get discouraged</td>
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@ShikhaJainMD
"It is not easy to be a pioneer - but oh, it is fascinating! I would not trade one moment, even the worst moment, for all the riches in the world."

Elizabeth Blackwell
References

- Smith DG, Rosenstein JE et al. The Different Words We Use to Describe Male and Female Leaders. Harvard Business Review. 2018 May.