

Assuming ignorance (EEJust)

Case:

Kayla is a Black second-year PhD student taking a challenging course on genomics that requires some degree of familiarity with bioinformatics to complete assignments. During Kayla's undergraduate research at her local state school, she explored the pathogenicity of a rare microbial organism by introducing specific mutations for suspected pathogen-associated gene products via plasmids. Kayla thus has experience with genetics and molecular work but has less familiarity with genomics and the bioinformatics approaches that are rapidly becoming more desirable and career-expanding in research.

Looking to expand her skill set and deepen her knowledge of genomics for her thesis work, Kayla enrolled in the course but is having difficulty understanding some of the terminology and concepts of the problem sets. Hoping to get some clarification, Kayla asks several questions during a study session led by her white professor, Dr. Robertson. After answering a few of her questions, Dr. Robertson, exasperated, mumbles "they must not have taught these concepts at your HBCU." The class goes silent, and Kayla, the only black student present, immediately begins to regret her decision to have enrolled in the course.

1. If you were in a similar position to Kayla, how would you respond (either verbally or internally) to Dr. Robertson?
2. How might Dr. Robertson's assumption and statement impact Kayla's perception of her ability to succeed in the course?
3. If you were another student in the course who witnessed this exchange, how might you respond to Dr. Robertson's comment?
4. Imagine that someone (either Kayla or another student) has decided to address Dr. Robertson's comment privately after the session. How would you respond as the person being asked to reflect on your implicit biases? Would your response change if the address was made publically?

Cultural Competence Case Study (SACNAS)

Case:

You are a grad student in Dr. T's lab and are looking forward to the annual lab summer party Dr. T hosts. You are chatting with Nancy, a senior scientist in your lab, when Dr. T interrupts your conversation and introduces a new graduate student joining the lab, Angelica. Nancy asks Angelica where she is coming from, Angelica replies that she is from Massachusetts. Nancy then asks if her family is also in Massachusetts or back in India. Angelica just laughs and says that she is not Indian and her family indeed lives in Massachusetts. Nancy apologizes and then asks her what she is if she is not Indian. Angelica replies by saying she is Latinx, her grandparents are from Costa Rica and Nicaragua. Nancy seems a bit confused, but then in an excited voice says "That's great! I would really like someone who I can practice Spanish with". Angelica replies "Oh, I actually don't know how to speak Spanish". There is a brief moment of silence and awkwardness before Dr. T says that the food is probably ready, and everyone should grab a plate

Discussion:

1. If you were placed in a similar situation, how would you react to Nancy's behavior?
2. What are some assumptions that may have been avoided in this scenario?
3. Do you think Angelica reacted in a proper way? Could she have reacted differently?
4. Do you think you, as a grad student, should have intervened in this conversation at any point in time? Why or why not?
5. Do you think Dr. T should have intervened in this conversation? Why or why not?
6. If you were Nancy, how would you follow up with Angelica after this interaction?
7. Based on this case study, what strategies should be incorporated in academia and research laboratories to address cultural competence issues?
8. Discuss other cultural competence issues that may impact the lab culture and environment.

Pronoun Case Study (LTBGS):

Case:

A new postdoc begins working in the neighboring lab and they introduce themselves as "Alex". You don't know this person well, but you occasionally use a machine located near their desk and you exchange small talk with them while you are there. After a few weeks, you overhear one of your coworkers talking about Alex and using the pronoun "he". This takes you by surprise because you thought Alex was female and you've been using the pronoun "she" to refer to Alex. You realize you've never actually heard Alex mention their gender or pronouns, so you are not sure who is correct and if you may have been inadvertently misgendering Alex.

1. What should you do in this situation? Is it important to learn Alex's pronouns? How can you go about determining Alex's pronouns? What is and is not appropriate to ask Alex about their gender and pronouns?
2. If you have been misgendering Alex this whole time, how should you proceed? Should you talk to Alex about this, or just use the correct pronouns moving forward?
3. Even once you've corrected yourself and know Alex's pronouns, you accidentally use the wrong pronoun in conversation. How do you correct yourself? Would this change if Alex was or was not present when you used the wrong pronoun?
4. Now that you know Alex's pronouns, you hear some new rotation students referring to Alex with the wrong pronouns. Is it your place to say something, and if so how would you correct them?