Recognizing and Interrupting Microaggressions

Objective
Interrupting comments that are racist, sexist, homophobic, classist, abest, etc, in an immediate manner will help create an environment that respects all people at all times and works towards dismantling complex systems of oppression from the ground up. Everyone has varying experiences and knowledge, and therefore interruption often requires compassion and education (although not always). There are different ways to successfully interrupt; there are not “right” or “wrong” ways, and it helps to practice strategies so that you can become quick and effective.

Some tools include:

1. Questioning/playing naïve: “What do you mean that poster is retarded?”
2. Personalizing: “Hey! That offends me!”
3. Humor: “I know that is so gay isn’t it? It’s all part of the homosexual agenda!”
4. Education: “Did you know that the word gypped comes from the word Gypsy?”
5. Assume the Best: “I know you didn’t mean to be offensive…..”
6. Fall back to the rules: “Our number one rule is to respect all people at all times.”
7. Respond or react authentically and in the moment: Sometimes your most effective strategy will be to respond with emotion and simply shut down the behavior, but this strategy should be used with caution and/or as a last resort.

Key Points

1. The most important thing to remember is that stopping the problematic language helps contribute to a safer environment.
2. Choose your battles. You will most likely not be able to interrupt every comment, every time.
3. Take care of yourself and know your emotional capacity and limits.
4. Consider time and place. Sometimes interruption will need to happen long after the comment was made if you need privacy, or direct intervention isn’t possible or ideal.
5. Consider confidentiality. It is sometimes important to pull the person aside and talk to them privately.