Women of PWN
Dismantling Racism

Language, Power and Privilege
March 30, 2017
Overall Objectives

• Understand how language impacts power, privilege and racism

• Identify different types of language and their impacts on power and privilege

• Share space and examples of the power of language when it comes to race, power and privilege
Presenters

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Mission of WPDR

To create a space for open dialogue to address racism among ourselves and our communities in a spirit of cultural humility
Our Commitment

We acknowledge a long history of systemic racism, institutional privilege, as well as past and recent brutality.

We are here, with humility, to stand in solidarity and hold safe space for our sisters and ourselves.

We commit, as white women, to being uncomfortable in order to learn and grow as we challenge racism in ourselves and our community.

We stand in sisterhood, solidarity, and action!
Language, Power & Privilege

How we got here....

Identifying troublesome language.....

Calling it out....

Working through it....
Olivia Ford

March 2017
Microaggressions: Definitions

***Nothing “micro” (small) about them!***

- "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative slights and insults toward members of oppressed groups." - Kevin Nadal, Ph.D.
  - Coined in academia in the 1970s by psychiatrist Chester Pierce, M.D.
  - Specifically described race-based insults and slights toward Black people by non-Black people

**Three categories:**

- **Microassault:** conscious, intentional discriminatory action (use of a derogatory term, avoiding someone due to an aspect of their identity)
- **Microinsult:** comment or nonverbal communication that conveys rudeness or insensitivity
- **Microinvalidation:** communication that excludes, ignores or dismisses feelings or experiences of people who experience bias
Examples (or, “Death by a Thousand Cuts”)

• "illegal aliens need to come to this country the right way!"
• "wow, great speech. you're sooooo well-spoken."
• "the neighborhood freaked me out. there were all these creepy Black people around."
• "I'm not racist, but ..."
• "that girl's hot, but I'm not usually into Asians."
• "that guy's hot; too bad he's positive."
• "you have HIV? do you and your partner have sex?"
• "you work in HIV? that must be so sad/scary/hard."
• "I may be white, but in my soul I'm Blacker than most Black people!"
• "the cops stopped you for nothing? you are so clean-cut and well-dressed, you don't deserve that."
• "I did everything right, I'm not promiscuous or a druggie, and I still became HIV positive."
• "I don't understand why those people are so angry. what did I ever do to them?"
Harmful Impact of Microaggressions

• Research shows that microaggressions:
  • Are a continuing reality for people of color in day-to-day interactions in academic, social and public settings
  • Their *invisibility* may render them more harmful to people of color than hate crimes and actions of overt white supremacist groups
  • Lead people of color to feel excluded, untrustworthy, abnormal
  • Drains psychological and spiritual energies; contributes to chronic fatigue, frustration, anger
  • Negatively affect mental health of those on the receiving end
  • Create a hostile and invalidating work or campus climate
  • Create physical health problems
  • Lend the broader society cues that devalue certain identities
  • Lower work productivity and problem solving abilities
  • Underpin inequities in education, employment and health care

*Adapted from "Racial Microaggressions in Everyday Life," by Derald Wing Sue, Ph.D.*
Intent vs. Impact

• Microaggressive statements may be invisible to people saying them

• 97% of thought is unconscious ("I'll see it when I believe it")

• *People's individual nice behavior or good intentions do not negate systemic bias*

• “Intent" conversation = "what they are" (and say they aren’t - racist, sexist, HIV-phobic, etc.)

• “Impact" conversation = "what they did" (hurt other people, further marginalize or oppress people)
  • “Impact” takes the person who said or did the hurtful thing out of the center
  • Places the person who was hurt in the center

*Partially adapted from "Intent vs. Impact: Why Your Intentions Don’t Really Matter," by Jamie Utt*
“Get Out”: Scary, ‘Cuz It’s Real
Reference Links:

• http://www.thebody.com/content/78275/microaggression-and-bias-in-the-hiv-community--and.html
• http://www.thewellproject.org/hiv-information/why-race-matters-women-and-hiv
• http://everydayfeminism.com/2013/07/intentions-dont-really-matter/
Tranisha Arzah

March 2017
Racial Bias in Language

By Tranisha Arzah
Objectives

• Language is our foundation
• Unpacking Coded language
• What is racially coded language
• Examples of racially coded words
• Examples of racially coded phrases expressed on social media
• Linguistic Racism/Discrimination
• The Art of Code Switching
• The Subtle Linguistics of Polite White Supremacy
• Developing a shared language and analysis
Language is our foundation

• The foundation of any collective action, of any community, is language.
  • Language influences how we feel and how we react to things.

• Biased language refers to words and phrased that are considered prejudiced, offensive and hurtful.

• The relationship between race, language and racism play key roles in reflecting and defining the way human societies are structured.

• Language embodies both power and privilege
Unpacking Coded Language

• What is coded language?

  • Coded messages have words or symbols which represent other words, so that the message is secret unless you know the system behind the code.
  
  • ... If someone is using coded language, they are expressing their opinion in an indirect way, usually because that opinion is likely to offend people.
What is Racially Coded Language?

• These passive aggressive racist statements are also known as racially coded language. They hide obviously oppressive language by appearing as common vocabulary, good intentions, or seemingly “objective” common sense. They are sneaky.

• Racially coded language is similar to microaggressions, but rather than directed at a specific individual, these phrases are most often used in discussions about social issues and current events.
Examples of racially coded words

• “Inner-City”
• “Shady” or “Sketchy”
• “Law and Order” “Criminal”
• “Welfare' and 'Food Stamps”
• “Sharia Law”
• “Illegal Alien”

• “Black on black crime”, “Radical Islam”, Bossy, sassy and uppity”, “Religious Freedom”, and “Middle Class”
Examples of racially coded phrases expressed on social media

- ‘Not Meaning to be Racist’
  - Example: “I am not a racist.
    - Impact not Intent.

- ‘Illegal’
  - Example: “Illegal immigrant” or “illegal rioting”
    - People are not illegal.

- ‘Politically Correct’
  - Example: “You’re being too politically correct.”
    - It’s about using language that doesn’t harm someone else and oppress an entire community.

- ‘Playing the Race Card’
  - Example: “Stop playing the race card and making everything about race.”
    - This denies the plausibility of racism.

- ‘Aggressive’ and ‘Divisive’
  - Example: “Can you be more polite? You’re being aggressive and turning the cause into a divisive one.”
    - Tone policing ends u shifting attention away from someone’s experience of oppression and onto how they are supposed to react.
Linguistic Racism/Discrimination

- What is Linguistic Racism? What is Linguistic Discrimination?
  - When language is used to empower white dominant culture over against another racial group.
  - Is the unfair treatment of an individual based solely on the person's use of language.
- Standard American English (SAE) privilege- It’s not that all English is privileged. Instead, the US tends to idealize Standard American English (SAE). SAE is essentially the neutral “non-accent” mostly associated with the suburban Midwest.
  - 1. You’re Assumed to be American
  - 2. Your Language Affords You Easy Access to Information
  - 3. You’re Assumed to Be Intelligent, Educated, and Non-Violent
  - 4. Your Accent Is Positively Represented on TV and in Film
  - 5. Your Accent Is Not Satirized or Exaggerated
  - 6. Your Accent Is Not Treated As ‘Exotic’
  - 7. You’re Not ‘Misheard’ or Purposefully Ignored Because of Your Accent
  - 8. You’re Not Forced to Code switch
The Art of Code Switching

• **AAVE**- African American Vernacular English

• Why code switch? What does that mean?
  • Code switching is a response to Standard American English (SAE) privilege that black and brown folks are impacted by.
  • Very often, people of color code-switch — both consciously and unconsciously — to act or talk more like those around them. While this can be effective, it can also be risky.
  • With Standard English as the accepted form of communication in America, it is a necessity for non-White folks to code switch in order to be successful.

• 5 reasons why people of color may code switch-
  • Our lizard brains take over
  • We want to fit in
  • We want to get something
  • We want to say something in secret
  • It helps us convey a thought
#PWS

- **#PWS**- Polite White Supremacy
  - Is the notion that whites should remain the ruling class while denying that they are the ruling class, politely. Affectionately, it’s called **#PWS** for short.
  - So why someone may say ‘Polite White Supremacy’ rather than Racism?
    - 1. Responsibility solely on the creators of a systematic problem
    - 2. Phrase addresses the subtlety and casualness with which is oppression administered.
    - 3. It eradicates the all-too-common confusion

- Language matters!
  - Racism and prejudice are NOT interchangeable.
• Racism is committed only by the ruling class and agents of the ruling class because they have the power that comes with racism.
  • In America, the ruling class is white people...of all classes.

• Prejudice, though harmful, is not necessarily systematic and can be committed by anyone. It simply requires one to pre-judge. It does not require its user to have any access to the ruling class or status of whiteness.
Developing a shared language and analysis

• Learning the new language of racism is an ongoing process. The language of racism evolves as scientists learn more about the processes that drive racism, as activists find new ways to clarify and describe the problems they observe and the solutions they seek, and as those who have experienced racism directly gain power, find their voices, and describe their first-person experiences. All of this change is good. It means that things are changing...that we are learning.

• So your first task is to embrace these changes in the language of racism and join the community of learners.

• What’s next?
  
  • Simply learning the language of racism is not enough. Language empowers action, and actions that make a difference are our ultimate goal.
  
  • Moving from concern to action
Dismantling Racism with Language

“WE NEED TO WORK PAST THE IDEA THAT OUR DIVISIONS WILL PREVENT US FROM COMING TOGETHER, FROM SOLVING PROBLEMS COLLECTIVELY”
Language, Power & Privilege

How do we sum it all up?

Where do we go from here?

How do we shift power and awaken consciousness?
Questions/Comments
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Thank you....we look forward to future conversations and putting in the work!