Combatting Unconscious Bias and Preventing Microaggressions: A Professional Duty

Creating Safe Spaces by Taking A.C.T.I.O.N. Against Microaggressions

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Disclosures

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Learning Outcomes

▪ Examine personal frameworks and unconscious biases and the role they can play in working with clients and colleagues of diverse backgrounds.

▪ Apply the Academy’s Code of Ethics to cultural competence in dietetic practice.

▪ Summarize methods to build and practice cultural humility, and identify resources for use by nutrition professionals to develop their cultural competence.
Recognizing When You are Impacted by Microaggressions

The ACTION Model: A Reactive Approach to Managing Microaggressions in the Working Environment

Think DEEP: A Proactive Approach
Recognizing When You are Impacted by Microaggressions
Microaggressions are...

Everyday slights, indignities, put-downs and insults that people of color, women, LGBT+ populations and other marginalized people experience in their day-to-day interactions. Appears to be a compliment, but contains a “metacommunication” or hidden insult to the target groups to which it is delivered (Sue, 2010).

Directed toward an individual due to their group identity, often automatically and unconsciously. Usually committed by well-intentioned individuals who are unaware of the hidden messages being communicated (Adams, M., Bell, L. A., & Griffin, P., 2007).
Let’s Chat

▪ Please state your associated group identities.

▪ Examples: gender, generation type, geographic origin
Taxonomy of Microaggressions

- **Microassaults**: Explicit racial derogation characterized primarily by a verbal or nonverbal attacks meant to hurt the intended victim through name-calling, avoidant behavior, or purposeful discriminatory actions.

- **Microinsults**: Subtle snubs, frequently unknown to the perpetrator, but clearly convey a hidden insulting message.

- **Microinvalidations**: Communications that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person.
What is Mindset?

- **Fixed mindset:** belief that abilities are less likely to flourish than those with a growth mindset

- **Growth mindset:** belief that abilities can be developed

- This perspective supports how to properly foster an environment of learning based on mindset of educators
Growth Mindset in Working Environments

- Mindsets cause differences in employee behavior and outcomes by shaping the following:
  - Their goals
  - Their beliefs about effort
  - Their views about setbacks
  - Their learning strategies
Let’s Chat

- How does fixed mindset encourage microaggressive behavior in working environments?
Triggered Tough Conversations

- Microaggressions often trigger difficult dialogues in working environments because they are found to be offensive to employees who directly or indirectly confront perpetrators who prefer to avoid the topic or feel falsely accused (Sue & Constantine, 2007)

- The dialogues or interactions become emotionally charged, producing misunderstandings, conflicts, and hostility between the parties (Watt, 2007)

- Stakeholders are not provided with appropriate resources to deal with the potential, explosive nature of the interactions…nor recognize the microaggressions when they occur, feel uncomfortable with unconscious bias-related topics, and lack the preparedness skills needed to facilitate difficult dialogues (Young, 2003)
The A.C.T.I.O.N. framework was introduced by Chueng, Ganote, & Souza (2016) as a response to microaggressive behavior in learning environments

The acronym provides guidance for bias behavior

Encourages stakeholders to address microaggressions without escalating the situation
Taking A.C.T.I.O.N. Framework

(Chueng, Ganote, & Souza, 2016)
A.C.T.I.O.N. → Ask

Ask clarifying questions to help understand intentions

Allows for the individual to explain a loaded account that could be perceived negatively

Helps to clear up expressions or statements of avoidance, fear, or unawareness made based on bias perceptions
Let’s Chat

- What are some examples of clarifying questions you could ask the stakeholder who said the microaggression?
Example Questions to Ask

▪ “I want to make sure that I understand what you were saying. Were you saying that…?”

▪ “Can you tell me what you were hoping to communicate with that comment?”

▪ “Can you please help me understand what you meant by that?”
A.C.T.I.O.N. → Carefully Listen

Carefully listen

Allows for the individual to cautiously decipher potential mixed messages that may lead to a microaggressive experience

Helps to ensure an accurate interpretation of an expression or statement
Let’s Chat

▪ How does bias affect how we listen?
If The Other Party Disagrees With Your Paraphrase...

- You could end the conversation.
- If you suspect they are trying to “cover their tracks,” you may consider making a statement about the initial comment.
  - “I’m glad to hear I misunderstood you; because, as you know, such comments can be…”
If The Other Party Agrees With Your Paraphrase…

- Explore their intent behind making the comment.
  - “Can you tell me what you were hoping to communicate with that comment?”
  - “Can you please help me understand what you meant by that?”
A.C.T.I.O.N. → **Tell**

**Tell** others what you observed as a microaggression, in a factual manner

Allows for the individual to converse with a thought partner to verify and validate the microaggressive experience

Creates a counterspace so you can find alternatives in addressing microaggressions. Provides:

- A sanctuary
- Support & validation
- Opportunity to identify best practices to respond
Let’s Chat

- How would you tell the microaggressor, in a factual manner, what you observed?
Examples of How To Tell

▪ “I noticed that . . .”
▪ “. . . made me feel . . .”
▪ “I felt hurt when he/she said that . . .”
A.C.T.I.O.N. → Impact

**Impact** exploration: ask for, or state, the potential impact of such a statement or action on others; without putting the target of the microaggression, if someone else, on the spot.

Allows for the review of potential risks or consequences:

If I respond: Could my physical safety be in danger? Will the person become defensive and will this lead to an argument? How will this affect my relationship with this person?

If I don’t respond: Will I regret not saying something? Does that convey that I accept the behavior or statement?
Let’s Chat

- How would you explore impact with the microaggressor?
Examples of How To Explore Impact

▪ “What do you think people think when they hear that type of comment?”

▪ “What message do you think such a comment sends?”

▪ “What impact do you think that comment could have on…”
A.C.T.I.O.N. → Own

Own your own thoughts and feelings around the microaggression’s impact

Allows for the individual to reflect and come to terms with the microaggressive event

Helps to ensure awareness and knowledge of bias
Let’s Chat

- How would you own your own feelings and emotions if you were involved in this case?
Examples of How To Own Your Feelings and Emotions

▪ When I hear your comment, I think/feel…”

▪ “Many people might take that comment to mean…”

▪ “That comment can perpetuate negative stereotypes and assumptions about…”

▪ “Such negative comments can cause division and defensiveness. I would like to think that is not your intent.”
A.C.T.I.O.N. → Next Steps

Next Steps: Request appropriate action be taken

Prompts accountability of the individual and others

Helps begin thinking through our decisions, use more effort to process information, adjust to snap decisions, and increase motivation & effort to lead without bias
Let’s Chat

- What are some examples of appropriate next steps that could be taken?
Examples of Next Steps

▪ “This is a learning community, and such comments make it difficult for us to focus on learning because people feel offended. So I am going to ask you to refrain from such comments in the future. Can you do that please?”

▪ “I’d like you to use Mustafa’s real name moving forward. Can you do that please?”

▪ “I’d appreciate it if you’d stop making these types of negative comments because…”
Think DEEP: A Proactive Approach to Managing Microaggressions in the Learning Environment
Think DEEP

- DEVELOP appropriate language
- ENCOURAGE open and honest dialogue
- EMPOWER stakeholders to share without ridicule
- PROCESS information shared to build an inclusive environment

RESPECT & ACCEPTANCE

Think DEEP
Let’s Chat

- How do YOU create an environment that fosters respect and acceptance?
Planning for a Culture of Diversity and Inclusion
Essentials for Planning

- Engage in organizational dialogue
- Build climate of support over time
- Connect to core organizational mission & values
- Review existing strengths & weaknesses; integrate & build upon existing programs
- Define rationale & goals through appropriate processes
- Develop strategies, structures, & support to advance goals
- Assess, revise, modify, rethink
- Recognize that this process is ongoing and rarely linear
Comprehensive Incorporation

Articulated organizational commitment

Leadership, structure, and staffing

SMART goals and outcomes

Policies and practices

Mobility

Collaboration and partnership
In Closing – Takeaways

- Practice using the A.C.T.I.O.N. model when you encounter microaggressions.

- Identify at least one new way to develop appropriate language that avoid labels & creates a judgment-free zone.

- Intervene in the moment a microaggression occurs so you can help empower stakeholders to share without ridicule.

- Acknowledge your stakeholders’ meaningful contributions & redirect discussions that veer off topic.


References


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RDNs’ Ethical Obligation to Bridging the Gap

Krista Yoder Latortue, MPH, RDN, LDN, PMP, PBA, FAND
Disclosures

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- Employer
  - Family Food, LLC – Executive Director
Academy’s Strategic Plan

Academy Vision, Mission

Vision: A world where all people thrive through the transformative power of food and nutrition

Mission: Accelerate improvements in global health and well-being through food and nutrition
Academy’s Strategic Plan

Impact Goals:
- Increase equitable access to nutrition and lifestyle services
- Improve health equity through access to medical nutrition therapy services

Strategies:
- Increase the diversity and cultural competence of the workforce to reflect the communities they serve
The Gap

When there is a gap...

- access is compromised.
- care is compromised.
- rapport is compromised.
The Gap

United States Population Demographics

- White
- Non-White

Reported RDN Demographics

- White
- Non-White
The Academy’s Code of Ethics

“The protection of the individuals, groups, organizations, communities or populations with whom the practitioner works and interacts.”
The Academy’s Code of Ethics

Social responsibility for local, regional, national, global nutrition and well-being (Justice)

a. Collaborate with others to reduce health disparities and protect human rights.

b. Promote fairness and objectivity with fair and equitable treatment.

"Of all the forms of inequality, injustice in health care is the most shocking and inhumane."

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
Bridging the Gap

Existing Work

- Diversity & Inclusion Committee
  - Diversity Promotion Grants
  - Diversity Action Award
  - Diversity Leaders Program
  - Diversity Liaisons
  - Diversity Mini-Grants
  - Diversity Promotion Grant
- Member Interest Groups
- Diversify Dietetics
Bridging the Gap

Individual/
Self

Organizational

Systems

Societal
Bridging the Gap

Individual/Self

Organizational

Systems

Societal

Individual/Self
Bridging the Gap

How biases affect the Gap:

▪ impact the amount of time spent with patients
▪ influence communication with patients and their families
▪ hamper the capacity to feel and express empathy toward patients
▪ affect the types of treatment that is recommended
▪ interfere with the capacity to interact positively with patients and their families
Bridging the Gap

Do my biases hamper my capacity to feel/express empathy or affect my communication, treatment, or time spent with patients and their families?
Bridging the Gap

Do I ever perceive that I am less comfortable with patients who are of a different race than I am?
Have patients or their families, directly or through satisfaction surveys, raised concern about my attitude or the way I communicate with them?
Bridging the Gap

Societal

Systems

Diagram:
- Patient 1:
  - Education
  - Health insurance coverage, access to care
  - Health literacy
  - Trust in doctors, healthcare; adherence to therapy

- Patient 2:
  - Nutrition, obesity
  - Neighborhood resources, safety
  - Life stress
  - Disparate health care

Birth

Death
(4.4 year gap)

76.7

72.3*
Bridging the Gap
Bridging the Gap

Know the History

“The African American community has historically had unique negative experiences with health care providers. Nutrition professionals who aren’t knowledgeable and sensitive to these experiences and beliefs may have a hard time gaining the trust and confidence of their clients and patients.”

~Tamara Melton, MS, RDN, cofounder of Diversify Dietetics, Inc. Today’s Dietitian July 2019
Bridging the Gap

The Food System

Labor

Distribution

Production
Practice Applications

- Examine and acknowledge individual implicit bias.
- Seek opportunities to learn more about systemic racism within healthcare.
- Continue to explore and learn more about social determinants of health.
Conclusion
References & Resources

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