

## Bystander Training for Microaggressions

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**Significance:** Dr. Derald Sue of Columbia University defines microaggressions as “the everyday slights, indignities, put downs, and insults that people of color, women, LGBT populations or those who are marginalized experience in their day-to-day interactions with people. They happen casually, frequently, and often without any harm intended.” They can take the form of brief and commonplace verbal, behavioral, or environmental acts or situations. Although seemingly minor, microaggressions can trigger anger, depression, and lower work productivity and problem-solving skills. And whether intentional or not, microaggressions make work and school hostile and less validating, causing erosion of confidence and achievement in students/trainees. Often the perpetrators of microaggressions may not be aware of the damaging impact of their words. Bystanders who witness microaggressions may feel caught off guard and lack the skills to respond to the microaggression in real time, resulting in feelings of self-recrimination after the fact and leading the victim of the microaggression to feel unsupported and further alienated.

Our goal is to develop a bystander intervention program for BUMC faculty to recognize and to respond to microaggressions observed in the hospital or clinic. We aim to create a community at BUMC where all members feel welcomed and our diverse backgrounds and experiences are respected and valued.

**Methods:** We designed and presented a faculty lunch workshop on bystander responses to microaggressions. Preparation for the workshop included consultation with experts (Dr. Harris, Dr. Sue, and others), a literature review and field survey, attending campus microaggression programs, and employing a design thinking process. An acronym for responding to microaggressions, LIFT (Lights on, Impact vs intent, Full stop, Teach), was created and presented as a pocket card. Actual vignettes taken from BUMC faculty surveys were discussed with workshop attendees, who role-played how they would respond. Under an IRB-approved protocol, we administered pre- and post-workshop surveys to participants. To track surveys, attendees were asked to self-assign a unique anonymous identifier on both surveys. On a scale of 1-6, attendees were asked to rank how comfortable they felt identifying and responding to microaggressions pre- and post-workshop. Participants were asked if they had experienced microaggressions, and if so, what aspect(s) of their identity was targeted, as well as what parts of the workshop could be expanded, reduced, or eliminated. Paired t test was used to compare pre-/post-survey responses.

**Results:** Twenty-three participants attended the workshop. Surveys without identifiers accounted for differences in response group size. 16/19 participants reported having experienced microaggressions, with 12/16 of those experiencing microaggressions targeted at more than one group identity (e.g. race, sexual orientation). Eighteen respondents who completed both pre- and post-surveys and were tracked by anonymous identifiers rated their comfort with identifying microaggressions at  $3.6 \pm 1.2$  pre-survey and  $4.5 \pm 0.7$  post-survey,  $p=0.002$ . They rated their comfort with responding to microaggressions at  $2.5 \pm 1.3$  pre-survey and  $3.8 \pm 1.0$  post-survey,  $p<0.0001$ . Thus, participants felt significantly more comfortable identifying and responding to microaggressions after the workshop than before the workshop.

**Innovation:** We employed a “design thinking” brainstorming process with our MFL group in building the project. We created a LIFT pocket card of tips on confronting microaggressions and real-life vignettes for participants to role-play their responses. This project was designed to be flexible so it could be scaled up for campus-wide implementation.

**Challenges and Limitations:** We discovered a general lack of centralized resources for microaggression training at BU. There are scattered efforts on bystander training located in different departments and schools without a coordinating structure in place. We found limited access to microaggressions-related information and training. Little of this work has been published or is available on line for dissemination.

**Next Steps:** We aim to: 1) build a standardized format/tool kit for bystander training that may be customized to different groups but maintain a consistent central theme; 2) publish the work from our project; and 3) advocate for a central home and project leader (i.e. Office of Equity, Vitality, and Inclusion) to facilitate campus-wide implementation, uphold continuous improvement, and ensure sustainability.