

The value of storytelling to build empathy, awareness, and inclusivity in EHS

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Benefits of encouraging diversity in the workplace

- The business case for diversity in the workplace is now overwhelming
 - We are not having a conversation anymore about whether it is something we need
 - Instead, conversation focuses on nuances of how to solve the problem
- Greater innovation and creativity
 - Improved productivity
 - Wider talent pool
 - Greater employee retention
 - Better understanding of customers
 - Positive employer brand
 - Employee happiness
 - Knowledge-sharing between cultures
 - Cognitively diverse problem solving
 - Better decision-making
 - Increased employee engagement
 - Etc.

The importance of storytelling in safety education

Some may argue that lecture and stories meet different goals. Storyteller Syd Lieberman suggests that it is the

story that hangs facts

– *J. Chem.*

Students identified that the inclusion of storytelling helped them to make connections between the scientists and the science, and also helped them

engage with the course material.

– *J. Chem. Educ.* **2022**, 99, 472-479

As safety experience, I understand and appreciate the need for established procedures and even rules that must not be disobeyed.

– *Chem. Health Saf.* **2004**, 11, 3, 9-11

Merely reciting or explaining the policies and procedures will not motivate others to adopt safe work

practices. What else can we do? Being storytellers will improve our

teaching. Storytelling shares experience and context, accommodating various

perspectives and realities. This enables students to participate from their own

cultural frame, creating better self-awareness, and bringing cognition, emotion, and action together to promote reflective learning.

– *J. Chem. Educ.* **2015**, 92, 58-65

Why are stories important for inclusivity?

- Scientifically speaking, people with social or institutional power
 - Act more decisively
 - See fewer risks in their behavior
 - Have lower levels of cortisol (stress hormone)
 - Have a hard time relating to people who have less power
- People with power see fewer barriers, mainly because they believe they deserve to have whatever they want (sense of entitlement)
 - Great qualities for a CEO or trailblazing genius
 - Not great for impulse control, empathy, or setting healthy boundaries
- Creates situations where people dismiss concerns because they don't understand why they are an issue

Stories unravel the complexities of fairness

Sameness

- Everything is equal
- Pay same price regardless of age
- Infant and adult will receive the same amount
- Average and apply it across the board
- Fairness as equality of outcome

Deservedness

- You get what you deserve
- Brightest and most talented should have more
- Deserving nothing if it isn't earned
- Fairness is a rational calculation

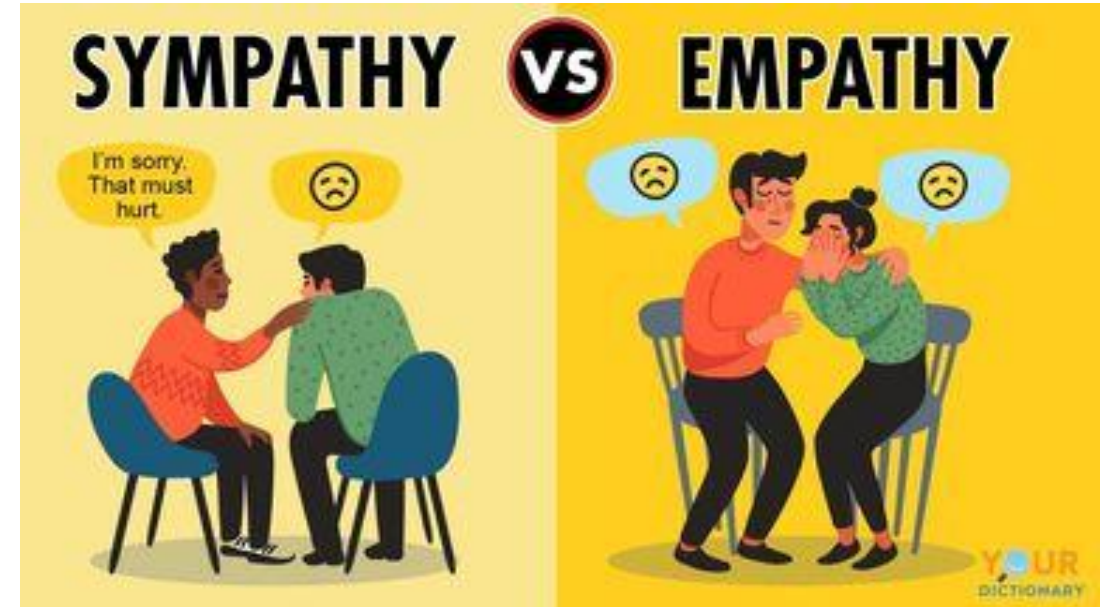
Need

- Those who have more give to those who have less
- Obligations and responsibilities to one another
- Compassion plays a role in the calculation
- Fairness as social justice

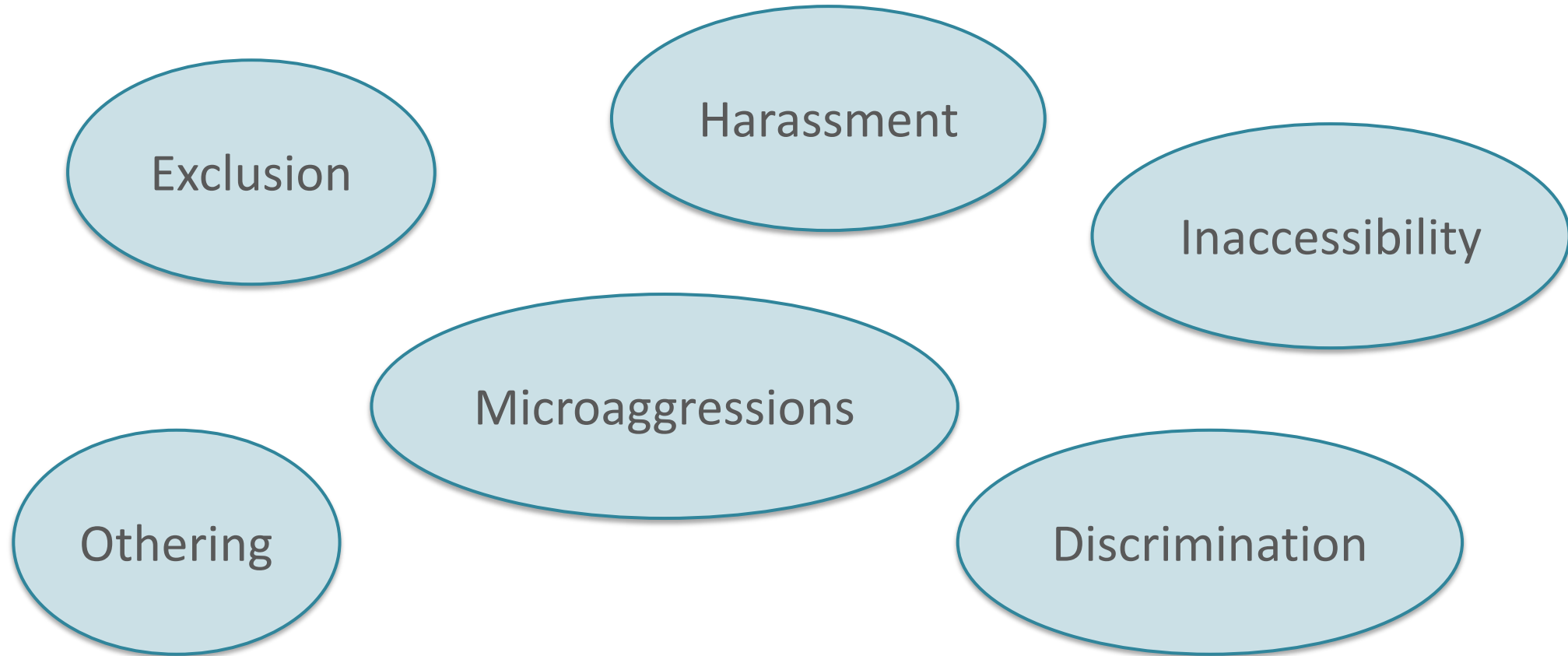
Fairness is good, but empathy and awareness are better

Empathy to increase inclusivity

- Empathy is feeling with people
 - Recognize that you have bias
 - Listen to people's stories
- Four qualities of empathy
 - Perspective taking
 - Staying out of judgement
 - Recognizing emotion
 - Communicating that emotion
- Avoid pity or silver lining or using “at least” statements (creates alienation)



Actions that negatively impact inclusivity



Opportunities lost, not because of an individual's lack of ability or skill, but because of the personal biases of someone in power

Discrimination

- Direct: Blatant derogatory statements
 - Someone isn't fit for leadership because they're a women
 - Only men who "act like men" should be allowed to shower at work
- Indirect: A practice presented in neutral terms but disproportionately disadvantages a specific group
 - Minimum height requirement for a job where height is not relevant
 - Smartphone required to access course materials
 - Show proof of a certain education level to vote
 - Installment payments allowed only if patent is employed
 - Candidate required to have at least ten years' experience
 - Only workers with a post graduate qualification can be promoted

Microaggressions and Othering

- Microaggressions are subtle interactions or behaviors that communicate bias toward historically marginalized groups
 - Where were you born? (alien in own land)
 - You must be good at math, can you help? (ascription of intelligence)
 - Men and women have equal opportunities (myth of meritocracy)
 - You don't sound/look gay (sexist language)
 - Faculty of color mistaken for janitor (second-class citizen)
- Each microaggression on its own can seem minor and trivial
 - Cumulative effect includes loss of self-esteem, feelings of exhaustion, decreased participation, or dropping out of programs
 - Othering is a pattern of exclusion and marginalization based on having identities that are different from the norm

Exclusion and Inaccessibility

- Important to acknowledge role of inadvertent exclusion
 - Holding meetings at inconvenient times (caretakers or during work)
 - Providing food without asking for dietary restrictions
 - Hosting events somewhere where there is pressure to have alcohol
 - Planning social events around hobbies not shared with whole group
 - Hosting an event in a place that is not disability accessible
- Keep in mind that everyone does not have your experiences



[comment](#)

The race to the bottom and the route to the top

Academic labs can be difficult places to work — but why is that the case and what can be done to address the issues that lead to harmful working environments?

David K. Smith

How to approach inclusion without fear of mistakes

- Zero tolerance for mistakes stifles learning, increases anxiety, and fosters disconnect
 - It's OK to make mistakes as an ally
 - Mistakes are how we learn and grow
 - People are resilient
- Depending on the situation
 - Don't make a big deal of it and work on it for next time
 - A simple apology will go a long way in most cases
 - Some cases require longer conversations to make it right

Questions?

Thank you for attending!

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