



STRATEGIC MEASURES TO REDUCE RACISM & PREJUDICE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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— ABSTRACT —

Racism is deeply rooted in the educational, health, and social systems in the United States of America. Students from minority backgrounds face more challenges in higher education compared to students from non-minority backgrounds. For example, the lack of representation of educators can contribute to a feeling of not belonging and implicit bias and prejudice in higher education. These challenges can impact the success of minority students, as well as their mental health. The objective of this review is to highlight the different types of challenges minority students face in higher education and to provide possible solutions to tackle these challenges.

KEY WORDS: higher education, microaggressions, racism, implicit bias

Introduction:

Elocutionist Hallie Quinn Brown paved the way for speech-language pathologists (SLPs) of color today. She taught oral language and literacy skills to African American children in both public and plantation schools in South Carolina and Mississippi from 1873-1875 (Duchan & Hyter, 2008). Brown opened the door for people of color to access higher education, necessary as a means to overcome the many obstacles they faced. In the fields of speech-language pathology and audiology (AuD), approximately 8% of clinicians are people of color, with 2.5% identifying as Black or African American and about 5.8% identifying as Hispanic or Latino (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association [ASHA], 2020). This lack of representation in educators, researchers, and clinicians in these fields contributes to racism in higher education, research, and clinical practices.

The aims of this manuscript are: 1) to bring awareness to implicit biases that contribute to prejudice and microaggressions; 2) to highlight the challenges minority students face in higher education; and 3) to

provide strategic measures for reducing biases, prejudice, and racism in higher education. Awareness of these challenges will aid in developing a safe space and a sense of community for minority students in colleges and universities.

Challenges Faced by Minority Students:

It is not uncommon to hear stories of racism experienced by minority students in predominately white institutions (PWI). Minority students are more likely to experience harassment, such as bias incidents and hate crimes, than their white peers (Dwivedi, 2018). Ginsberg (2018) investigated successful strategies that Black SLPs used to persevere in their predominately white academic programs. Participants in Ginsberg's (2018) study attended PWIs and all reported experiencing microaggressions (e.g. comments disguised as hidden racism), isolation, and culture shock. Further, students of color at PWIs reported they often were intimidated or bullied by their peers, professors, and/or supervisors. Bullying is not always physical. Some examples of bullying and/or

microaggressions students reported include covert comments about their appearance, dialect, or education, unjust treatment/clinical reviews, peers intentionally withholding important information and/or leaving students out of study groups. Microaggressions contribute to isolation and lack of success in higher education (Hubain, Allen, Harris, & Linder, 2016; as cited in Dwivedi, 2018).

Microaggressions and hate speech also have an impact on the mental health of students in higher education. Marginalized groups may experience feelings of alienation and vulnerability (Kaplin, 1992; Liao, Weng, & West, 2016). Students from these marginalized groups often question their purpose and capabilities in their academic programs. In addition, these students may be unable to take full advantage of the educational opportunities available at their colleges or universities and report that the emotional scarring is every bit as real as physical abuse (Kaplin, 1992). Individuals from minority groups do not have to directly experience hate speech or microaggressions to be impacted by it as it denigrates everyone (Kaplin, 1992). Students who experience hate speech or microaggressions may begin to lose motivation and hope in their academic programs (Ginsberg, 2018). Instead, they may begin to suffer from increased anxiety, depression, and/or stress (Liao, Weng, & West, 2016).

Strategic Measures to Reduce Racism:

A first step in tackling racism in higher education is to increase educator, supervisor, and student awareness of their implicit biases. Implicit bias refers to the attitudes or stereotypes, which are activated involuntarily, that affect our decisions, understanding, and actions insensibly (Ohio State University, n.d.). An effective tool that is used to identify biases is Project Implicit from Harvard University <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>. There are several implicit association tests (IAT) that identify and address bias regarding race, transgender, and/or disability. These tests administered to and completed by educators, supervisors, and students would bring consciousness to biases and prejudices of individuals of different races and backgrounds, as well as their effects on these individuals. Bringing awareness to these biases will increase awareness of actions and interactions with others.

Tackling racism in higher education also combats racism in clinical practice. Everyone, students and educators alike, all have implicit biases. A good practice would be to have students complete an IAT to bring to consciousness their biases. Our implicit biases affect how we interact with our clients. For example, white physicians were less likely to refer black patients with symptoms for thrombolysis for specific medical care because they implicitly associated black

patients with being less cooperative (Perception Institute, n.d.). Increased awareness of these internalized beliefs is necessary when assessing and treating clients in the clinic or in externships, as well as interacting with peers. Recognition of and alertness to implicit biases helps to ensure that we interact and treat colleagues and clients equitably, providing them with the best level of care.

A second step to tackling racism in higher education is to include and embed cultural humility workshops and/or courses into the curriculum. Although all schools and programs have clear anti-racism guidelines in the department handbook, they should be reviewed annually with students, professors, and clinical supervisors. Institutional responses should be outlined in the handbook to emphasize the seriousness and commitment of the program's zero tolerance for racism. Furthermore, while academic programs list a link to the university's anti-discrimination, anti-harassment policies on the department website and/or handbook to address unacceptable behaviors, these policies are often not enforced.

There may be some resistance from faculty, supervisors, and students to participate in these workshops or assessments. Although some may even question the necessity, it is this simple: racism and racial prejudice are intertwined. "If racial prejudice is not reduced, it could lead to racism, and if racism is not addressed, it could lead to more prejudice" (Hampton & Lee, n.d.). Institutions need to identify potential biases that affect behaviors and decisions to eradicate the cycle of prejudice and racism (Perception Institute, n.d.). Administrators, educators, and clinical supervisors are in positions of power; thus, education and policies are needed to address inherent biases (Hampton & Lee, n.d.). Institutions must commit to implementing specific procedures for decision making. They can also encourage the staff to be conscious of the hazards of implicit biases to prevent acting on these biases which may go against their conscious values and beliefs (Implicit Bias Explained, 2017).

A third step to tackling racism in higher education is to increase representation of minorities in administrative, faculty, and clinical lines consummately. Diversifying the faculty creates a voice for the underrepresented populations in decision-making, as well as a community. Hiring qualified Black, Hispanic, or Latinx faculty members to PWI creates visibility and diverse role models. Diversifying the curriculum by identifying varied and inclusive learning materials (e.g. norms in minority cultures) and providing workshops to address stereotypes in cultures can help overcome barriers leading to increased opportunities for minority students and clients. Creating diversity opportunities in higher education allows students

to become allies with their peers and future clients. Students educated in this type of environment will develop better critical thinking skills, empathy, perspective-taking, and think more open-mindedly, which will prepare them for diverse work environments (Drexel University School of Education, n.d.).

Conclusion:

Overcoming racism in higher education is ongoing and feasible with the collaboration of administrators, faculty, clinical supervisors, staff, and students. Identifying and eliminating microaggressions creates a supportive work and learning environment for all students and faculty. Instituting and enacting violations of anti-racist policies indicates a program's commitment to creating a safe environment for its entire community. Checking our implicit bias is a major step to eliminating the continuous cycle of prejudice and racism. Recognizing and admitting that we all have biases and prejudices is an important first step and necessary to ensure that they do not affect how we interact with others. Acknowledging and talking about racism, prejudices, and injustices of underrepresented populations necessitates the importance of this issue to end it (Gregory, 2020). COVID-19, the "Black Lives Matter," and "Me Too" movements have made clear that inequities exist. These three seminal events have put to the forefront the inequalities that minorities and minority students confront. Now, more than ever, there is greater alertness and awareness of cultural, racial, and gender experiences and differences. An accepting and safe environment to discuss these issues openly, free from reproach is needed. As SLPs and audiologists, our voices cannot be silent. We are at a pivotal moment and should seize this opportunity to address these issues.

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