



Discussing Identity at My First HFES BIPOC Meeting

Correct pronunciation of names of people you meet, use of their personal pronouns, and being culturally sensitive and understanding of their background are not just performances of political correctness or “wokeness,” as some would say dismissively. I learned that these are the minimal efforts we should make in our interactions with one another, and they are signs of respect that make people feel seen. For example, some people try to learn how to pronounce my Korean name correctly, but many others do not and continue to mispronounce it. In a professional or academic setting where I interact with some of the same people regularly, this may imply that the person who mispronounces my name repeatedly is rude or indifferent. My name is linked to my identity as a Korean woman, and I learned that I feel more respected and comfortable when people try to learn how to say it properly. I also realized that communication should begin with calling someone’s name correctly. Other people of color and members of underrepresented groups in STEM and postgraduate education might have encountered similar and, in many cases, worse microaggressions and behaviors that are dismissive of their identities. This is what made me focus my presentation at the HFES BIPOC Affinity Group meeting on applying the “platinum rule” to understanding others’ identities and how they want to be called.

Many say that we should live by the Golden Rule: we should treat others the way that we want to be treated. In our meeting at HFES, I presented the concept of the platinum rule, which states that we should treat others the way that they wish to be treated. This requires an individual to reach out and learn rather than rely on a subjective assumption. I displayed an interactive poster that encouraged attendees to write down how they identify on a post-it and attach it to the left side of the poster under the heading, “Call me [].” On the right side of the poster, they posted notes stating what they wish people would and would not do in interactions that focus on their identities. Some of the notes said, “Don’t ask me where I’m from,” “Do not use the phrase ‘blacks’,” and “Don’t assume I’m the secretary or the assistant.” These are a few of the many examples of microaggressive and culturally insensitive behaviors and statements attendees posted. Almost all of the statements were “don’t dos,” but one was poignant in its statement of both a do and don’t: “Do ask; don’t assume.” To ask is to act rather than make a passive assumption based on uninformed perception.

Identity is a complex intersection of experiences and backgrounds, and being deliberately mindful of that is one way we can show respect. I was inspired by the people I met and honored to participate in the HFES BIPOC Affinity Group meeting. I feel that our discussions were productive and insightful, and I am sure that their impact has already spread into our respective workplaces and academic institutions. I

look forward to participating again, and I hope to meet even more future colleagues who are working to make academia and STEM more diverse and welcoming of diverse people.



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