Phoenix Scholar

Special Edition
Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, & Belonging

PHOENIX SCHOLAR

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EDITORIAL

In late 2019, the Center for Workplace Diversity and Inclusion Research was delighted to accept the invitation to develop a special edition of the Phoenix Scholar, focused on areas of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. One year later, I do not believe any of us could have ever imagined the events that would soon follow and the timeliness of this monumental issue, as we collectively struggle to gain some sense of certainty in times offering anything but.

Not only has this global pandemic shaken the foundation of this country, it has also forced us to revisit the disparities and inequities that have plagued this country for generations. Marginalized groups are absorbing a disproportionate percentage of COVID-19 related deaths. And, while this pandemic has had devastating impact on the U. S. economy, we must acknowledge that women and people of color have been disproportionately impacted by resulting furloughs and layoffs. The far-reaching effects of this pandemic have, consequentially, exposed numerous equity-related issues including inequitable access to affordable healthcare, food insecurities, inequitable distributions of wealth, lack of affordable housing, and the "digital divide" in the United States.
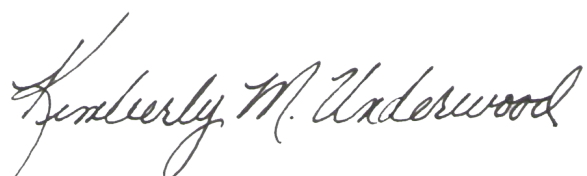
In parallel, this country once again began a long-overdue (re)awakening to systemic racism deeply embedded in our economic, political and social systems, as the deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor led way to a wave of national and global protests against police violence in the United States and a call for significant changes in policing. Further, a hostile and divisive political climate has many questioning the meaning of "liberty and justice for all." Alas, the foundations of stratification and othering that reside within the DNA of our country, once again, are front and center and impossible to ignore.

Diversity. This one word has such a profound and multifaceted impact on almost every component of who we are, both as individuals and as a collective society. In this inaugural special edition of the Phoenix Scholar, we will critically and courageously examine diversity in various spaces, to include related topics of inclusivity, equity, and belonging. We begin with a candid conversation on race with President Peter Cohen. And, stemming from a summer writing program in the Center for Workplace Diversity and Inclusion Research (CWDIR), several of these eminent writings stemmed from the perspectives of University of Phoenix doctoral students and alumni and their faculty members. Not only do we examine diversity through our organizational lens, such as in the publication "Cultivating a Sense of Belonging," we have also examined diversity and its related components through various communities of practice, including education, healthcare and business.

From ancient mythology, the Phoenix remains a symbol of rebirth, renewal, regeneration, and reinvention. While many may hope for a return to our pre-pandemic state, I challenge each of you to think about what could be as we move forward within our "new normal." I wonder, individually and collectively, are we truly able to understand ourselves and challenge current thinking to broaden our personal and professional relationships and communicate in authentic and meaningful ways within our diverse society? It is my hope that, within disruption, we seek and seize opportunities to learn from these challenges and build future achievements to advance innovative and radical schools of thought and plans of action to benefit all communities of practice, as well as our collective society.

In times of uncertainty, one thing remains evident: Our actions today will determine how we are viewed by future generations. How do YOU want to be remembered?

Kimberly Underwood, Guest Editor
CWDIR University Research Chair

A Candid Conversation About Race:
An Interview with President Peter Cohen

Kimberly Underwood, Ph.D.
   Guest Editor and University Research Chair
   College of Doctral Studies

In April 2017, President Peter Cohen was appointed the eighth president of University of Phoenix, bringing more than 20 years of leadership experience in the education and learning science sectors to his role at the University. In an interview with guest editor Dr. Kimberly Underwood (University Research Chair of the Center for Workplace Diversity and Inclusion Research), President Cohen engages in a candid conversation about race, including a candid self-reflection on his background and experiences, his social responsibility as a leader, and current and future actions for supporting diversity and creating inclusion and belonging at the University of Phoenix.

Underwood:

Peter, thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to participate in this interview. I would like to begin with recent events in our country. Unquestionably, these are extremely difficult times within communities and the United States, as a nation. Earlier this year, we were inundated with the rapid spread of the coronavirus, shedding additional light on long-standing systemic health and socioeconomic inequities in our country. In tandem, there is a global clarion call for social change and racial equality in the United States, sparked by the recent killings of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbrey, George Floyd, and many other Black Americans.

Peter, how have recent events directly impacted you and shaped your thoughts around these topics, as a leader?

Cohen:

Kimberly, as you know, this has been a year of unprecedented events impacting our society on so many levels, including health and safety, economic, political, and racial and social justice reawakening. And I note the justice issues as a reawakening because, as you note, the abhorrent recent killings are but a few in a long line of killing of Black Americans over a very long period of time. I grew up during the 1960s and remember the civil rights marches then demanding an end to police brutality. I remember the march in Selma, Georgia and the beatings meted out by police to many, including Rep. John Lewis. I lived in the west when Rodney King was brutally beaten by police, and I lived in Baltimore, Maryland when Freddie Gray died in the back of a police van, and I remember St. Paul, Minnesota in 2016 when Philando Castile was pulled over for a broken taillight and fatally shot by police. And we could go back to the time of the first African Americans enslaved and routinely beaten, tortured, abused, and murdered. So, sadly and painfully, what we faced this year is neither new nor unique to this period of time. It has existed and persisted for as long as America has been inhabited by white settlers from Europe.

I note this simply to give context to my own personal journey growing up in a largely segregated Phoenix, Arizona in the 1960s with little interaction with people of color. My first awakening and exploration of how people who had differences from me came when I attended a summer program in Prescott, Arizona called Anytown Camp USA which took high school students from very diverse backgrounds and spent a week helping them embrace what makes us unique and what unites us. It was eye opening for me and forced me to examine my own beliefs and what we now term white privilege. That experience helped me shape my early leadership tenets of trying to treat all people equitably and fairly. However, it did not cause me to recognize the specific issues facing Black Americans more than other suppressed groups of people.

About five years ago, when leading a K-12 curriculum company, I had my second awakening when a caption on a picture in one of our 7th grade history books referred to the Atlantic slave trade as bringing Africans to the "new world" to work on plantations, instead of recognizing them as enslaved labor. I took that opportunity to meet with respected experts on Black American history, including Henry Louis Gates, and Lonnie Bunch, the founder and executive director of the National Museum of African American History, and Glen Singleton, author of Courageous Conversations about Race and began to examine how we teach history in the United States and how it is a white person's narrative and not inclusive of the impact other groups had upon our development and growth and how our development destroyed the lives of Native Americans who already lived on this land. Through that experience, I began to understand how insidious, pervasive, and systemic racism has been in the founding of the United States.

When I joined our university three years ago, I was proud that we had already developed attitudes, programs, and departments to reflect the impacts of racism on our courses, our students, and our faculty and staff. So, when the most recent events you noted took place, we did not have to pivot as a university and I did not have to pivot as a leader of our school in acknowledging the ongoing and long standing issues of systemic racism and social injustice we are again demanding be addressed by our civic leaders, our police administrators and our neighbors. However, the latest incidents, coming at a time when many more people are glued to social media and highlighted by the ubiquitous live video capturing on camera and made freely available for all to witness may make this latest series of killings the pivot for true change. As a leader, I have an obligation to use my voice and my position to speak about these issues, even though they are uncomfortable for white people to acknowledge, and to use our position as educators to assure that we make more and faster progress in addressing the causes of racial inequities built into our laws, our policies, our practices and our inherent bias based on how we were raised.

Underwood:

Thank you for your candid reflection. In response to the current Black Lives Matter movement across this country, many universities are creating initiatives to assist their students, faculty, and employees in understanding the meaning behind the movement and providing resources for additional learning and reflection. Within my work at UOPX, I am extremely excited to see so many like-minded people collaborating to address topics, such as diversification, inclusion and belonging, cultural competence, and antiracism in meaningful ways.

What do you see as our greatest strengths surrounding diversity and inclusion? What is your vision for future DEI (diversification, equity, inclusion) initiatives at UOPX?

Cohen:

Kimberly, as I noted earlier, the university was focused on addressing the issues of diversity and equity before this latest public movement, so for us it was an opportunity to both reinforce and expand our current efforts and to assure that our staff, faculty, students, and the public knew what we had been doing and planned to do next. Internally, we were able to leverage the excellent work being done in the Office of Educational Equity, along with the work of our Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) which provided a forum for discussion and action among all people who were interested in embracing the richness of our team. Our ERGs include councils for African Americans, Latinx, Women, Veteran and LGBTQ identifying people to gather, share and support each other. Our Office of Educational Equity team has developed public webinars to address issues of diversity, equity and inclusion, and most recently developed the Inclusive Cafe for our internal teams to find an open safe forum in which to explore their own beliefs and hear the views of others on a variety of inclusive topics including race, gender, gender identity and cultural competence. Our Office of Institutional Effectiveness is leading efforts to review our courses to ensure the presence of elements supporting the development of cultural competence. Also, through a collaboration with the Office of Educational Equity, the Office of Faculty Development and Training, and the Center for Workplace Diversity and Inclusion Research, we are providing a series of faculty trainings to support our continued efforts to create inclusive classrooms that support a sense of belonging for all of our students. Most recently, we also challenged the Mayor of Phoenix to become the leading example of commitment to racial and social justice, and backed up our challenge with a $100K donation to be used to research or implement policies which improve social justice and economic opportunities for every member of the community especially in poorly served areas such as low income neighborhoods.

My hope is that our DEI-focused teams continues to shine a light on additional actions we can and should take to make our university the north star for access and opportunity for student populations who have not been advantaged by white privilege. Change, such as we are describing, is very difficult to maintain because it is simply hard to address the many roots of systemic racism embedded in our policing, our funding, our zoning, and our consciousness. So, I trust that we will continue to drive the message forward by continuing these actions and finding ways to expand them.

Underwood:

I appreciate everyone involved in these important efforts and I am glad you note these efforts are also supported through opportunities for meaningful conversations. Peter, you recently led a critical dialogue with all of us… In a recent letter (June 3, 2020) to our UOPX students, alumni, faculty, and employees, you discuss the need for social discourse to create real and sustainable change in this country. Specifically, you note, "While incidents of discrimination occur too frequently based on gender, sexual orientation and other differences, the degree of prejudice shown to the Black community is often the most pronounced. Racism and violence are unequivocally wrong. Witnessing the outrage across our nation, it is clear that we must take action, and that action must be intentional steps toward unity."

Peter, what does this mean for us, both collectively and individually, within our roles as "Phoenixes"? What could "action" look like within meaningful advocacy for social equality and equitable system changes?

Cohen:

Kimberly, I appreciated the final words written by Representative John Lewis when he noted we should cause "some trouble, good trouble". Each of us must decide what actions are appropriate for our personal situation. Is your stand attending at protest march, organizing one, or voting for candidates who believe what you believe? Are you able to research regulations which disadvantage people of color and propose legislative changes to address them? Are you able to bring others together to meet with police administrators and show them what the community desires in effective practices? Can you fund organizations committed to addressing issues of racial injustice? Will you speak out when you observe racist actions, or boycott businesses which practice them? It is not for me to say what actions you should take but I would stress that if you take no action of any kind, you should not expect any progress on reducing systemic racism or inequity across our society any time soon. Collectively, as I said initially, I believe the university has an obligation to stand up for equity, diversity, inclusion by educating our staff, faculty, students and the public about what drives racism, and what it will take to end it. And that will be a journey, not a brief sprint because these systems of oppression will not disappear easily. I trust this provides you some insights into my thinking about these issues and I want to thank you and the DEI team for leading the way for the university on addressing these critical issues of fairness, equity, and justice in our university and society.

Underwood:

You're welcome! Peter, it is always a pleasure speaking with you and I thank you for this interview and your leadership during such an important time.

Minoritized Faculty in Higher Education: Perspectives of a South Asian Academician

Sujata Gopalan, Ph.D.
Faculty
College of Doctoral Studies

Introduction

As a South Asian woman in higher education, I have often considered my place in the academy. I began my journey as a tenure-track assistant professor with a newly minted MFA in a university in the deep south, where my status as a "woman of color" was quickly established. I was junior faculty, so I did not consider the fact that in addition to teaching my regular course load I was placed on half a dozen committees, tasked with taking care of the university gallery, cleaning out adjunct offices and storage closets, as irregular. I did not object when I saw that my white colleagues had no such duties. I wanted to advance in my career, and I knew to fly below the radar. Over the course of my career, I have seen many faculty women of color and women of South Asian descent do the same: we keep our heads down, speak when spoken to, and work harder to gain less recognition. It is an old song, and one that needs new lyrics.

The issues that South Asian female academicians face in an ever-evolving educational environment are complex: matters of gender, race and marginality intersect with, and obfuscate scholarship, innovation, and personal and professional progress. South Asian women are a demographic within academia whose presence is notable, but one that may have been neglected or marginalized in studies specific to minority women. Part of the reason may be because of the small numbers of women of Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, and Bangladeshi descent represented in any given discipline. As a group, South Asian women have been included in studies which address foreign born academic women, and in non-specific ways in studies that examine foreign-born and international faculty, but to date, there has been no significant research regarding challenges that South Asian female faculty face in the higher education environment. The glaring gaps in the literature about this demographic are perplexing because although the group is a minority, it is represented in academia across a broad scope of disciplines. In order to examine how to support and celebrate this demographic, which continues to make significant contributions to the Academy, three broad inter-related categories should be addressed: recruitment and retention, analysis of teaching, research, and service, and the unique contributions made by this group. Due to the dearth of research on this specific population, the scope of these categories will be distilled from a wider faculty population: minoritized faculty, including women, faculty of color, and international faculty.

Recruitment and Retention

As academia strives to create a more diverse, multicultural milieu, campuses across the country feel both internal and external pressures to recruit and retain minoritized faculty. Reasons for the underrepresentation of minoritized faculty include lack of a pipeline of qualified PhD candidates emerging from post-secondary institutions and poor recruitment and retention practices, particularly in predominantly White institutions. The argument that the pool of qualified candidates of color is responsible for the lack of diversity in an institution is often asserted by administrators and faculty to rationalize poor minority representation (Stanley, 2006). Additionally, recruitment of underrepresented minority faculty may require specific interventions in the hiring process which address race and ethnicity. While recruitment of a diverse body of faculty may be challenging, minority retention creates another headache for administrators. Statistics suggest that retention of faculty of color is more challenging than retention of White faculty. Once hired, minoritized face a host of challenges: feelings of "otherness", often exacerbated by a lack of diversity on campus, racial barriers to tenure and promotion, accepted behaviors towards minorities often presented as micro-aggressions, and, in the case of foreign-born or international faculty, having to navigate cultural differences between home and the workplace. Additionally, while reasons that affect recruitment and retention of minoritized faculty can be widely

suggested, these issues as they relate to Asians, and specifically South Asian women, will remain unclear until a disaggregation of the terms "minority", "faculty of color", and "international faculty" occurs.

Teaching, Research, and Service

One relatively comprehensive study of the teaching and service of minoritized faculty was conducted by Stanley (2009). Faculty members were asked to write narratives concerning their experiences working in predominantly White institutions. The contributors were from the disciplines of business, dentistry, education, engineering, ethnic studies, health education, political science, public policy, psychology, sociology, and speech, language, and hearing science and had rankings in both teaching and administrative positions. Approaching the discourse from a critical race theory perspective, Stanley (2009) found behaviors towards faculty of color both in and out of the classroom that included challenges to their authority and expertise, negative behaviors and attitudes of students, and excessive complaints filed to senior faculty and administrators about teaching and communication. For foreign-born and international faculty, some of these experiences can manifest in interactions with both students and colleagues. For example, in a study of international faculty in universities in the South, faculty spoke of feeling open hostility towards them by administrators and colleagues which adversely affected their morale and productivity (Omiteru, Martinez, Tsemunhu & Asola, 2018).

Unique Contributions

In addition to scholarly contributions to the academic field, minoritized faculty can make significant and unique contributions to the academic landscape. As students are becoming global in their perspectives, international faculty bring diverse perspectives and knowledge adding a critical cultural component to higher education. Minoritized faculty are becoming increasingly active as role models for students and taking greater responsibility for mentoring student organizations. Antonio (2002) found that faculty of color are much more likely than are white faculty to place high importance on the affective, moral, and civic development of students. This supports the idea that a greater diversity among faculty leads to greater institutional and educational effectiveness.

Discussion and Implications

Studies of minority faculty populations in academia yield similar narratives of disenfranchisement, marginalization, and discrimination, while also speaking in heroic terms of the contributions made to universities by people of color. While universities continue to grapple with the issues of recruitment and retention of a diverse work force, pressures to expand minority faculty numbers come from both internal and external sources. Women who fall under the term "minority" face additional challenges, balancing a sense of personal and professional identities. For international faculty, differences in the culture of the American university and the cultural climate of the region in which they work is an additional hurdle to acclimatization. Often, these members of the professoriate feel compelled to leave their native culture at the door of the Academy.

Studies of these populations serve to create a framework and starting point from which more comprehensive investigations can arise. Most studies which address issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion in the professoriate do so using a broad brush. But each minoritized population is unique in its culture, contributions, and challenges. Disaggregated studies which look at specific minoritized populations should examine how each demographic impacts their organization, and what factors contribute to recruitment, retention, and job satisfaction. More importantly, the data retrieved should impact policy and procedure that supports a more diverse workforce. Mentoring and training for incoming faculty, as well as diversity and inclusion training for all administrators, faculty, and staff should be considered. Implementing procedures and policies which promote cultural competence and tolerance can only create a richer teaching and learning environment.

As institutions of higher education seek to increase diversity among faculty, the contributions that populations such as South Asian women make to the academy should not be overlooked, but rather, celebrated. The hope is to provide an opportunity for continued dialogue among all academic professionals in order to continue to create a more cohesive, respectful, multicultural, and gender-aware environment in higher education.

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COVID-19 and Protesting for Social Justice:
Taking Risks to Ensure Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion within Today's Communities of Practice

Roneisha Randall
Doctoral Student
College of Doctoral Studies
Sandra Sessoms-Penny, Ed.D.
Research Fellow and Faculty
College of Doctoral Studies

Introduction

People around the world have been impacted exponentially by COVID-19 and the coronavirus pandemic of 2020. The World Health Organization (WHO) (2020) at the time of this writing reports that globally, 27,062,744 people have contracted the coronavirus and 883,740 people have died of the virus. Over 19 million people have recovered. Within the United States, to date, there have been over 6,431,152 cases of people who tested positive for the virus and 192,818 deaths from the virus reported within the United States where the numbers continue to rise with re-openings across the country. Nearly four million people have recovered. This fast-paced health crisis has resulted in extreme restrictive measures, to include travel restrictions, cancellation of public events, quarantine, lockdown, shelter in place, stay at home orders, social distancing, restrictions on public gatherings, increased testing for the virus, and contact tracing to contain the pandemic at local levels.

Early 2020

Our generation has experienced the entire world literally come to a glaring halt and shut down suddenly, leaving many in shock and ill-prepared for a long shut down. Most workplaces, businesses, universities and schools closed abruptly or moved to an online platform. Many people were required to work from home while students around the globe participated in distance learning, severely testing online platforms with maximum usage. Many parents were tasked with either teaching or monitoring their children's educational process simultaneously. Many people lost their jobs and measures were taken to help in a recessed economy. The unemployment rose to 17.8 million workers (14.7 percent), with over 23 million workers filing for unemployment benefits during the pandemic driven recession (Lambert, 2020).

Coupled with the impact of the pandemic, on May 25, 2020, George Floyd, an African American male was arrested in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and the entire world watched him die on video. At some point after being arrested, Floyd fell to the ground and a white officer placed his knee on Floyd's neck for 8 minutes and 46 seconds during which time, Floyd uttered, "I can't breathe" and called out for his mother while police officers present did not intervene (Truesdell, 2020). Video footage of the incident surfaced and people around the world became outraged. A worldwide social justice movement was rebirthed. This incident was the catalyst that prompted millions of people globally to take risks, come outside of their homes, disregarding the orders to stay indoors, and begin to protest for the Black Lives Matter Movement. Other countries not only support the movement but also recognize problems within their own countries. This incident was one of many that has shown the inequities experienced primarily by black and brown people in the United States for over four centuries in the areas of governmental interventions, economic inequities, limited or lack of health care, limited educational opportunities, workplace unfairness and policies, systemic police brutality, and discrimination in the entertainment industries and other areas that have been identified, yet ignored (Cohn & Quealy, 2020).

With a sense of urgency, people began to march all over the world for social justice. The safety measures precipitated by COVID-19 are ignored by many. The police and the military have been ordered against American citizens within their own country. People march and protest in every state, risking their lives for social justice for all people. Globally, people also

continue to protest in support of the protestors in America. Some white Americans continue to be shocked at the range, anger, and frustration being displayed in the streets by protestors for change. Others choose to offer rebuttals with "All lives matter, not just Black lives matter." Americans of all races march daily during a pandemic that is killing black and brown Americans at a higher rate than any other race. This speaks volumes to the state of one of America's "oldest sins" slavery. The depth of conviction the culture feels toward police reform is driving the change. We are at the core of emotional, physical, and mental distress challenging discrimination at all levels of American life. This is our first unified global collaborative effort. People are risking their lives to make a difference.

Ironically, there is a history in America of pandemics and protests. For example, the Spanish Flu (also known as the 1918 flu pandemic) took the world by storm, causing schools and other public places to close and the wearing of handkerchiefs around the face for protection from the virus (CDC, 2019). We have a history of peaceful and aggravated marches for social justice such as the March on Washington to end discrimination and gain more freedom in 1963, led by Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Congressman John Lewis organized and participated in peaceful marches, sit-ins and demonstrations wherein he was assaulted and ultimately arrested over 45 times for his commitment to "good trouble" (Blakemore, 2016).

Corporations and Social Responsibility

An even stronger passion has resurfaced that has the world's attention during the pandemic and cry for social justice and police reform. While people are taking risks in hopes to change policies, perceptions, and eliminate systematic racism, notable leaders in corporations and organizations are doing the same. Examples include NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell publicly apologizing to players for dismissing racism concerns and how they now understand the concept behind "take a knee." Jeff Bezos, CEO of Amazon posted "Black Lives Matter" on the business webpage to make a statement. NASCAR officials banned the display of the Confederate flag at its events. Adidas executives commit to hiring more black and brown employees. General Motors (GM) is creating an Inclusion Advisory Board to increase inclusion. Millions of dollars of funding have been donated and designated to address the racial divide in businesses, academic institutions and public education. Some governmental leaders have agreed to reform police departments and practices. Physical reminders of racism such as statues and flags continue to be removed from public settings. Even the use of specific language has been changed as it refers to black and brown people and product brands revamped. Communities of practice must recognize how their actions or inactions impact society. They inherently represent groups of people who share similar concerns and passions to make conditions better for the entire community.

Coping with a pandemic and systemic racism are similar as they both are events and mindsets that have a direct effect on the emotional, physical, and mental health of the society and culture as public opinion is weighed. Many citizens continue to also deal with not being able to see their family members in nursing homes and hospitals; distance learning has become the new normal, and virtual graduations, birthday parties, meetings and funerals have replaced the face to face interactions people are accustomed to having. Shifts in the increase of the virus have societies around the world going back and forth on reopening businesses and communities.

Leaders Looking Ahead

The initial evidence suggests now is a time to encourage and enhance communications across the board for practitioners throughout all communities of practice and at all levels. Leaders must be empathetic and hear the heart of protestors and help make long lasting changes to promote growth for generations to come. Leading by example and being transparent in growing relationships between the generations are significant initiatives that must be intentionally nurtured. A reflection on the quote "people do not care how much you know until you demonstrate how much you care" is a resounding refrain for communities of practitioners to adopt in all settings. Our current social constructs must be examined and redefined. Being sensitive to the voids and negative emotions that created and sustained long standing diversity, inequities and exclusions require admitting there is a problem and then addressing the problems in a collaborative and nurturing environment. Communities of practice must share their stories and experiences without blaming or judgement and practice forgiveness if we are to move forward. They then must agree to change the status quo and make the community better. This means giving, sharing and changing beliefs and practices to become more inclusive and fairer. It also means not pointing the finger but rather taking a moment for personal reflection and preparation for action. The protestors are sharing their narratives on every platform. Many in the community are listening and responding. It will take time and understanding to redesign communities of practice. There is no overnight fix to systemic behaviors; however, there is always a start and reminder to focus on what matters most to those we serve, live and work with.

The pandemic and protesting are not new to American history or communities of practice. However, this time, the world sees and responds. Many people think racism does not exist or it cannot be changed. The Black Lives Matter Movement vividly shows us systemic racism is still alive and survives like a disease that also lacks a vaccine. People of all ages are realizing the burdens black and brown American shoulder will influence generations to come. Although the virus has taken nearly one million lives in America and around the world, now is the time to recognize that we are still human beings and our concerns for each other must outweigh the dark patterns of our past so that we may all survive. Communities of practice are showing us that it is worth speaking up to change our future. Perhaps this is why people around the world are taking risks during COVID-19 and protesting for social justice. They want to ensure diversity, fairness, and freedom are in all areas and for all people forever.

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Cultivating a Sense of Belonging

Tondra D. Richardson, MBA, CDP
Director - Student Diversity & Inclusion
Office of Educational Equity
Saray E. Lopez, MBA
Director - Student Diversity & Inclusion
Office of Educational Equity

Having a sense of belonging has been widely considered an essential human requirement. Within organizational environments we see these same social needs and the effects of having them unmet exist today. The importance of this basic human need to connect with others has been highlighted this year more than ever amidst a time of crisis as we all face a global pandemic and social unrest. While we may be enticed to think that belonging is only a personal need, recent research by BetterUp demonstrates that belonging at work is crucial for worker well-being and organizational performance. (Fraser-Thill, 2019)

The term "belonging" has become a recognized concept to define success of diversity and inclusion efforts within an organization. Innovative organizations understand diversity and inclusion is no longer enough, aspiring for belonging creates greater accountability on the company and its leaders to foster a culture where employees feel safe, valued, and accepted. However, belonging is a complex construct to define and measure. As a solution to this challenge companies are starting to add questions into standard engagement surveys to measure how employees feel and perceive their organization as it relates to diversity and inclusion.

Supporting an Inclusive Work Culture

The UOPX Office of Educational Equity works to promote cultural understanding, provide thought leadership, and develop community partnerships to provide professional development, support students, alumni, faculty and staff, and foster a sense of belonging for all. Educational Equity actively collaborates with partners across University of Phoenix to promote and sustain diversity and inclusion initiatives and articulates the strategic priorities and engagement areas to address the individual needs and foster success and a rising retention for each engagement area.

In January 2020, a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Survey was initiated to assess the experience of students in the classroom from the lens of inclusion and collect data to identify opportunities and challenges to design an effective program, categorize strategic priorities, and gauge the University climate. Some relevant survey results include:

- Over 20% of those surveyed stated that they are interested in participating in diversity events and/or organizations sponsored by the university.

- 61.5% agreed that participating in university events and organizations contribute to their sense of belonging.

- 66.3% state that they add value to their educational experience.

- 86.4% state that it is important that faculty are sensitive to the needs and perspectives of diverse groups.

- 86.7% state that it is important that university staff are sensitive to the needs and perspectives of diverse groups.

While this survey was created prior to the pandemic and recent outcries for social justice, the results helped support the importance of creating programming that would educate University of Phoenix staff and faculty on ways in which they can connect, empathize and support students while creating community with one another.

One such program is the Inclusive Cafe, which was started by the Office of Educational Equity in June 2020. This was in

response to the survey data related to the need for faculty and staff who are sensitive to the needs and perspectives of diverse groups. The Inclusive Cafe was created as a virtual place for faculty and staff to gather, connect, and build community through biweekly sessions focused on topics designed to discuss diverse perspectives and generate compassionate conversation.

Creating and Maintaining a Safe Space

The Inclusive Cafe topics are directly connected to matters impacting various communities. The Office of Educational Equity is intentional in the process of selecting co-facilitators for the sessions and ensuring they are subject matter experts on the respective topics. Following their brief presentation at the start of the Inclusive Cafe sessions, they work alongside The Office of Educational Equity to encourage Participant engagement by presenting discussion items, answering questions, and providing resources. The goal of each session is to create a space in which faculty and staff are educated while allowing them the opportunity to share insight, experiences, resources and/or ask questions seeking support.

Shared Stories by Inclusive Cafe Attendees

In the first session, one participant shared her experience as a Black wife and mother and the fear and anxiety she struggles with each day. In another instance, an Enrollment Advisor reached out directly to explain how she was multi-racial and struggled to see where she fit in as well as how this impacted her discussions with students. She engaged in a personal conversation with the Educational Equity team outside of the cafe which inspired a session on the multiple dimensions of identity and how individuals' feelings this way can "find their tribe."

In September, the University of Phoenix began a new fiscal year and as a result, the Inclusive Cafe session began with a video montage of statements, poems and emotions shared during prior sessions. The video was also the prelude to a discussion of lessons learned and areas to examine as a university community. It is our hope that the level of self-awareness and empathy demonstrated by faculty and staff throughout these sessions translates to the needs expressed by students in the survey.

The resources, as well as the support and guidance provided within each of the sessions, has resulted in a platform for faculty and staff to showcase their level of expertise. Following his attendance in the cafe, a faculty member began to engage with the Office of Educational Equity directly to seek ways in which he could actively utilize his privilege to be an ally. He later presented on allyship for the cafe and continues to advocate and support in various leadership and equity efforts throughout the university. He has also asked that the Office of Educational Equity present for the Denver Society for Human Resource Management on how Inclusive Cafe was developed, its impact on faculty and staff and ways in which others might benchmark those efforts to create programming in their own institutions.

Looking Ahead

In addition to the Inclusive Cafe, the Office of Educational Equity also facilitates a monthly Educational Equity Webinar Series which is open to the public. The webinar series is held on the third Thursday of each month and is aligned with cultural awareness months while also expanding on Inclusive Cafe topics. The webinar series provides a more structured session including in-depth presentations, expert materials and subsequent question and answer sessions. The participants in this webinar vary from employers across different industries, leaders in nonprofit organizations, higher education institutions, diversity, equity, and inclusion practitioners, University of Phoenix students, alumni, faculty, and staff.

Looking forward, the Office of Educational Equity team is working on a model similar to the Inclusive Cafe for students leading to listening sessions that will provide opportunity to further engage with the student body, gain a greater understanding of their needs and develop programming to contribute to each student's sense of belonging and the facilitation of inclusive classrooms.

What has been learned within these webinars and evaluations is the increased need for connection, self-awareness, empathy, compassion all that contribute towards cultivating a sense of belonging. Creating spaces for faculty and staff to connect and build community, cultivate respect and continuous learning, and by drawing on the diverse perspectives of the participants to explore powerful and effective responses as we face this new reality together.

Investing in purposeful strategies to understand who you serve internally and externally is essential to fostering a culture of belonging. We conclude with the following key findings to cultivating a sense of belonging in an organization:

- Employee Engagement Survey- ask questions related to the company culture, cultural sensitivity, perceived bias in organizational processes, promotional opportunities, and product development.

- Be intentional about creating safe spaces to have conversations, promote cultural understanding and provide thought leadership relating to equity and inclusion in the classroom, workplace, and our communities.

- It is important for leaders to empathize with the uncertainty and emotions that is impacting employees during the instability of a global pandemic. In space such as the Inclusive cafe, leadership vulnerability has been crucial to demonstrate authenticity and build trust with employees.

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Radical Thought:
Re-envisioning "Safe Spaces" in the Post-Pandemic Era

Kimberly Underwood, Ph.D.
University Research Chair, CWDIR
College of Doctoral Studies
Nakiba Jackson
Doctoral Student
College of Doctoral Studies

Introduction

Following the drastic disruption of work environments by the COVID-19 pandemic, on May 6, 2020, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released guidance aimed at helping businesses and employers successfully re-open and resume business operations in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic. In order to resume normal or phased activities, the CDC requested that all employers should implement a plan that considers social distancing, employee monitoring and daily physical health checks, routine cleaning and disinfecting, and the use of face coverings and hand washing to prevent infection (CDC, 2020). While these measures serve as unquestionable imperatives for leaders, the authors of this article pose the question: Is this enough? Specifically, considering the impact of events of recent events on our society, how do businesses and employers effectively support employees impacted by collective emotional and physiological trauma?

Understand the Impact of Trauma

Collective trauma refers to the emotional and psychological reactions to one or more events that affect an entire society or community (Hirschberger, 2018). Given the major events occurring in 2020, it is hard to argue the lack of a significant impact on our society. Not only must we contend with the loss of lives from this pandemic, we must acknowledge the pervasive issues of inequalities that are inextricably linked to this pandemic. COVID-19 highlights longstanding inequities, insecurities, and vulnerabilities within the United States, including racial disparities in socioeconomic classes and the distribution of wealth, lack of affordable health care, widespread food insecurity, access to housing, and access to technology and broadband. In addition to the impact of a global pandemic, this country is once again addressing the pervasive issue of systemic racism, oppression, and stratification within the DNA of this country. Following the deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, an estimated 20 million Americans have taken to the street in protests denouncing police brutality and all racially motivated violence against Black people (Putnam, Chenoweth, & Pressman, 2020). As if these events were not enough, this country is experiencing one of the most volatile and polarized political climates in its history. Looking ahead, as leaders consider reopening their doors to employees, there is a responsibility to also consider the impact of this collective trauma on employees and how to create a sense of safety as they reenter organizational structures.

Safety in the Workplace

Within Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Maslow (1943) notes that humans must satisfy lower level needs before progressing on to meet higher-level growth needs. The need for safety is one of those basic, fundamental needs for all of us. So, how does this apply to the workplace? Employees' safety in the workplace is based upon their experiences and extends beyond the notion of physical safety to include their emotional and psychological safety. Currently, many organizations are strategizing on ways to bring employees back together safely within the workplace. Conversations are being had around social distancing and mask usage policies, and employers are finding ways to conduct daily temperature checks and other measures to ensure physical safety. While these measures are essential for physical safety, this pandemic has presented organizations with a unique opportunity: Is it possible for organizations to reset their organizational cultures to better support diversity through inclusion

and belonging? Moreover, are companies prepared to contend with the emotional and psychological impact of collective trauma affecting many of their employees?

When employees do not feel comfortable enough to share their experiences and thoughts or they believe this information is not valued by the organization, it may challenge their sense of safety and belongingness. According to the United States Office of Personnel Management (2016), inclusion is defined as "a set of behaviors (culture) that encourages employees to feel valued for their unique qualities and experience a sense of belonging" (pg. 7). These employees may not feel that they are a valued member of that organization. Further, these feelings and doubt can directly challenge aspects of their psychological and emotional safety.

Psychological safety in the workplace refers to an employee's ability to confidently take interpersonal risks. This includes a belief that they will not be embarrassed are punished for asking questions, making suggestions, or admitting to a mistake (Underwood, 2020). As a related concept, emotional safety challenges the assertion that emotions have no place in the workplace. In this instance, employees feel it is safe to take risks and show vulnerability. Within an emotionally safe workplace employees are collaborative and communicate with emotional intelligence (Harris, 2019; Underwood, 2020). Further, in instances of conflict or difficult conversations, these discussions are had, through constructive communications that preserve working relationships. Conversely, the absence of psychological and emotional safety can detrimentally impact employees and, ultimately, the workplace. When employees do not feel they are psychologically and emotionally safe, they may begin to disengage and not become as productive as the job requires (Harris, 2019). Further, according to Underwood (2020), this lack of trust and engagement can ultimately affect productivity and retention within organizations.

Shifting from "Safe Spaces" to "Safe Place" Mentality

Often, employers and organizations rely on the existence of "safe spaces" as a means of support and to foster belonging amongst various groups within the organizational structure. This may include the designation of human resources departments, employee resource groups, or specific managers as "safe places" where employees can discuss diversity-related topics or issues. Yet, when examining this concept of safe spaces, what is this subconscious or underlying message? Does this mean that only some areas of the organization are designated as "safe"? What does this say about the rest of the organization? As a member of one of these groups, does this mean that I cannot find a safe space with other groups? While safe spaces, such as employee resource groups are helpful, they serve as only one of many steps to creating inclusivity and belonging.

On the other hand, *safe place mentality* in the philosophy that any and all areas should be safe for employees. Within an organizational culture, it does not imply that it is a conflict free zone. Instead, safe place mentality creates an organizational culture where difficult and necessary conversations can occur with a goal of development and learning through respectful communication. Within an organization implementing safe *place mentality*, employees are able to communicate (utilizing a high level of emotional intelligence) horizontally and verbally throughout the organization around issues related to the existence of diversity, actions leading to inclusion, and individual belonging without fear of labeling, shunning, or retaliation. Finally, contrary to safe space mentality where one or a few are responsible for fostering inclusivity, in an organization with safe place mentality, every member of the organization is held to a high standard of respecting others and fostering inclusiveness and belonging within the organizational culture.

As organizations strive to develop safe place mentality, it is important to remember the following:

- *"Safe Place Mentality" is a JOURNEY, Not a Destination*: In the same light of our quest, our individual quests for cultural competency, it is difficult to imagine any organization becoming a fully functional and competent safe place without challenges and missteps during the pursuit. Organizations need to engage in honest self-reflection to understand where they excel and where there are challenges related to inclusivity and creating belonging.

- *Ditch Perfection*: When it comes to diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts, there is no perfect organization! Organizations will make mistakes and they will stumble. The question becomes do you make the same mistake twice or use it as a learning opportunity? Oftentimes, organizations want to be politically correct and judge themselves harshly when a situation arises outside of this level of correctness. The pursuit of perfection can lead to stagnated growth and unnecessary censorship. For both organizations and individuals, it is OK to say, "I don't know but I am willing to learn."

- *Check Alignment*: Within DEI strategies to foster inclusion and belonging, it is important to periodically check for alignment. Specifically, do efforts such as policies, programming, events, and other initiatives support feelings of belonging, as detailed through the employee lens? While intentions are good, it is important to ensure that the intended outcome is an actuality.

- *Measurement is Essential*: Identify how diversity, equity, and inclusivity relate to your business objectives and are aligned with your company mission, goals, and strategies. Once you create a plan to address these, how do you know that your plan is effective? How are you benchmarking within your DEI strategic plan? Effective measurement shows an organization when they are progressing within DEI planning and project/initiative implementation. It is a necessary element of any good DEI plan.

- *Reinforce Safe Place Mentality as an organizational culture and individual mindset*: In order to successfully create successful inclusivity and belonging within an organization, buy-in is key. These tenets should not only exist within policy and procedure, they should actively live within the behaviors, values, and mission of the organization. This requires that

each member of the organization be held personally responsible for actions related to creating a respectful and inclusive environment, fostering belonging.

As we continue to process and adjust to living within this "new normal", we also must learn to navigate within the workplace in this newfound state. Crisis leadership and management has become a necessary tool for ensuring organizational survival within a fragile economy. As human capital is the most important resource and any organization, leaders and managers have the social responsibility to take the necessary steps to protect and develop their employees during these difficult times.

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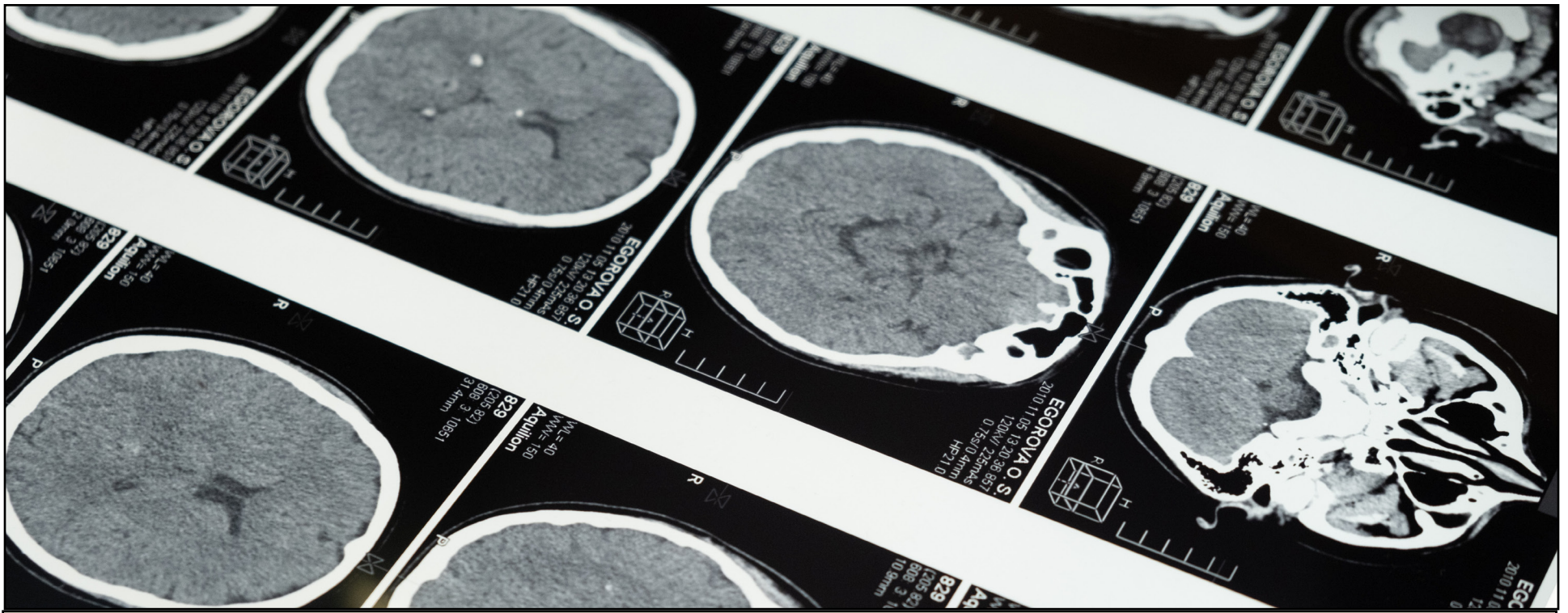
Nursing Narrative on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Raelene Brooks, Ph.D., RN
Associate Dean
College of Nursing, University of Phoenix
Dometrives Armstrong, DNP, RN
Associate Dean
Nursing Education, San Diego City College
Dee Oliveri, Ed.D., RN
Associate Dean
Nursing Education, Saddleback College

Nursing as a vocation, a discipline, and a practice, beautifully weaves a tapestry of threads containing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) within our curriculum. The foundation of understanding the meaning of DEI related to the nursing perspective is a vital principle of nursing practice. DEI is the prerequisite of quality and equitable health care to patients. Nursing awareness, education, and practice are necessary for a wide-range evaluation to meet the requirements of a diverse, multicultural, and multiracial population. By embracing DEI through an open mind, nurses can develop a framework and a perspective on support and care. Integrated into DEI's definitions are vital factors that provide a blueprint for sharing knowledge, skills, and beliefs. O'Connor, et al. (2019) defined DEI as the following:

1. Diversity focuses on the perspective, representation, and conversation;

2. Equity describes being fair; and

3. Inclusion highlights decision-making that provides equal opportunity.

Nursing's perception encompasses a deep connection with DEI emphasizing a safe methodology based on respect and kindness for multicultural, multiracial, gender, spiritual beliefs, and values. DEI for healthcare providers makes all accountable for modifying and examining perspectives, biases, principles, viewpoints, and behaviors to implement safe, quality care. DEI is essential for addressing health inequalities. As a discipline, Nursing is one of care and compassion. When one considers respect and understanding within the lens of DEI, empathy, open-mindedness, humility, mindfulness, and spirituality is how nursing students and nurses can achieve cultural competency.

Healthcare

Nurses are a strong voice in healthcare with a workforce in the United States of close to 4.3 million strong (Thornton & Persaud, 2018). As primary healthcare providers, nurses must interrogate and assess an individual's social determinants of health (SDOH). Social justice and SDOH are essential, inherent, and a powerful narrative in nursing education. As frontline workers, nurses have witnessed first-hand how the pandemic has threatened our very way of life, affecting this country's economy and national security.

Social justice and social determinants of health are intertwined and continue to be integrated as a robust vocabulary for advancing nursing practice and our nation's health. A primary example of disadvantaged populations, social epidemiology, and vulnerable populations is reported in Healthy People 2020 where lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) people are associated with higher rates of mental health disorders, suicide, and substance abuse (Cochran & Mays 2008). Unless education and training surrounding LGBTQ health is sought out, a shortage of knowledgeable and culturally competent providers to care for this group will continue.

Nursing Education

Nurse educators need to incorporate cultural theories and concepts into curricula so that future nurses can feel competent addressing DEI within their practice. Effective use of assessment tools in the provision of care and more research into this area is needed to develop skills in conducting and measuring the impact of interventions. In 2008, the American Association of Colleges of Nursing called for educators to begin looking at cultural competence related to patients, families, and communities' underlying social environment. The rationale behind this call to action pointed to the persistent inequities in health, especially racial and ethnic disparities, not to mention the individuals with disabilities who often experience health disparities (Bauman, Graybill, Crimmins, Berger, Thomas, Truscott, & LaFleur, 2020).

In 2008, The Institute of Medicine determined the need to address the existing disparities in healthcare. Their recommendation included transcultural education that would ensure culturally competent practice, including the concepts of DEI (Gillson & Cherian, 2019). The Quality and Safety Education in Nursing (QSEN) initiative was born, and the purpose was to align nursing education and nursing best-practice standards in quality and safety. QSEN has a connection with DEI because QSEN focuses on knowledge, skills, and attitudes (KSA), which expresses diversity, culture-sensitivity, ethnicity, communication, and respect.

The QSEN competencies incorporating knowledge, skills, and attitudes emphasized areas where students and nurses holistically practiced bedside practice. It would mean to consider system improvements (D'Eramo & Puckett, 2019). DEI, described by QSEN, are concepts integrated throughout the six competencies (patient-centered care; teamwork and collaboration; evidence-based practice; quality improvement; safety; and informatics) and are categorized as knowledge, skills, and attitudes. All of the competencies directed at DEI are focused on patient and family values, awareness of healthcare providers' biases and strengths, respecting patients' rights, and valuing different communication methods.

The Essentials of Baccalaureate Education for Professional Nursing Practice (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2008) support the nursing practices of health promotion and disease and injury prevention as essential to health care improvement for individuals and populations. Nursing generalists should assess, plan, and intervene when SDOH is identified (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2008).

Best Practices

In order to develop operational strategies for DEI in academic healthcare settings, the following best practice standards are suggested: (a) Conducting a needs assessment, that includes the creation of a DEI mission statement, with an emphasis on the healthcare workforce keeping pace with DEI in the workplace including changing societal demographic data, and improving cultural competence- cultural competence training-with outcomes to improve student outcomes; (b) Addressing the DEI culture of the institution-paying attention to the knowledge, skills and attitudes of faculty, staff, and administration, with attention to commitment to DEI; (c) Understanding barriers to addressing disparities by recognizing and understanding differences race and ethnicity among students, faculty, and staff; (d) Creating a DEI committee to address opportunities that exist in the institution and to help develop diversity across the academic settings; and (e) Integration of a validated reliable cultural assessment tool which aligns to the chosen mission and philosophy DEI statements.

Conclusion

Nurses understand that there is no social justice without fundamentally integrating DEI into every decision made for this country's health outcomes. Nurses recognize that social justice is central to the proper understanding of health. Nurses acknowledge that inequities are killing people in this nation on a grand unconscionable scale resulting in fear and societal discord. The term 'vulnerable populations' exists due to the disparities of income, education, sex, ethnicity, community, and environment (Thornton & Persaud, 2018). Nurses appreciate that DEI's implementation and practice impact the overall wellness of individuals and communities.

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The Psychological Implications of Racial Microaggressions

Rodney Luster, Ph.D.
University Research Chair, CLOSR
College of Doctoral Studies

The Nuances of Harmful Ingressions

The law in U.S. society has attempted to protect stigmatized groups over the years from the various forms of discrimination that have emerged. However, as with any disease, there can be left the unaddressed remnants of harmful viral agents that can impede the healing process and – in this analogy – so it is with the agents of racism and discrimination suffered.

Regarding race and culture, we have begun to observe another human element at work, something which lies beyond the eyes and ears of those who try to restrict the most conspicuous and overt behaviors of those with malicious intent. It is another device, a behavior, nuanced in the many ways in which people communicate, and yet it remains covert and somewhat undetectable by many. However, for the receiver, it is a communication that attempts to gas-light, to call into question what has been received while maintaining its dubious introjected and poisonous potentials. What I am referring to is a form of discrimination that can affect the psychological well-being of people in general. This "lived experience" of race and discrimination has been studied more intensely as researchers have begun to uncover its variant effects.

However, these nuanced variations of racist and discriminatory behaviors is termed "microaggressive" behavior. From the person who holds a negative opinion of another, such as someone who willingly participates in a movement like Black Lives Matter, to an LGBTQ+ customer who is served rudely in a coffee shop. There are thousands of expressions of such passive-aggressive behavior by those who hold any kind of internal bias towards another. For the transgressor, their need to be acknowledged amidst their aberrant desire to diminish those they hold in contempt – without being caught – can play out in the form of microaggressions.

According to Michelle Hebi, a professor of psychology at Rice University, she explains that when we are the receivers of such microaggressions of behavior the burden of cognitive resources we engage in mentally to question whether a transgress has occurred or not can be deeply troubling (Storrs 2020). What this means psychologically is that there are many mental functions at work when we attempt to decode communications of this type. Such processing moves through our own memory, looking for ways to understand it, to compare and reference what we have just seen or heard, to synthesize it, to challenge it, and to understand the actions of another fellow human being. This kind of aggressive communication calls into question who we are as individuals at the core of our personality.

The purpose of this article is to gain a basic understanding of microaggressions: what they are, how they happen, and their derivatives within the effects of psychological underpinnings.

Did they say what I just think they said?

The *projection* of feelings is a psychological defense mechanism where a person may attribute negative aspects they dislike or find unacceptable in themselves to another. For example, if one person believed another person or group to be hostile, then it may well be that the person themselves may be the one holding a hostile attitude and not the other person or group. Microaggressive processes can play out through these sometimes-unconscious defense mechanisms with projective tendencies to another person or group, with the offending person being wholly unaware of the real inherent issues that lie within themselves.

For some people, accepting that they may have any kind of racist agenda within their own self-agency is an intolerable internal state to maintain. Thus, expelling such content through projection is a way to eliminate the burden. This can be seen playing out in politics today where projection is applied by political parties where one projects negative ill intentions towards another, making assumptions that incite anger and hostility towards a group.

Another example of projection might be examined in the fictional character of Colonel Fitts from the 1999 movie *American Beauty*. The character of Fitts demonstrates his internal anger outwardly regarding homosexuality in all his encounters with men. But eventually, by the end of the movie, he is internally confronted with the fact that he may be attracted to men, having suppressed his feelings through overt projections, managing impressions and being overly machoistic. In the end, the reflective confrontation of the character regarding what he feels proves to be too overwhelming, leading him to dire consequences.

Projection and microaggressive behaviors provide a way for the offending person to ventilate, to eliminate internal perspectives and content onto another, thus hurting others. And because these behaviors are conducted in covert ways, the person on the receiving end of the offense is often left wondering if they actually heard or understood correctly what was being communicated. It is hard for many of us to believe that someone might actually say something so malicious that it tugs at our own sense of a just and fair world. In one study, researchers found that job seekers who were overweight (both men and women) received more rude and interpersonal negative forms of discriminatory responses and slights when given applications, in contrast to those who were not overweight (Storrs 2020).

To this end, Professor Richard Keller, a blind professor at Teacher's College, has also studied the effects of microaggressions against people who have *disabilities*. Amidst his research he also reports his own unique personal experiences with bias and microaggressions based on his blindness. In his reflections of such interactions, Keller remembered that some people tended to talk more loudly to him than others, as if he were hearing impaired as well. Such behaviors assigned a broader "global impairment" precept to him and those like Dr. Keller who may have had only one disability. These dispensed behaviors like speaking louder to someone with a disability are assumptions made on the communicator's part, and applied in such a way as to diminish or ignore the quality of another human being" (Martin 2011).

Through research we are beginning to understand the collateral damage of microaggressions, alongside the tremendous psychological cost of dealing with them daily. The insidious nature of racial microaggressive behavior is that such behaviors are delivered through less conspicuous means, providing an advantage of safety and escape for the aggressor. Over time, studies are now beginning to show us the resulting psychological damage that microaggressions can deliver, where enough accumulation in a person can trigger the onset of traumatic symptomology.

Currently, there is an urgent need for further research to help illuminate and understand how racism and discrimination align to functionally impact our psychological well-being at a traumatic level, and to shed light on how we may better challenge these elements to protect our core sense of self (Psychology Today 2020). In this, there is an imperative need to look at one of the more deceptive means by which hate and anger are constructed around differences, as it relates to the delivery of racial microaggressive behavior.

Understanding Microaggressive Behavior

Before defining the term *racial microaggression*, it is necessary to understand the point of origin of this term within the confines of *racism* and *discrimination*. According to David Williams (2019), "racism is the perception and treatment of a racial or ethnic group [or person] as intellectually, socially or culturally inferior to one's group." In essence, various forms of behaviors will fill these umbrella terms of racism and discrimination, such as systematic and institutionalized actions manifested where certain groups are excluded, where barriers exist for progression or where physical torture and intimidation are unleashed.

What we have learned from studying racism and discrimination is that those who adopt such beliefs towards others typically do so to ascertain some element of *power* or *privilege*. By internalizing beliefs about others in this way (and through the use of *downward social comparison*) such individuals attempt to elevate themselves in superiority, which ultimately oppresses minority groups as a whole.

Under this larger category of racism typology, *overt racism* is how we have come to understand and study racism and discrimination over the years, because it is often conspicuous, blatant, and candid in its effectual demonstration. But what about that which is not as exposed? This is where behaviors termed "microaggressive" require more explanation. The term "microaggression" was invariably adopted by Harvard psychiatrist Chester Pierce back in the 1970s as a way to characterize the nuanced insults he observed in the interactions between White students and African American students. But then, in 2007, the term resurfaced through the work of Columbia University psychologist Derald Sue who started to socialize this terminology more prominently in his own work (Teachers College Columbia University 2020).

More specifically, we can borrow an insight from how Sue and his colleagues (2007) have defined *racial microaggressions*, which – in his own words – are described as "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group" (Nadal et al. 2019, p. 271).

This theory was expanded to characterize the harm of microaggressions egressed with reference to other minority populations that include those related to sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, ability, religion, size, age, social class, and more. Sue and colleagues also state that the usage of the word *micro*, in front of the word *aggression*, does not infer the quality of such transgressions as being "smaller" or "less relevant" in any way, but rather, represents "the covert and individual manner in which this type of discrimination occurs – which often makes it difficult to detect, pinpoint or prove" (Nadal et al. 2019).

The Four Distinctive Types of Microaggressions

There are four types of microaggression defined herein, primarily *microassaults*, *microinsults*, *microinvalidations*, and *over-*

validated microaggressions. According to researcher Jennifer Young-Jin Kim, "*microassaults* are a deliberate method of microaggression transacted which entail overt racial remarks or slights that are purposely designed to offend another" (Kim et al. 2019). This may be observed in the following example where a white employee refers to another colleague of Asian descent in a derogatory or offensive manner by communicating that all Asian Americans are more adept in the world of IT, a generalization regarding everyone of Indian descent.

Microinsults represent the second method of offensive behavior of the four outlined, but is considered more indirect. An example may be a situation in which a supervisor asks for team input and as team members voice their ideas, the supervisor ignores the person of color and attributes the contribution to someone else on the team from which the idea did not come from. This may also be demonstrated by ignoring another team member or making remarks such as the promotability of someone based on their cultural representation. Microinsults are indirect and yet they are observed by the victim because it denotes some level of attribution based on their affiliation to a group.

The next type of racial microaggression – that is also less conspicuous – are *microinvalidations*, which is the invalidation of another where actions by the aggressor might disavow the racial reality of the other person. This is lending to the idea or notion of invisibility embedded in indistinguishability, such as when two employees are mistaken for one another by virtue of cultural affiliation.

The last method of microaggression is the *overvaluation* of microaggression. This is a positive valence toward a group. An example could be established in the assumption of a supervisor who starts assigning a large majority of tasks to an Indian worker because the supervisor who demonstrates this form of aggressive tendency buys in to the stereotype of a group and erroneous beliefs about work ethic (Kim et al. 2019).

Microaggressions can be harmful is what we may infer from the countless volumes of research studies regarding the effects of overt racism and discrimination. Yet, there is still much we do not know about the *extent* of harm that microaggressions in particular can inflict. Further, are there profound implications for the possibility of *traumatic* injury in these kinds of social ingressions?

Racial Microaggressions and Trauma

Currently, we know from prior studies that the recipient of racial microaggressions can suffer from the extant of issues like anxiety, stress, and depression. However, a bigger question that remains to be studied regards the "totus est" or *comprehensive* occurrence and frequency of microaggressions over time to the victims of these kinds of communications.

Researcher Kevin Nadal sees the potential links in what previous scholars have started to see as the probable connectivity between suffering racial microaggressions and consequential traumatic tendency as follows:

Scholars have hypothesized that the cumulative impact of these three diverse types of racism - overt racism, systemic and structural racism, and racial microaggressions - can result in trauma, otherwise known as racial trauma. When people of color experience trauma related to race or ethnicity, they are more likely to undergo behavioral or personality-related changes that are often pervasive and long-lasting and align with typical symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress. (Nadal et al. 2019)

Nadal and group took the opportunity to conduct their own research on this topic taking a racially diverse sample of the population and using a correlational, cross-sectional design. The researchers went looking for the potential impact between racial microaggressions and trauma outcomes. They began to examine the descriptive data observing the pervasiveness of racial microaggression experiences and trauma symptoms across the group using PCL measurea, which is a self-report measure designed to screen for PTSD symptomology. "Total PCL scores ranged from 0 to 80, with an average score of 21.53 (SD = 19.43). Sixty-six participants scored higher than 33, which is traditionally the lowest score needed for a PTSD diagnosis (Blevins et al., 2015)" (Nadal et al. 2019).

To explore the relationship between racial microaggressions and traumatic impact, the researchers studied the correlations between REMS-Total scores, REMS-Subscale scores, and PCL scores. What they found was a substantial correlation amongst REMS-Totals and PCL scores (r = .417, N = 226. p < .001, two-tailed). In fact, of the six studies, five of the REMS subscales (all except Subscale 5: Environmental Microaggressions) demonstrated a positive and significant correlational outcome with PCL average scores, where r-scores ranged from .25 to .42 (p < .001, two-tailed) (Nadal et al. 2019).

The Need for More Research

In the end, the researchers found that their ANOVA results actually did support the first half of what they were hoping for. Namely, that those participants who disclosed traumatic events involving race or culture did in fact report higher PCL scores. However, their research regarding the potential for traumatic injury inflicted through microaggressive behaviors was inconclusive. Their research yields the need for further study as racial microaggressions and the potential for traumata fallout should be considered through the lens of a "complex trauma" paradigm, which would require a deeper study which accounts for the complexities of the issue. Such studies would help enhance our understanding of how racial microaggressions could lead to conditions like Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Acknowledgment of such passive-aggressive movements in society has taken on more focus over the years as a result of greater awareness, as well as through our understanding of the "lived" experiences of those who suffer from the actions and behaviors of those who cast aspersions on these same minority groups. Additionally, the psychological underpinnings resulting from the immediate social torrent of issues surrounding race and culture today will most likely open up more channels for

future insights on the extent of damage reflected in the nuanced discharge of hate and anger by those who demonstrate such xenophobic pathology. The hope then is through further study – especially as it pertains to these kind of harmful outcomes – is that we can, as a society, upgrade our potentials for coming to better understand and appreciate one another in ways that do not present with such egregious outcomes, but rather in ways that respect and value our differences as human beings.

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Experiencing Racism as a K-12 Educator and its Effect on Professional Practice

Marie Smith, J.D., M.Ed
Faculty
College of Doctoral Studies
Patricia Akojie, Ph.D.
Dissertation Chair
College of Doctoral Studies

American history encompasses both great exploits accomplished through solidarity and missed opportunities resulting from prejudices, ignorance, and discrimination. The missed opportunities have become detrimental to all organizations of the United States, especially educational institutions (Milkman, et al, 2015). Educational institutions on all academic levels, are disproportionately structured, and biases in school cultures are explicit (Warikoo, et al., 2016). For example, research suggests African American teachers across the United States are less supported by school administrators than Caucasian teachers (Griffin & Tackie, 2017). Our narrative inquiry study explored the experiences of black K-12 educators that have experienced racial bias and the impact of such biases on their professional practice. Specifically, how do experiences with racism in educators' personal and professional lives impact the way they engage professionally with colleagues, institutional leaders, parents, guardians, and students? Further, we explore how racism, bias and microaggressions impact school cultures, in general.

School Cultures and the Historical Narrative of the Evolution of Racial Bias

School cultures are cultivated by the legislation, policies, rules, and operational modes of educational activities embedded in daily life practices. These operational modes of educational activities function on an established social and racial hierarchy that extends into school cultures from the larger society and are detrimental to some beneficiaries of daily instruction. Beginning in the 1700s, African Americans were excluded from education, both as students and teachers (Menchaca,1997). What emerged from a long and difficult struggle to educate African Americans was a system of poorly funded segregated schools. In an 1896 Supreme Court decision, *Plessy v. Ferguson* upheld and institutionalized segregation across American society declaring it constitutional that public accommodations could be "separate but equal." Later, in 1899, the Supreme Court decision, *Cumming v. School Board of Richmond County*, Georgia made racial segregation in American schools the law of the land. As a way to ensure a permanent and lasting impact of the most destructive aspects of school segregation by race, the Supreme Court in *Cumming* ruled that managing funding for public schools by withholding funds for Black schools and using the funds for white schools was constitutional, which effectively eliminated the equality in the "separate but equal" doctrine of *Plessy v. Ferguson*.

The impact of *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision continues throughout school cultures even today. While racial segregation by creating "separate but equal" schools is no longer law, it is still reflected in the way that schools are funded based on the demographics of the students that each school serves. Further, racial bias continues to occur in school systems based on deficit theory or perspectives and low expectations for students of color. Although the 1954 landmark Supreme Court case, *Brown v. Board of Education* made it illegal for public K-12 schools to refuse to admit students based on their race, today, as a result of funding, redlining, and other social practices, many of America's public K-12 schools are segregated much as they were when *Brown* was decided. Racism and bias in school cultures appear in various forms, including microaggressions. While it has become a commonly used term, it is important to note that the word microaggression connotes the marginalization of any racial, ethnic, or social group. Microaggressions are common across cultures, institutions, groups, and communities across society. In schools, microaggressions occur from child to child, teacher to child, teacher to teacher, and from faculty member to faculty member.

Educators' Experiences and the Impact of Racism on School Cultures

Within this study, Black K-12 educators were interviewed to share their experiences with racial bias both in and out of school

settings and how it has impacted their professional experiences, students, parents, administrators and/or coworkers. Each of the study participants reported the need to, or habit of, changing their behavior to accommodate or disprove socially accepted stereotypes associated with African Americans, including changing their attire. Several respondents were the only ones, or one of a few African Americans in their school and they reported that in those environments they felt stereotyped, undervalued, and overlooked. Participants also felt that they had to prove their professional qualifications to their white co-workers because of a perception that they were less qualified or skilled based on their race. All participants in the study reported overcompensating for being a minority in a predominantly white environment by trying to prove their abilities above and beyond the required performance standards.

Changing their normal behaviors to conform with the school predominate culture was another consistent theme. One of the participants reported that he was steered toward a stereotypical career in an inner-city school but decided not to conform. Instead, he remained at his suburban school, where educators and students were predominantly white and when he became a school administrator he created an environment where the teachers under his supervision could talk to him about their experiences with racism and its impact on their professional performance. Some participants experienced low expectations from white parents who saw them as less qualified based on their race and one of the participants reported that his role was to make sure that his students, especially students of color were provided an African-American perspective and protected from the effects of racist policies. All research participants reported that racism, bias, and microaggressions in their school environments impacted them in both their personal and their professional lives. They adjusted by changing their own behavior in ways that allowed them to protect their careers, as well as by acting in ways that they believed would protect other educators and students of color from the racism in their school cultures.

The study shows that educators are still experiencing racial bias even in the twentieth century in the United States. Therefore, there is a need for professional development on racial awareness in schools and other levels of education. Diversity needs to be purposively imbedded across school curriculum and textbooks. A 2018 review of some of Harvard University's collection of 3,000 history textbooks published between the 1890s and 1980s, showed that most of these textbooks communicate the values and beliefs of white supremacy (Yacovone, 2018). The information in those textbooks form a foundation for K-12 education from professors teaching it to their college students who are training to become educators, to teachers teaching it in K-12 classrooms, and then those shared ideas spread among students and internalized. As such, we suggest that workplace diversity is more than just a lofty idea, and strategies should be employed to embrace a diverse workplace and use appropriate textbooks and other teaching and training strategies to embrace diversity.

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Addressing Systemic Racism in Healthcare Organizations

Stacey Glass-Smith, DHA, MBA
Alum
College of Doctoral Studies
Jose Garza, DHA, MBA
Alum
College of Doctoral Studies

The fourteenth amendment of the United States (U.S.) Constitution mandates that all U.S. right to life, liberty, or property and equal protection of the laws. However, minority communities throughout history have been denied these constitutional rights. Healthcare disparities and systemic racism in public health are not new suppositions; however, the topics are often ignored or undermined. The outcry for healthcare fairness and equality has either been denounced or ignored; however, in 2020, two events, coronavirus (COVID-19) and police brutality, revealed what some individuals denied or refused to accept as reality; systematic racism exists and is universal.

Systemic Racism

Racism is a multi-dimensional issue systematically instituted through legal and structural systems that restrict minorities' access to healthcare. Racism transpires from individuals' unconscious predispositions grounded from education, training, and experiences regarding individuals of another race, commonly referred to as implicit bias (Kirwan Institute, 2015). As a result, individual inherent behaviors based on beliefs, attitudes, experiences, observations, assumptions, and stereotypes, transform into professional behaviors within the workplace, including healthcare organizations. Racism becomes systemic when prejudicial practices and behaviors become part of the organization's accepted values, principles, norms, and behaviors. The value assignment of races, nationalities, gender, sexual orientation, or physical characteristic on a hierarchy (García & Zulfacar Sharif, 2015) sets the possibility of racial profiling. The continued issue is that the history of racism in the U.S. has led to the roots of systematic racism, which affects minority communities. Healthcare disparities among minority communities support the notion that systemic racism exists.

Racial Healthcare Disparities

Minority groups across the U.S. continue to suffer at alarming rates when it comes to illnesses. Social, economic, and environmental factors are contributing elements to the healthcare disparities among disadvantaged minority groups. Although minority groups account for a smaller percentage of the total population in the U.S., minority groups have higher healthcare inequalities. The total number of Hispanics and African-Americans who died or suffered serious illness from COVID-19 is unknown; however, Haseltine (2020) concluded that both populations were affected at least four to five times more than non-Hispanic whites. The infant mortality rate for Native Americans and Alaska Natives is 60 percent higher than Caucasians. While Caucasian women have the highest prevalence of breast cancer, African-American women have the highest mortality rates from breast cancer (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019).

D.E.F.E.A.T: A Pathway to Eradicate Healthcare Disparities

The death of George Floyd corroborates that systemic racism permeates society every day as protestors of all races march together throughout cities to end injustices against minority communities. The notion of the protests has forced organizations to acknowledge racism and reevaluate organizational inclusivity. In an effort to address healthcare disparities, universal acknowledgment of the power systemic racism has on healthcare must occur. Universal acknowledgment is crucial since systemic racism is implemented through systematized policies and social norms.

Closing the gap in healthcare disparities will require multifaceted solutions on several levels to defeat systemic racism within

healthcare organizations. As a result, healthcare organizational leaders, individual healthcare professionals, and support team members should use inclusivity approaches such as D.E.F.E.A.T., an acronym, which promotes pathways to eradicate systemic racism and stimulate healthcare equality. Healthcare organizational leaders establish the tone and expectations for inclusivity within the organization culture, and frontline healthcare professionals are vital in the delivery of health services, which makes them ideal advocates in promoting equality.

• Dedicate, Denounce, and Denote: Healthcare organizational leaders should dedicate the mission to the administration of fair and equitable healthcare to all patients regardless of their race, nationality, age, sex, gender, sexual orientation, or creed. Therefore, it is essential every healthcare leader and employee denounce individual racist stereotypes and assumptions and dedicate their job performance to fair and equitable healthcare to all patients. Alternatively, all healthcare organizational leaders and employees should denote inclusivity using value statements, visual cues, meetings, and verbal and nonverbal communications.

• Engage, Educate, and Emulate: Healthcare organizational leaders should engage employees, patient advocates, and community leaders to join forces to mobilize equitable healthcare within the community. Healthcare organizational leaders should also educate all internal and external stakeholders on the organization's mission and policies to ensure the alleviation of healthcare disparities and distribute procedures on how to communicate healthcare disparities to the healthcare organizational leaders. It is equally important healthcare organizational leaders and frontline healthcare professionals' emulate positive and open behaviors within the organization to create a receptive environment.

• Frame, Formulate, and Fascinate: Healthcare organizational leaders should develop an organizational framework that promotes healthcare equities throughout the administration of healthcare. Accordingly, all healthcare employees should follow organizational leaders' examples and expectations of fair and equitable healthcare to all employees and patients. Every healthcare organizational leader and employee should fascinate the organization's values and policies by respectfully asking everyone to adhere to the interest of justice and equality.

• Enforce, Emulate, and Enunciate: It is essential healthcare organizational leaders enforce organizational regulations, policies, and procedures and emulate desired workplace expectations through daily behaviors to ensure accountability. All healthcare organizational leaders and employees should enunciate the values of fair and equitable healthcare to others to expand the knowledge base on the subject matter.

• Assess, Accentuate, and Activate: Healthcare organizational leaders should assess past practices and outcomes to decipher changes needed within the organization to alleviate systemic racism in healthcare. Healthcare organizational leaders should also accentuate change management initiatives and document and vocalize new expectations for all employees, including ramifications for noncompliance. It is also essential every healthcare employee should follow healthcare policies and procedures that promulgate fair and equitable healthcare to all patients. Additionally, employees should feel comfortable to activate the healthcare organization's employee reporting process to report non-compliant behaviors that prevent fair and equitable healthcare to patients.

• Train, Translate, and Triplicate: Healthcare organizational leaders need to train all managers, supervisors, and employees on newly framed or revised internal controls (policies and procedures) and translate if needed to prevent any misunderstandings and clear any confusion. Concurrently, all healthcare employees should speak to family, friends, and others about systemic racism within organizations to open the dialogue and promote other potential solutions. The goal is to reinforce nonracist attitudes through the reinforcement of triplicated nonracist behaviors; spiritually, emotionally, and mentally.

Systemic racism is prevalent in all industries, and disparities exist in social, economic, and environmental factors among minority communities. Acknowledging systemic racism is crucial in promoting awareness. Leaders across every industry must set the bar within organizational cultures through strategic planning, value statements, workplace expectations, policies, and procedures. Change requires time, but it is more essential than ever as the people demand a paradigm shift in all organizations for equality and justice for all U.S. citizens. Therefore, organizations across the country must confer, embody, and implement inclusion at a leadership level to disseminate across all hierarchy levels of each organization. Racial and other systemic inequalities "at the institutional, structural, and systemic levels [should be] a precursor for taking up race at the individual level" (Kempf, 2020, p. 116).

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Affecting Change:
Influencing Communities through K-12 Teachers

Pamela Roggeman, Ed.D.
Academic Dean
College of Education

Alexandra Escobar, Ed.D.
Director of Programmatic Accreditation
and Regulatory Compliance
University of Phoenix

Lilia Santiague, Ph.D.
Associate Dean of Instruction, Faculy
College of Doctoral Studies

Camie Walker, M.A.Ed.
Faculty
College of Doctoral Studies

Amy Beattie, M.A.Ed.
Faculty
College of Doctoral Studies

Connie Lorthridge, Ed.D.
Regional Assistant Dean
University of Phoenix

K-12 schools have historically contributed key milestones to both barriers and advancements in the areas of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). At times, schools are microcosms of society, and teachers-as leaders in schools- have the potential to become change agents within their communities. As most American public-school students will identify with a racial background other than white and LGBTQ students have found their voices, teacher preparation must include DEI education as part of its core pedagogy (NCES, 2020). The University of Phoenix College of Education (COE) began this pedagogical work guided through a group of critical stakeholders with the creation of their Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Council. While this council began as an effort to meet a state education agency requirement, the council evolved into its own change agent whose influence will eventually reach all teachers the UOPX College of Education produces.

Last year, in preparation for an accreditation visit, University of Phoenix leaders brainstormed on ways to address a regulatory requirement to demonstrate evidence its College of Education programs were robustly supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives across its operations, especially related to faculty development. The group wanted to do more than simply meet a requirement; they wanted to take this opportunity to embrace DEI to benefit faculty and students across the United States. We decided to create a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Council in order to ensure these issues were at the forefront of the college's planning efforts and strategic initiatives. After these foundational elements were in place, the group did a targeted outreach to its faculty, staff, alumni, and students to identify dedicated members to serve in the important role of committee members. Its first meeting was held in May 2019, five months after its initial brainstorming meeting. Over a year later, the group remains strong and fully invested in its purpose of assisting the College of Education with its goal to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion to enhance the preparation of future educators and administrators to effectively address the needs of the K-12 students they serve.

The first task of the committee was to create a mission/vision statement. This critical undertaking was facilitated by Dr. Kimberly Underwood, the University Research Chair for the Center for Workplace Diversity and Inclusion Research within the College of Doctoral Studies. She is a veteran DEI professional and served as an ex-officio member to help guide college leaders in creating a framework for the council and the council's purpose, mission, and general guidelines. She facilitated in-depth discussions about what the group hoped to achieve and how the council should operate. It was at this point that the council members' passion for creating more inclusive, self-aware, and compassionate teachers became the North Star for this group. Council members shared their personal and poignant experiences, background stories, and connections to diversity, equity, and inclusion and created norms that resulted in a respectful and safe community. As a result, the council was able to add depth and greater nuance to how we would define the terms: diversity, equity, and inclusion. One decision became clear; the council unanimously agreed that our work should lead to action, not just talk.

The next task of the council was to integrate the framework of our mission statement into the College's Educational Conceptual Framework honoring the tenets of diversity, equity, and inclusion. The revised Conceptual Framework was embedded into all Education courses, so this document became socialized. This strong foundation set the stage to inform curriculum. A curriculum plan was created that included faculty training, as well as curriculum revision. This started with a single pilot course to explore how best to integrate concepts of diversity, equity, and inclusion into the syllabus. The council worked with the College's Associate Dean, Lisa Ghormley, and recommended readings, activities, and assessments aligned with the College's revised Conceptual Framework. The Council then set out to expand its influence into other areas of the College and the University. Team members chose to join the University's Cultural Competency committee because members saw they had unique ideas to offer this larger group. Members of our College Council presented at the University's *Inclusive Cafe*, and our committee engaged in cross-college collaboration by working with faculty from the College of Doctoral Studies. As we continue to share ideas, our hope is that our vision statement will become a reality across all areas of our university, creating a paradigm shift where inclusion will become the norm for all educators, students, and classrooms.

Our professional learning community was formed by members joining with a desire to help define what diversity, equity and inclusion represent within our college and our population of future teachers. Our group is effective because our task is driven by passion and a shared vision. Roles and responsibilities are divided among members with part-time and full-time employees, all having an equal voice. Our meetings begin with discussions to keep the council informed on how diversity, equity and inclusion impact industry practices and end with deliberate acts which propel intent into action. College leaders have stepped back and allowed adjunct professors to take the lead as co-chairs on the committee. This single act has helped establish trust in individual and group decisions. We are a team bonded by a shared commitment to live the principles and "walk the talk" of inclusivity.

All organizations need collaborative groups like the COE Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Council because this work requires intentionality. From its inception, the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Council committed to take action to ensure that its mission and vision came to fruition. Recent societal events have made it abundantly clear that much more needs to be done in the areas of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Since the murder of George Floyd, this work has come to the forefront causing individuals and organizations to reflect on what more they can do to right the wrongs that continue to shape too many aspects of society. As a result of institutional racism, many organizations and institutions find themselves with leadership that does not represent the diversity of the populations it serves. Although this lack of representation may not happen intentionally, there is now more consensus than ever that institutions must reflect the values that society is demanding. The laws and regulations that have been in place for generations, no matter how often they are stated or how faithfully organizations attempt to follow their mandates, are not enough. Organizations need to create safe spaces, like the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Council, where all stakeholders have the ability to shape the culture and create meaningful change.

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The Connection Between Students of Color, Teachers of Color, and Advanced Placement Courses

Alana Morales
Doctoral Student
College of Doctoral Studies
Joy W. Taylor, Ed.D.
Research Fellow
College of Doctoral Studies

If it is true that racial inequity is rooted and woven into the thread of our society, this suggests there is no area without its issues. While media focus has been directed towards the impact of a global pandemic, substantial evidence of racial disparities continues to surface, including those found within the public education system. The inequities within our educational system cannot be overlooked. In fact, now is the time to address the inherent inequities within our educational system. Two such inequities are the lack of minority students in advanced classes and the lack of minority teachers in K-12 classrooms.

Think back to your own high school experience. Specifically, think about the racial composition of the students in grades 9th through 12th who were completing advanced placement classes. What did you see? One thing you probably did not see was many students of color in advanced classes. If you were to enter a high school today, chances are you would see the same scenario. Students of color are underrepresented in advanced classes across the country, such as Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate. In a report by The Education Trust, over 600,000 students of color could be participating in an advanced level class based on their academic achievement but are not (Theokas & Saaris, 2013). This brings us to ask why there is such a huge disparity in student enrollment. The authors suggest there are two main factors that contribute to this statistic: (1) how students are identified to be assigned to the advanced courses and (2) the lack of student support once they are identified in terms of mentoring and guidance.

There are a number of system-wide barriers that may prevent a student of color from taking an advanced level class, but those barriers are irrelevant if the student is not identified in the first place and given the option to enroll in the advanced classes. There is an inherent bias when you ask what an advanced student looks like; very rarely will someone think of a student of color participating in an advanced level class. This is but one example of the implicit bias rooted within the education system.

There are many barriers to student identification and selection to participate in advanced classes, but it is difficult to know the root cause for the under identification. Is it because teachers have a preconceived notion of what an advanced student looks like? Is it because the students of color lack background skills that would increase their likelihood of success? Other barriers include systemic issues, such as GPA requirements, summer homework requirements, and even parent signature requirements. If schools are going to address the lack of minority students in advanced classes, they are going to have to address and identify how to initially get the students into the classes. Schools must examine the inherent biases within the system of advanced classes and then determine what purpose the rules or selection criteria serve. For example, one potential barrier is a student must have and maintain a particular GPA to enter the class. What does that prove? The GPA is not an indicator of the student's ability to think deeply or to understand concepts. And if GPA is not an indicator of these two skills needed to be successful in an advanced level class, why use it to keep students out? Instead, school leaders must focus on identifying skills needed to be successful and accept students who meet these established criteria.

Once students are identified, educational leaders must determine how to ensure supports are in place to help students achieve success. One factor that increases student success is having a trusted adult the student can go to for support, mentoring or guidance. This illustrates a second issue in our current educational system, which is the lack of minority teachers to serve as role models. Take a moment to think once again of your own high school experience. Now try to think of a minority teacher

on your campus. If you are having trouble, do not feel bad because as with the previous scenario, you will likely see the same lack of minority educators on campuses across the nation today. In *The State of Teacher Diversity in American Education*, researchers reported that while minority student numbers are increasing, minority teacher numbers are decreasing (Bond et al., 2015). Much like the advanced student issue, it is difficult to determine a root cause for this discrepancy. Whatever the reason, youth of color need more teachers of color to represent them. Research supports that when minority students have teachers they can relate to, they are more likely to be successful academically (Mitchell, 2018).

The problem created by analyzing the lack of minority teachers reveals the difficulty in knowing and responding to the root cause. Do we lack minority teachers in our schools because they do not exist? And if they do not exist, how do we actively and intentionally begin to recruit minority teachers to serve as role models? Why would a minority student want to become a teacher when many have never experienced what it is like to have a minority teacher as a role model and someone they can relate to on such a fundamental level?

The first step in correcting a problem is to acknowledge the problem exists. The implicit and explicit biases of police officers, politicians, retail clerks, medical personnel and yes, even classroom teachers toward people of color, profoundly influence how decisions are made when interacting with them. In some cases, the bias is so engrained that it is acted upon with automaticity. Another insightful message demonstrating progress is promoting ongoing racial awareness and sensitivity training across the board to help leaders and decision makers to recognize bias and to develop methods for addressing it nationwide. However, this effort must be intentional if effective and lasting change is to take place.

Having good intentions and empathizing are positive starts for educational leaders and educators; however, solid strategic actions are needed to begin the process of moving from awareness to change. The time is ripe to move from the passive role of non-racist to the active and participatory role of anti-racist. The latter calls for action by the entire school community and culture. Bear in mind that teachers are people too. They are just as likely to have racial biases as non-teachers. Therefore, school leaders must do more to lead the change to dispel stereotypes and discrimination within their areas of influence. Our schools reflect society as a whole. Eighty percent of teachers are white, while about half of students are people of color. Teachers' racial biases tend to influence expectations within the classroom. For example, black students are less likely to be placed in gifted education classes and more likely to receive exclusionary discipline (such as detentions and suspensions). In addition, white teachers also tend to have far lower academic and behavioral expectations for black students than they do for white students (Starck, 2020). Children need to see racial representation within the school setting. Teachers of color, in particular, may be perceived more favorably by students of color because they can serve as role models and are sensitive to the cultural needs of their students. Likewise, the same student-teacher connection is also linked to teacher perception and expectations of students.

Another key component of increasing the number of students of color in advanced placement, honors and gifted courses lies within the area of parental education and empowerment. Often parents are not aware of the process for accessing these courses or may be under the impression they are only for "A" students. Guidance counselors and teachers should provide opportunities to enlighten parents about academic opportunities and teach parents on how to monitor and question their child's academic achievement starting in pre-school and each grade thereafter. Some parents believe every school and every teacher has their child's best interest in mind; however, this is not always the case. Parents can receive academic support briefings on back to school night, parent teacher conferences and other venues supporting their student's achievement.

One indicator of success for student achievement requires the student being willing to do the work and developing higher level thinking skills as a result of learning opportunities. Schools may build their own Advanced Placement programs within the local community feeder patterns. However, they cannot wait until high school to start selecting students for the programs. Middle schoolers would benefit from pre-AP type courses in addition to differentiated instruction to support their learning styles. Students who do not complete the necessary pre-requisites in middle school have little hope of meeting the requirements for advance placement once they reach high school. Targeted, short-term and long-term academic planning will increase the opportunity for students of color to participate in advanced courses throughout their primary and secondary schooling and beyond.

Likewise, implementing initiatives designed to increase targeted recruitment and incentives to attract teachers of color to education may persuade more minority teachers to at least consider the profession. Another issue for many people who attempt to enter the profession is their performance on the various certification tests and requirements most states deem necessary to become a teacher. Therefore, additional support and training for teacher preparation may help. Efforts to ensure diverse representation on hiring committees may help, especially in school districts where extremely low numbers of people of color apply. It may even be necessary to select educators of color from other school districts or professions to provide that level of diversity, sponsorship and mentorship.

Within K-12 education, there is much talk about the importance of diversity and equity. It sounds good and nice to address diversity, equity, and inclusion but these topics only scratch the surface in addressing mindsets and systemic selection of teachers of color candidates and students of color to participate in advanced classes. How do we move beyond simple words to taking effective actions? School leaders are called upon to facilitate continual conversations that explicitly examine and eliminate the ways racism manifests itself in school policies and processes.

Race and its impact in the classroom among teachers and students must be acknowledged, taught, and understood. All students are deserving of equal access to quality education. This will not magically happen. It will require the collective efforts of educators, school leaders and the school community to put the needs of students ahead of explicit and implicit biases and change the status quo to benefit society.

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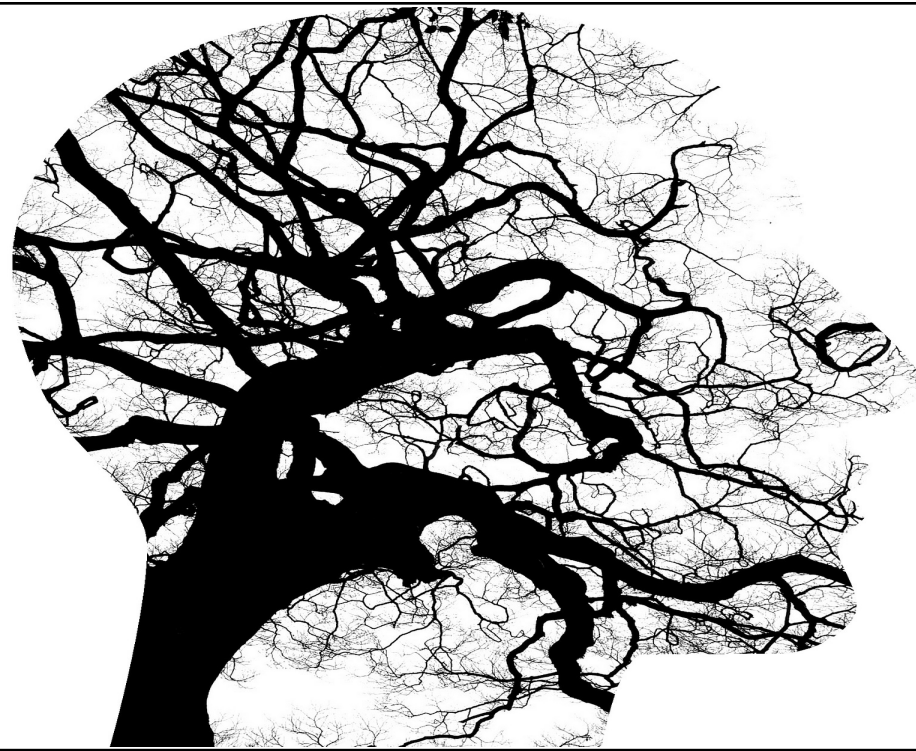
Providing Effective Mental Health Services for Diverse, At-Risk Youth Populations

Eric Rosen, Ph.D., MS
Faculty
College of Social and Behavioral Sciences
Diego Rodriguez Garcia, MS
Marriage & Family Therapist
VMS Family Counseling Services

Introduction

Diverse youth of color are particularly vulnerable to abuse, neglect, and the resulting trauma. Youth of color have inadequate access to mental health services compared to white youth (DeNard et al., 2017). Further, youth of color are more likely to experience chronic mental health conditions due to abuse and neglect (Keller et al., 2010) placing them at risk for comorbid primary health conditions (Burns et al., 2004). Thus, youth of color are disproportionately likely to face inequitable health care services and outcomes. Therefore, youth of color need mental health systems and interventions tailored to address this inequality gap.

Occurring concurrently with the COVID-19 pandemic was a change in Californian's mental health needs, particularly for diverse at-risk children. The COVID-19 pandemic placed children at inordinate risk for abuse and neglect (UNICEF, n.d.) and which can result in a diagnosis of a trauma and stressor related disorder (Webster et al., 2016). Children who experience childhood trauma are disproportionately likely to have poor educational outcomes, increased justice system involvement, increased likelihood to re-perpetrate abuse and neglect, and involvement with the child welfare system (DeNard et al., 2017). Thus, during and after the COVID-19 pandemic children have a distinct need for mental health services.

The purpose of this article is to describe how mental health services can provide culturally inclusive support to at-risk youth using a data-driven community intervention public health model. This article calls mental health policy stakeholders to action regarding how data can inform mental health community interventions in response to, and in conjunction with the lessons learned from, the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, this article discusses data-driven decision-making and community interventions in public health, and how that can be applied to public mental health and public mental health services.

California county mental health plans are responsible for providing medically necessary specialty mental health services (DHCS, 2020). Specialty mental health services are "carved-out" of the larger public health care program in California, referred to as "Medi-Cal." To meet regulatory requirements, the county mental health planners are accountable for collecting and reporting numerous data points. These data include mental health service availability, frequency of providers, functional assessment tools, fiscal management, service utilization, and others. However, to date, the data collected by California county mental health planners have been leveraged largely for maintaining compliance with regulatory reporting requirements. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, California mental health plans are uniquely situated to utilize their bevy of currently tracked data to take a public health approach in meeting the mental health needs of children.

The Model

In response to COVID-19, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) utilized television, advertising and news briefings to disseminate health data and recommendations in response to COVID-19 despite traditionally using state and federal reports along with peer-reviewed articles. These communications often included graphical representations of health data trends over time, geographical mapping of health issues, health care service availability charts, and the effects of illness on diverse persons (CDC, 2020a,b,c). In addition, these communications were often made available in age-appropriate languages.

Further, the CDC and California Department of Public Health (CDPH) provided the public data addressing and targeting diverse persons particularly at-risk of health complications due to COVID-19 (CDC, 2020a,b,c; CDPH 2020a,b). The CDC and CDPH used data to inform decision making and community intervention regarding physical distancing, sanitizing, and identifying COVID-19 symptoms.

Both policymakers and government health agencies relied heavily upon epidemiologists to provide racially equitable guidance on managing the COVID-19 pandemic. Epidemiologists rely upon the pragmatic collection and analysis of data to inform their policy decision making (Regidor et al., 2007). Data have informed epidemiologists on the community transmission of COVID-19 and the effectiveness of stay-at-home orders (DHCS, 2020). Epidemiologists used data to inform the public on the importance of reducing the rate of transmission (e.g., "flattening the curve") for health care service availability (Maragakis, 2020). Armed with data, healthcare professionals dispersed health outcomes and intervention recommendations to the public. These community-based interventions included an explanation of how these efforts had the capacity to, and later assisted with, "flattening the curve." Despite an effectively demonstrated model for using data to address community healthcare inequities, there is a need to integrate this practice into mental health services.

Mental health policymakers should consider this model in communicating mental health information at consistent intervals to the public using diverse communication types. This can include utilization of social media, collaboration with communities in which at-risk diverse youth are already engaged, targeting schools in diverse communities, and local televised public service announcements that are tailored to youth of color. Mental health policymakers should consider embedding communications in media utilized by diverse youth that includes preventative strategies and symptom management interventions. These communication interventions should incorporate age appropriate data substantiating the findings and recommendations, and age-specific resources. Findings can include prevalence of mental illness, geographical clusters or outbreaks of mental illness, as well as strength-based self-management interventions.

Data Driven Mental Health

Data-driven health communications were integral in addressing COVID-19 and will be invaluable in addressing mental health inequities for youth of color by increasing awareness of risk factors and community support. This model of communication and community intervention will position California mental health plans as inclusive systems serving diverse community needs. Some California mental health plans may have initiated their public health model approach to mental health services. However, the mental health "curve" resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic is projected to include an increase in inequity of mental health service access and suicide rate (Reger et al., 2020).

Data-driven mental health recommendations disseminated to the public will be most effective when they are tailored to and target at-risk populations, particularly diverse at-risk youth of color. California county mental health legislators and administrators should incorporate data-derived methods for providing and recommending mental health information to at-risk youth.

In conclusion, COVID-19 has challenged health care professionals to address the COVID-19 crisis using community-based interventions to address the complex inequities and risks already faced by youth of color. Further, the COVID-19 pandemic has placed children at inequitable risk of mental health complications. By incorporating a data-driven public health approach to mental health services that includes communication and intervention, California mental health plans are well-situated to meet the needs of Californians. Public health professionals have provided a model and demonstrated effectiveness with this intervention model, and with adequate implementation that can be recreated in mental health to better serve diverse and at-risk youth.

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PLAYLISTS

The "playlists" below suggest resources we can use for our own personal growth and development, to deepen our understanding of race, diversity, equity, and inclusion. While we understand the broad definition of diversity and related concepts, we begin our focus on resources related to race and anti-racism.

These playlists are the result of a collaboration by the University of Phoenix Office of Educational Equity, Office of Institutional Effectiveness, Center for Workplace Diversity and Inclusion Research, and Faculty Training and Development.

Playlist #1: Understanding Race and Anti-Racism

Books

o So, You Want to Talk About Race by Ijeoma Oluo

o The Little Book of Race and Restorative Justice by Fania Davis

o Readings for Diversity and Social Justice by Maurianne Adams

o Overcoming Our Racism: The Journey to Liberation by Derald Wing Sue

o Biased by Dr. Jennifer Eberhardt

o Privilege, Power, and Difference by Allan Johnson

o Microaggressions and Marginality – Manifestation, Dynamics and Impact edited by Derald Wing Sue (pages 241-268).

o The Fire Next Time by James Baldwin

o Understanding Everyday Racism by Philomena Essed (Chapters 1, 3)

Articles

o White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack (1989) Peggy McIntosh

o Navigating the Meanings of Social Justice, Teaching for Social Justice, and Multicultural Education (2017) International Journal of Multicultural Education

o Achieving a Culture of Inclusion – A Self-Assessment Tool (2006) University of California

o Approaching Diversity with the Brain in Mind (2018) Strategy + Business

o Historical Trauma and the Health and Wellbeing of Communities of Color (2018) HIV Vaccine Trials Network

o Intersectionality – A Partial List of Resources to Generate Reflection and Conversation Center for Culturally Responsive Evaluation and Assessment

o The Roadmap For Racial Equity- An Imperative For Workforce Development Advocates (2019) National Skills Coalition

o The Unequal Race for Good Jobs (2019) Georgetown University

o What is Intersectionality and Why Does it Matter (2020) Everfi

o Uprooting Racism – Bibliography (2002) Paul Kivel

Videos

o TED Talk: The Urgency of Intersectionality (2016), Kimberlé Crenshaw

o TED Talk: We Need to Talk About Injustice (2012), Bryan Stevenson

o TED Talk: How Racial Bias Works-And How to Disrupt It (2020), Jennifer Eberhardt

o YouTube: Structural Racism: What is it? What Does it Look Like? (2020), Brian Stanley

o YouTube: What I am Learning from My White Grandchildren – Truths about Race TEDx Talk (2014), Anthony Peterson

Playlist # 2: Anti-Racism in Action

Books

o How To Be An Antiracist by Ibram X. Kendi

o White Fragility by Robin DiAngelo

o Uprooting Racism by Paul Kivel

o Living in the Tension by Shelly Tochluk

o When We Fight, We Win by Greg Jobin-Leeds and Agit Arte

Articles

- [Toward a Social Psychology of Race and Race Relations for the Twenty-First Century](#) (2016) Annual Review of Psychology
- [Anti-Racism in Higher Education: A Model for Change](#) (2020) Race and Pedagogy Journal
- [But I'm NOT Racist- Tools for Well-Meaning Whites](#) (2016) Kathy Obear
- [How to Show White Men That Diversity and Inclusion Efforts Need Them](#) (2019) Harvard Business Review
- [Race Equity and Inclusion Action Guide](#) (2015) Annie E. Casey Foundation
- [Language of Difference: Writing about Race, Ethnicity, Social Class, and Disability](#) (2015) Nesbitt-Johnston Writing Center, Hamilton College

Videos

- TED Talk: [How to Deconstruct Racism, One Headline at a Time](#) (2019) Baratunde Thurston
- TED Talk: [The Difference Between Being "Not Racist" and Antiracist](#) (2020) Ibram X. Kendi
- YouTube: [A Mindful Approach to Race and Social Justice](#) (2019) Wisdom 2.0's Mindfulness in America Summit
- YouTube: [White Privilege](#) (2018) Robin DiAngelo
- YouTube: [Color Blind or Color Brave TED Talk](#) (2014) Mellody Hobson

Playlist #3: General Resources

Podcasts

- [1619](#) New York Times
- [Code Switch](#) National Public Radio
- [About Race](#) About Race Radio
- [Intersectionality Matters!](#) African American Policy Forum
- [Momentum](#) Race Forward
- [Scene on Radio](#) Duke University
- [Talking Race with Young Children](#) National Public Radio
- [Uprooting Racism- How White People Can Work for Racial Justice](#) Making Contact
- [Conversations about Race](#) Bold
- [Allyship 101: The Construction of Whiteness](#) Bold
- [Does Diversity Equal White Genocide?](#) Cultural Humanity

Websites

- [What Is Race?](#) (Public Broadcasting System)
- [Raising Race Conscious Children](#)
- [Talking About Race](#) (National Museum of African American History & Culture)
- [Understanding Implicit Bias](#) (Public Broadcasting System)
- [Race and Ethnicity](#) (National Education Association)
- [National Diversity Council](#)
- [National Association for Multicultural Education](#)
- [Facing History and Ourselves](#)
- [Racial Equity Tools](#)
- [Diversity Best Practices](#)
- [Civil Rights History Project](#) (Library of Congress)

Online Resources

- [Implicit Association Test](#) (IAT) Explore your attitudes and beliefs through these quick association tests.
- [Toolkit for Teaching about Racism in the Context of Persistent Health and Healthcare Disparities](#) Society of Teachers of Family Medicine
- [Tips for Self-Care](#) The Root
- [Self-Care for Children](#) National Museum of African American History and Culture
- [Creating Inclusive Classrooms](#) University of Arizona
- [Breaking White Silence and Stepping Up Your Work for Racial Justice](#) Paul Kivel

ANTI-RACISM GLOSSARY

Ally: Someone who makes the commitment and conscious effort to recognize their privilege (based on gender, class, race, sexual identity, etc.) and work in solidarity with other groups in the struggle for justice. Allies understand that it is in their own interest to end all forms of oppression, even those from which they may benefit in concrete ways.[1]

Anti-racism: Anti-racism is defined as the work of actively opposing racism by advocating for changes in political, economic, and social life.[2]

Bias: An uninformed belief based on limited information, often on stereotypes. While all uninformed beliefs about others are negative, especially when directed toward oppressed people, are damaging because they deny the individuality of the person.[3]

Diversity: Diversity includes all the ways in which people differ, and it encompasses all the different characteristics that make one individual or group different from another. A broad definition includes not only include race, ethnicity, and gender — the groups that most often come to mind when the term "diversity" is used — but also age, ethnicity, national origin, religion, abilities, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, education, group memberships, marital status, familial status, language, physical appearance, and other differences. It also involves different ideas, cognition, perspectives, and values.[4]

Equity: Equity seeks to ensure fair treatment, fair access to opportunity, and fairness in access to information and resources for all. While often used interchangeably, it is important to note that equity does not mean equal.[5]

Implicit Bias: Also known as unconscious or hidden bias, implicit biases are negative associations that people unknowingly hold about themselves and others. They are often expressed automatically, without conscious awareness.[6]

Inclusion: The behaviors, practices, and social norms that ensure people feel a sense of belonging.[7]

Intersectionality: Exposing [one's] multiple identities can help clarify the ways in which a person can simultaneously experience privilege and oppression. For example, a Black woman in America does not experience gender inequalities in exactly the same way as a white woman, nor racial oppression identical to that experienced by a Black man. Each race and gender intersection produces a qualitatively distinct life.[8]

Microaggression: 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.[9] Example: Saying "You are very articulate, as a Black woman" or asking an Asian American colleague "Where are you really from?"

Privilege: Unearned social power accorded by the formal and informal institutions of society to ALL members of a dominant group (e.g. white privilege, male privilege, etc.). Privilege is usually invisible to those who have it, but nevertheless it puts them at an advantage over those who do not have it.[10]

Race: For many people, it comes as a surprise that racial categorization schemes were invented by scientists to support worldviews that viewed some groups of people as superior and some as inferior. Race is a social construct, and not an actual biological fact.[11]

Racism: Racism is a system of structured dis-equality where the goods, services, rewards, privileges, and benefits of the society are made available or denied to individuals according to their presumed membership in particular racial groups.[12]

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4. https://www.racialequitytools.org/glossary#anti-racism

5. https://www.fordfoundation.org/about/people/diversity-equity-and-inclusion/

6. https://www.racialequitytools.org/glossary#anti-racism

7. https://builtin.com/diversity-inclusion

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