

Diversity 101 for Homeopaths

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Abstract: Cultural diversity training is something which is very much needed within the professional homeopathic community. Microaggressions have occurred at our conferences and it behooves organizers of such conferences and attendees to learn microintervention techniques to help deal with these events. Various examples of microaggressions are given as well as possible interventions for racial, sexual, gender and other offensive remarks. Possible responses include: repeating back or paraphrasing what was said or challenging the stereotype, expressing empathy and compassion, asking for more information or playing dumb, expressing one's feelings about the comment, appealing to values and principles or pointing out commonalities with those affected, pointing out what's in it for them, and pointing out policies and laws that prohibit such conduct. The concept and importance of an ally which is an individual who is often not a part of the targeted group but is able to speak up for that group is discussed. Finally, a Diversity and Inclusion Statement is included at the end which can be signed by speakers to insure their awareness of this issue.

Keywords: cultural diversity, microaggressions, microinterventions

"We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people." - Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Introduction

Throughout history, when actions and deeds were done which oppressed one or more groups or classes of people, the silence of the masses is what allowed this inequity to continue. Within the homeopathic community at large, we have identified instances of offensive words or statements being spoken that have challenged our group to respond in a healthy, compassionate and forgiving manner. This article is a first attempt at such a process which we acknowledge is incomplete and preliminary, but we hope is a first step in the right direction. We will first identify the problem of microaggressions, then give several examples, and end with concrete examples of how to deal with these problems by a process which may be called microinterventions. Hopefully, this will give the reader the necessary skills to respond appropriately when such an event occurs in the future at a homeopathic conference or in a homeopathic classroom or office. Remember the golden rule: We should always treat others as we wish ourselves to be treated.

What Is Microaggression and Its Effects

Black psychiatrist Dr. Chester Pierce coined the term "microaggression" in the 1960s to help describe "the small, continuous bombardments" of automatic offenses levied by white people upon black people in America. To Dr. Pierce, it was "the essential ingredient in race relations and race interactions." Since then, however, Dr. Derald Wing Sue from Columbia University and others in the ensuing decades have expanded the term to include offenses involving any historically disadvantaged group such as LGBTQA (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Queer, Asexual), or due to gender, religion, etc. (Sue 2010) (Williams 2019) Microaggressions re-

inforce pathological stereotypes and promote exclusion and the statements are very easy to dismiss as accidental, non-intentional, or not discriminatory and offensive at all. Victims and observers are not sure how to react as denial and hostility are common reactions when someone is called out on a microaggression. (Williams 2019)

Currently in psychology research, microaggressions can be organized into three main types:

1. *Micro-invalidations:* These are communications that exclude or negate the thoughts, feelings, or experiences of people of color or another historically disadvantaged group. Examples include when people say they do not see color or when someone from a historically disadvantaged group is told not to be so sensitive to perceived discrimination.
2. *Micro-insults:* These are communications that unintentionally demean another person's racial or gender or religious identity. An example is when it is implied that someone got a job solely because of affirmative action.
3. *Micro-assaults:* These are intentional instances of discriminatory name-calling, as in the use of racial slurs and epithets. (Auguste 2018)

Microaggressions are the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership. In many cases, these hidden messages may invalidate the group identity or experiential reality of target persons, demean them on a personal

or group level, communicate they are lesser human beings, suggest they do not belong with the majority group, threaten and intimidate, or relegate them to an inferior status and treatment. Microaggressions can be directed toward a particular race, women, LGBTQA persons, those with disabilities, religious minorities, and any other marginalized group. (Sue 2010) We have all inherited these biases from our ancestors and many of these biases are unconscious, as the system we live in is structured to uphold these biases. Thus, it is important to “make the invisible, visible” to overcome the problem.

Microaggressions often occur unconsciously by well-intentioned individuals. The individuals delivering the microaggression may have a hard time recognizing the harm that they have caused. However, research indicates that microaggressions “have a powerful impact upon the psychological well-being of marginalized groups and affect their standard of living by creating inequities in health care, education, and employment.” (Sue 2010)

Studies link microaggression exposure to mental health problems, including increases in self-reported symptoms of depression, anxiety, and posttraumatic stress disorder. It should also be noted that the effects have been shown in Blacks, Asian, Latinos, and other racial and ethnic minority groups across the United States. (Auguste 2018)

Microaggressions occur because of the biases that we all have, and it is often uncomfortable for individuals to admit that their world view is biased. However, microaggressions and the biases behind them clearly affect the standard of living and quality of life of women, people of color and members of the LGBTQA community. This is evidenced by the fact that, though white American males constitute only 33% of the population, they occupy approximately:

- 80% of tenured positions in higher education.
- 80% of the US House of Representatives.
- 80-85% of the U.S. Senate.
- 92% of Forbes 400 executive CEO-level positions.
- 90% of public school superintendents.
- 99.9% of athletic team owners.
- 97.7% of U.S. presidents. (Sue 2010)

Examples of Microaggressions and their Hidden Meanings

Racial Microaggressions

A white person clutches their wallet or purse when near a black or Latino man. (Hidden message: You and your group are criminals.)

A black or Asian American who was born and raised in the US is complimented for speaking “good English.” (Hidden message: You are a foreigner despite growing up in this country.)

Gender Microaggressions

An assertive female manager is labeled a “bitch,” while her male counterpart is described as “a forceful leader.” (Hidden message: Women should be more passive and allow men to

lead and be the decision makers.)

A female physician wearing a stethoscope is mistaken for a nurse. (Hidden message: Nurses are expected to be women while doctors are expected to be men. Women are less capable of decision making than men.)

Sexual Orientation Microaggressions

Someone calls a movie they don’t like “gay.” (Hidden message: Being gay is associated with negative and undesirable characteristics.)

A gay or lesbian couple are told not to hold hands in public as it flaunts their sexuality. (Hidden message: Same sex displays of affection are abnormal and offensive. Keep your sexuality private.)

Other Examples

Religious microaggressions: Someone who is bargaining with a store owner is told, “Don’t try to Jew me down.” (Hidden message: Jews are avaricious.)

Disability related microaggressions: When speaking to a blind person, someone raises their voice. (Hidden message: Because you are blind, you must be deficient in other ways too.)

Microaggression in the Homeopathic Community

At professional homeopathic conferences over the last few years, there have been multiple instances in which an international speaker has said something that unintentionally offended some people in the audience. Though these offenses might have been too easily overlooked by some because the speaker was from another country, these statements were quite painful to other attendees and highlight an underlying issue, though there may be a lack of understanding from the speaker.

Our own homeopathic organization, the Illinois Homeopathic Medical Association, was a co-sponsor of a teaching event at NUHS (National University of Health Sciences) where a microaggression/microassault occurred. (The perpetrator might view it as a microaggression, but a victim might perceive the same event as a microassault.) Most of the audience immediately cringed but did nothing or looked towards people of color in the audience to react. Then an African student bravely stood up to eloquently say that she found the language offensive. Then, the speaker made matters worse by giving a justification rather than an apology and made an attempt to silence her. Most of the audience sat by uncomfortably, not knowing how to react or how to try to correct the situation, while others left the lecture room. Ultimately, this resulted in the speaker being permanently banned from lecturing at the university. The speaker and others involved have since committed to doing diversity training to help prevent or better deal with such future events.

Prejudice and bias are the result of ignorance, and we are all ignorant of many things. How we deal with our ignorance determines if we think, say or do something prejudiced/biased or commit a microaggression or other offensive acts.

We are all only one slip-of-the-tongue away from a microaggression. So, it behooves us all to learn how to respond when a microaggression occurs. When it does, when you notice it, you cringe, the adrenaline flows and you may want to escape the situation or put your head down and disappear. Some of us are more adept at perceiving and navigating ignorance and bias from being on the receiving end of microaggressions implicit in racism, sexism, classism, xenophobia, and homophobia, but the task of eradicating this ignorance is the duty of us all.

Joy DeGruy, in her amazing book, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome* (DeGruy 2005), examines the effect slavery and its aftermath has had on generations of black people in America and how we can begin to heal from those effects. In America, I think we all need to read this book! If we do, it will help us to be an accelerator of the healing process rather than be a promoter of the painful status quo. Also, Malcom Gladwell's revisionist history podcasts are excellent, as well as his audio book, *Talking to Strangers*, which at the time this was written was free with a new subscription to *Audible*.

Every one of us is affected by these tragedies. With the right understanding, each one of us can have the proper thoughts, words and deeds to help promote healing of ourselves, others and our society around these issues of race, sex, and sexual orientation. After all, we are healers as homeopaths. That's what we do, and this is an opportunity for us to spread that healing to a societal level.

What is at stake in the homeopathic community as a result of these issues? They are a detractor that hurts the image of homeopathy, which already suffers from an image problem—only this is an avoidable obstacle. In-fighting and public accusations further divide the homeopathic community, which historically has suffered significant setbacks due to multiple factions and conflicts. Let's work together and not perpetuate this history.

Self-Examination to Avoid Incidence

The first step is awareness that microaggressions and lack of proper diversity training are an issue in our community and that we all have our unconscious biases that we should strive to bring to light. We can review our old speeches, stories, literature and clean-up our language. Seasoned homeopaths offer much wisdom through lectures and chat rooms. Younger homeopaths might return the favor by gently educating the more seasoned homeopaths on what younger audiences might find antiquated or offensive language.

We can better prepare speakers and listeners of different cultures at our conferences. We can start our conferences and meetings with a preface acknowledging there may be differences and encourage the audience to point out issues because you want to learn and improve our understanding. This friendly invitation for welcomed feedback may help to defuse heated accusations.

Although a relatively new field, there are currently many resources for diversity training. One such resource is Harvard's Implicit Association Test that asks about your attitudes

or beliefs. The test will also help you gain insight into why you think the way you do. Only through this reflection, awareness and understanding can one move forward.

<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>

The Importance of Having an Ally

An ally is someone who witnesses the injustices against another person and takes action on their behalf. Usually, an ally does not personally identify as part of the group for which the microaggression was intended. Allies are particularly helpful because it can be difficult to speak up for oneself immediately after having your humanity insulted or called into question. It is unfair and unrealistic to expect only members of a marginalized group to correct any injustices committed against them. In fact, if an injustice is committed against one group, it can be committed against any group, and thus we all should be prepared to respond to injustices when they occur. Offenders are also more likely to respond well to allies because allies are often someone they view as presenting like themselves. Allies help to bridge the gap in a world that seems so divided.

How to Speak Up Against Offenders (often as an ally)

We've covered the importance of speaking up, but typically people freeze upon hearing a biased comment due to not knowing what to do. So, we need to prepare ahead of time and practice responses that can be used in such situations. Derald Wang Sue, PhD, and others suggest countering microaggressions with what he termed microinterventions. Below are 15 techniques that can be used singly or together.

Paraphrase or repeat back what they just said. Restating their comment clarifies it for you and for them. Either it can help them hear how biased or silly they sound, or it ensures that you are understanding them correctly and can respond appropriately. "So, you're saying that all people on welfare are just lazy and looking for a free ride?"

Express empathy and compassion first. "It sounds like you're really frustrated/nervous/angry...." "I can understand that you're upset when you feel...." Listen for the feelings behind the statement. People may make biased comments when they are feeling frustrated, disappointed, or angry. Often, if you can initially acknowledge the underlying feelings, it provides an opportunity to address the bias later. First allow someone to be heard, then challenge the beliefs.

Ask for more information. Try to understand why people hold those views. "Could you say more about what you mean by that?" "How have you come to think that?" As people try to explain their comments, they often realize what they are saying is unfounded or does not make a lot of sense. It also provides you with more information so you can address the misconceptions. Keep asking clarifying questions to unravel the web of assumptions. Point out

contradictions in their statements. For people not to feel attacked or ridiculed, you need to do this non-judgmentally with genuine interest.

For example, "I'm wondering, what's led you to believe this about people on welfare?" Further questions might include: "How many people do you know that are on welfare? Do you know how much assistance people actually get who are on welfare?"

Play dumb. "I don't get it." "Why is that funny?" Even if you understand what they are saying, pretend that you don't and ask them to explain. It forces them to think more about their statements. For example, in response to reference of a person's race, say, "I'm not sure what their race had to do with the story. Did I miss something?" This can also be used with jokes. When people have to explain the punchline, it often loses much of its humor.

Challenge the stereotype. Give information, share your own experience and/or offer alternative perspectives. "Actually, in my experience...." "I think that's a stereotype. I've learned that...." "Another way to look at it is...." Offer facts to correct or challenge the assumptions, share your own experience that contradicts the stereotype, and suggest other ways of viewing the person or situation.

Comment: "I can't believe they're going to let those gay people adopt kids. That's not providing a good home—kids need a mom and dad."

Response: "Actually, I know many gay couples who are wonderful, loving parents with great kids. In fact, research says that kids raised in gay homes are just as well-adjusted as kids raised in heterosexual homes. Sexual orientation really has nothing to do with it."

Encourage empathy. Ask them how they would feel if someone said something like that about their group or their friend/partner/child. Remind them of a time when they complained about similar comments directed at them.

Comment: "Man, is she built. I wouldn't mind having to work late with her."

Response: "How would you feel if someone you are not sexually attracted to said that about you? We're here to work."

Express your feelings. Tell the person how you feel and, if possible, explain why you're offended or uncomfortable with the comment. Offer an alternative if appropriate.

"I'm uncomfortable when I hear you talk about a person (or a specific group) in that way. I'd like you to stop."

"I find that language offensive and don't appreciate hearing it. I know you know other more appropriate words to use."

"I find it offensive when you call him that. He is a Sikh."

"I know you may not intend it this way, but I cringe when I hear you refer to grown women in service roles as 'girls' be-

cause it sounds so demeaning. They can be called 'women' just like you call the females in the senior staff."

Share your own process. Talk about how you used to say, think or feel similar things but have changed. Avoid sounding self-righteous. Share what caused you to change or to offer alternative language or perspectives.

"I used to laugh or tell jokes like that, but then I realized how hurtful they are to people. I don't do it anymore and I would like you to stop too."

"I used to make those assumptions too, but then I learned that those are untrue generalizations or stereotypes and try to catch myself when I start to think that."

"I used to use those terms, but then I heard that those can be offensive (because...). Better language I've learned to use is...."

Separate intent from impact. Acknowledge that someone may have said something biased or inappropriate without meaning to. Don't automatically attribute bad motives. Give them the benefit of the doubt, especially if you think the person meant no harm.

"I know you were just trying to be funny, but I found that joke offensive because...."

"I'm sure you didn't intentionally mean to be hurtful, but when you use that term...."

Use humor. Sometimes exaggerating the comment or using gentle sarcasm makes the point. However, you need to be sure that it is heard as humor or sarcasm, not a reinforcement of prejudice. This is where tone is particularly important.

"She plays like a girl? You mean she plays like Serena Williams or Mia Hamm?"

Tell them they're too smart or good to say things like that. When someone says something that you doubt the person really believes or at least doesn't hold strongly you can say: "You're too good/caring a person to say something that offensive/insulting."

Appeal to values and principles. Individuals and organizations often espouse particular values and principles. Refer to these when challenging their comments.

"I know you want to have a respectful and inclusive workplace; those kinds of statements just aren't consistent with that."

Or frame it as a question: "In the past you've talked about wanting to raise open-minded kids. How do you think having them hear those comments might impact them?"

"I know you really care about.... Acting in this way really undermines those intentions."

Point out commonalities. Point out shared interests, values, experiences, and concerns between the person making the comment and the person they are referring to.

"I'm tired of hearing your Muslim jokes. Do you know he's also studying . . . and likes to . . . ? You may want to talk with him about that. You actually have a lot in common."

Comment: "I heard our new neighbor down the street is Muslim. I hope we're not going to be living in a neighborhood of terrorists."

Response: "I met him last week and he seems like a nice guy. He works in technology like you. He also was asking about local golf courses. I thought you might be able to help him."

Consider WIIFT (What's in it for them). Explain why diversity to that individual can be helpful or valuable. Often someone can bring new resources, skills, and perspectives that can enhance the group's effectiveness, increase clients/students/members, and improve services. Individuals may also learn new things that can foster their personal or professional growth.

"I know you didn't support her being hired, but our students have been asking for more diversity in our staff and for more people who share their experiences. I think she will be an important addition and will enhance our department and enrollments."

"She will really help us work with some of our clients. She understands the culture and can help reduce the distrust."

"In the real world, we are going to have to work with all sorts of people, so might as well learn how to do it here."

Point out policies or laws that prohibit such conduct. In workplaces, remind people of their obligation and liability. Note the policies and laws that prohibit such conduct and the consequences.

"That behavior could be considered sexual harassment and you know we have a policy against that. You could end up in big trouble." (Goodman 2011)

Variables To Consider When Speaking Up Against Offenders

There is no one right way to respond. A challenge in responding effectively is to determine what is right for you and the other person in that situation. Below are five variables to consider:

1. **Determine your goal.** Do you simply want the behavior to stop? Or would you also like to educate the person involved if the situation and timing allow for this?
2. **Keep your tone non-confrontational and non-judgmental to increase the offender's receptivity to your message.** Attacking, blaming and judgmental comments are likely to be met with defensiveness and anger.
3. **Weigh the risks against the nature of your relationship with the offender.** Is the microaggression from a stranger or someone you see often? Is there a power dynamic that puts you at risk for speaking up, such as if the offender is your supervisor. Consider your investment and ongoing nature of your relationship with the offender.
4. **Consider context and setting.** Formal settings (e.g., in

a classroom or at a professional meeting) might dictate restrained or professional behavior. Informal settings (e.g., a gathering of friends) might allow for a broader range of expression. A public response to a public comment is one form of action. However, a private response to a public comment might provide a better educational opportunity. Another hybrid option is to speak to the individual privately but also address the group more generally about appropriate language or stereotypes.

5. Craft messages differently for adults and children. Children's comments often reflect ignorance and the need for education and thus a more educational response should be provided. (Goodman 2011)

How to Respond When Accused

Despite best efforts, you might one day be confronted about something you said. It is vital to acknowledge that someone was offended. Then, take responsibility and apologize by saying something like "I was wrong. I'm sorry. Thank you for pointing this out so that I can avoid this offense in the future. It's a growing experience and I have learned from this mistake."

Depending on the nature of the offense, consider a positive corrective step like taking a class on cultural diversity or receiving coaching, or contributing time, service or funding to a relevant group. Only make this part of your announcement, if you genuinely will do so.

The worst response is to rationalize, argue, or make excuses. This causes a backlash and escalates the situation. Defending the indefensible is even more offensive for those who have been injured by the event. Keep your response simple and genuine. Everyone will know if you have understood the nature of your offense and are rectifying it because you care about people.

Conclusion

We all carry our biases around, often unknowingly, and when we interact with others, these biases can lead to uncomfortable situations for ourselves and others. Cultural sensitivity training helps us to become aware of our biases so that we can interact with others in a comfortable, compassionate and understanding manner so that we can achieve higher goals through working together.

In this article we have defined what microaggressions are, why they happen, and given examples of how to deal with them in an open and caring manner. Change can be positive, but also overwhelming; so let us commit to trying to implement at least one thing that you have learned in this article during your interactions with others. If it is your job to set up conferences, you could commit to having speakers sign the attached "Diversity and Inclusion Statement/Contract" so that speakers are made aware of diversity issues before they begin speaking. Let's remember to speak up, but let's not lose civility and moderation in the process. It's essential to keep the dialogue open so that continuing growth can occur.

Below is a sample Diversity and Inclusion Statement. All

homeopathic organizations are encouraged to post this statement as is on their websites or customize it. Note the last line is specifically to convert the statement into a contract with speakers to be revised and signed before any kind of presentation.

Diversity and Inclusion Statement

At [homeopathic organization] we believe that a diverse, inclusive, and equitable environment is one where all members, students, instructors, speakers, employees and volunteers, whatever their gender identity and expression, race, ethnicity, national origin, age, religion, sexual orientation or identity, education or disability, feel valued and respected. We are committed to nondiscriminatory practices and provide equal opportunity for membership, programs, and seminars. We respect and value diverse life experiences and backgrounds and ensure that all individuals are valued and respected. We're committed to modeling diversity and inclusion for the entire homeopathic community and to maintaining an inclusive environment with equitable treatment for all. To provide informed, authentic leadership for cultural equity, [homeopathic organization] strives to:

- See diversity, inclusion, and equity as connected to our mission and critical to ensure the well-being of our members and the homeopathic community we serve.
- Acknowledge and dismantle any inequities within our policies, systems, programs, and services.
- Explore potential underlying, unquestioned assumptions that interfere with inclusiveness.
- Advocate for and support board-level thinking about how systemic inequities may impact our organization's work, and how best to address that in a way that is consistent with our mission.
- Lead with respect and tolerance. We expect all members, instructors, and speakers to embrace this notion and to express it in all interpersonal interactions, seminars, lectures, and through everyday practices.

Add the following to transform your diversity and inclusion statement into a speaker's contract: As a speaker contracted with (homeopathic organization), I agree to conduct myself and communicate in a manner consistent with these principles as described above in this Diversity and Inclusion Statement.

Speaker's Name: Signature: Date:

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