



AN UNLIKELY DUO

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Racism has been a stain on the soul of the United States for centuries. Generations of workers were born, lived and died only knowing a world where communities, neighborhoods and churches were identified by the color of their inhabitants. Their jobs began with compulsory sexual harassment, cyber security and anti-discrimination trainings. Despite efforts, decades of struggle, racism, discrimination and bigotry remain pervasive in every vein of the American workforce even those whose mission is to improve the lives of those they serve like communication sciences and disorders (CSD) and the field of speech language pathology (SLP).

Communication Sciences & Disorders (CSD) researchers and practitioners are not explicitly racist. In fact, most are committed to treating all patients equally. However, they practice in an inherently racist system. A system which has been built upon subconscious prejudices and implicit biases. In a system built upon inequality and systemic prejudice, individual partiality is often unrecognizable and often acceptable. To concede to the status quo is to accept these institutions as they are without awareness that they must evolve and the desire to see that change. The attention that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought to the existence of racial disparities should be utilized by both practitioners and academics as an opportunity to actively learn and expand their knowledge on cultural competence, cultural humility, sensitivity, diversity and inclusion.

Now that the platform has been established and awareness has been raised, the time has arrived to end the ingrained, or structural, racism, as well as implicit bias in CSD. Racism is not a condition that impacts only the marginalized population. Racism is a problem for all individuals because it limits the advancement, discovery, assistance and growth that all members of society can achieve.

What is the remedy? Articles addressing racism in clinical practice and academia suggest many of the

same things—to fight racism and discrimination, we all need to recognize, name and understand the attitudes and actions of others. We need to be open to identifying and controlling our own implicit biases. We need to be able to manage overt bigotry safely, learn from it and educate others. These responsibilities need to be a part of CSD research and education, as well as institutional policy. We need to practice and model tolerance, respect, open-mindedness and peace for all individuals. Everyone has an obligation, and everyone can take actionable steps to advance this goal in their work, community and personal interactions. Only in a world where we are constantly striving for equity and justice, can we all maximize our potential.

In the fall of 2019, a colleague suggested that I meet a senior faculty member in the Department of CSD at my university who had proposed an interesting research hypothesis. Later that week, I met the individual who would quickly become a favorite collaborator, a trusted mentor and an enduring friend. Superficially we were an unlikely pair—I was a white, female, junior faculty economist and he was a well-published, senior, black, PHD, SLP—but together we have produced the most interesting, thought provoking and impactful research that has had projected my career to a new level.

On paper we might have appeared opposites, but our fundamental understanding of research, commitment to standard and ethics and intellectual curiosity were highly comparable. This collaboration illustrates the strides that can be made and the milestones that can be achieved when we accept, recognize and understand one another choosing to grow out of our differences using these lessons to educate and inform others.

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