Purpose & Significance of this Work

As mentors, there is a lot of power that you hold in your thoughts, words, and actions. It is important to acknowledge and address this power, which includes privilege and the ability to knowingly or unknowingly perpetuate bias and microaggressions. This is a life-long process, which occurs through transformative learning in order to challenge assumptions and beliefs in pursuit of justice and change.

Presentation Overview

To initiate this process, we seek to address the following topics today, including power, privilege, types of oppression, microaggressions, and to then tie these concepts together with two interactive cases.

On that note, I will proceed with a land acknowledgement.

Land Acknowledgement

We would like to acknowledge this sacred land on which the University of Toronto operates. It has been a site of human activity for [thousands] of years. This land is the territory of the Huron-Wendat and Petun First Nations, the Seneca, and most recently, the Mississaugas of the Credit.

The territory was the subject of the Dish with One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement between the Iroquois Confederacy and Confederacy of the Ojibwe and allied nations to peaceably share and care for the resources around the Great Lakes.

Today, the meeting place of Toronto is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work in the community, on this territory.

In addition to acknowledging this land, it is also important to reflect on the anti-Indigeneity that so actively permeates every facet of our society. As a future physician, it was utterly disturbing to hear about the death of Joyce Echaquan in Quebec. In her final moments of life, she knew she was not safe and used Facebook Live to capture the outright racism and violence she experienced in hospital. This included slurs from nurses degrading her humanity instead of life-saving assistance when she screamed in distress and asked for help. These cries for help
include the many kidnapped and murdered Indigenous women whose families have not received justice. This is the Canada that we live in and we need to work towards an anti-oppression that addresses this reality.

**Power & Privilege**

Power and privilege can be hard to conceptualize, which makes it easy to continue unchecked. Like a fish that has only ever known water, privilege is the reality you swim in and were born into. To help identify some of these privileges, we are going to do an activity called the Privilege Checklist. As I read each of these points out loud, please note whether the point applies to you or does not.

**Verbal Privilege Checklist Activity**

[Read through the slides]

**Quotation**

Reckoning your privilege can be uncomfortable and can evoke a variety of feelings. These are feelings that you should reflect on rather than ignore, but this quotation sums up our hope.

[Read the quotation on the slide]

**Types of Oppression**

Oppression is layered, spanning engagement with individuals and with systems. We tend to focus a lot on the interpersonal, which is a result of the individual. Individual oppression includes people’s own beliefs and actions that perpetuate oppression. This can manifest as the interpersonal when these beliefs or actions are vocalized or acted upon another person. That will be a focus of a bulk of our discussion today as well, but it is also important to recognize the role of systemic oppression, which occurs through policies and practices at organizations AND across institutions, throughout history.

**The Four Dimension of Racism**

More specific to racism, these four areas can manifest towards marginalized racial groups, such as Black and Indigenous communities, and act in a layered manner.

**Microaggressions**

We just discussed the various types of oppression and racism, and microaggressions fall under interpersonal oppression and racism. There are three subcategories of microaggressions, which include microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidation.
Microassaults include a conscious and intentional harmful action or word against a racialized person. This includes use of racial slurs, displaying swastikas, or deliberately serving a white person before a racialized person at a restaurant.

Microinsults are rudeness, insensitivity or demeaning of a racialized person because of their racial heritage or identity. This includes asking a Black colleague how she got her job, implying that she did not deserve her job and instead was awarded it through affirmative action or a quota system.

Finally, microinvalidations are the subtle exclusion or negation of the thoughts, feelings, or experiences of racialized people. This includes asking a racialized person "Where are you really from?" when they told you Canada and you didn’t believe them. This reinforces the sentiment that racialized people can’t actually be Canadian, excluding them from who is perceived to be integral to Canadian culture.

**Intent vs. Impact**

A question that may be going through your mind is, what if the person didn’t mean it? What if it was just a minor mistake? That doesn’t actually make the person racist, does it?

The issue within our society is that we are more afraid of being CALLED racist than of our thoughts, words, and actions being harmful to racialized people. As is shown in this picture, if someone were to run over your foot, you would be more concerned with the damage to your foot than the question of whether the person was a good driver. Clearly the driver made a mistake, regardless of their previous driving record. Similarly, if we see that something we have said or done is harmful to a racialized person, it is important to not make that situation about us, and instead to see what we can do to address that situation. It is not up to us to state that that person is offended too easily and should toughen up or get over it. It is up to us to empathetically consider others and ways we perpetuate racism, even when done unconsciously.

This is summarized nicely by a writer, Rebekah Bastian, who stated “Good intentions are important, but the impacts of people’s actions are the true measure of goodness. By channeling intentions into learning about biases and the ways that they manifest into microaggressions, work relationships can be strengthened and harm to marginalized groups can be reduced.”

Before we discuss a set of cases to help us understand and address microaggressions in a practical way, it is important to unpack racism and go over a few terms.

**Unpacking Racism**

[Read slides]
You now have the definitions of each of these terms, so it will be helpful to provide an example of microaggressions connected to each of these.

For Anti-Indigeneity, a microinsult would be a comment stating that Indigenous peoples protesting pipeline development over their land is unmerited and that they should be grateful for the reserves that they were “gifted” by the government.

For Anti-Blackness, a microinvalidation would be telling a Black person that every interaction YOU have had with police ended fine and made you feel safe, so that you don’t see why Black communities feel unsafe and brutalized by the police. A microassault would be using the n-word.

For misogynoir, a microinsult could include describing a Black co-worker who shows leadership and engages as frequently as any other member of your team as loud or aggressive.

Lastly, a microinvalidation that perpetuates the Model Minority Myth could include stating that an Asian student who is having difficulty in math is just being lazy because math should come naturally to them.

Hopefully these examples have provided you with some context. Now we can proceed with the case studies.

[Read slides]