

Welcoming Environments

CS109: Ethical Foundations of Computer Science

February 19, 2019

Discussion: Welcoming Environments

What is a “Welcoming Environment”?

- An environment that is, well, welcoming. (Ha.)
- It is an environment that is welcoming to *all* groups (majority, minority, and in the middle).

How do we get this magical thing?

Welcoming Environments: Creating One

We are all responsible!

- Create a feeling of community
- Understand and promote the Growth Mindset
 - Do not confuse preparation with ability!
- Insist on decency
- Stop bias

Insist on Decency

- Do not allow condescension/flaming/hazing to stand
- Speak up and stop it!
 - In class
 - On Piazza
 - In the lab
 - In the hallways
 - At work
 - ...

A Big Part of Decency: Eliminating Microaggressions

Those are those little comments that:

- May seem to be compliments but are not
- Make someone feel like they are not part of a group
- Intentionally put someone down
- Make fun of someone for an innate trait
- Pigeonhole a person's characteristics based on the stereotype of the group

Yes, intent and context may matter.

For instance, the question, "Where are you from?" could be:

- Friendly conversation
- An attempt at background information to understand someone better
- Meant to make someone feel different from others

But realize that what the listener hears is what matters.

Other examples...

- “Weeeelll.... Microsoft hires a lot of women.”
- “Girls are good at design”
- “Men are just not good communicators.”
- “I mean, I know there must be smart people in the South, but when I hear that accent... I just can’t believe it”
- “Are you in the right building?”
- “How can you go to work and leave your kids at home?”

Why do these microaggressions matter?

- Behavior is cumulative: one comment may not matter, but many of the students in our underrepresented groups face many of these comments.
- Not welcoming
- Ostracizing
- Affects the recipient's confidence

Step 1: Recognition

This is hard. Here are some thoughts:

- Try to hear it through the recipients ears and in other contexts [text message vs. voice]
- Listen for key words: “actually” “you people” “like them”
- As yourself:
 - Does it marginalize the person’s experience/feelings/actions?
 - If the statement were made to an underrepresented group as a whole, would it be appalling?
- Practice: Read a bunch of them along with explanations about what they means, and you’ll be able to recognize new ones on the fly

Step 2: Assessment

- Is it important to address?
- Should I interrupt now?
- Should I take the person aside later or address this issue at a later time?
- What is stopping me from intervening?

Later: What could you, anyone in the scenario, or the organization do to prevent future instances?

Step 3: Response

- Confusion. Avoid accusations and instead invite clarification “What do you mean by that?”
 - “Could you explain, please?”
 - “Which women? Which men?”
 - “How do you know that?”
- Arouse dissonance: people don’t like to be inconsistent.
 - I’m surprised you would say something like that, considering how supportive you are of women in computing

Step 3: Response

- Pivot: this is a way of not confronting directly, but letting people know they made a mistake in a socially graceful way.
 - If someone thinks that a colleague is a clerical worker, walk up and say, “Hi, have you met our new assistant professor?”
- Declare irrelevance.
 - “Why does that matter here?”
- Use humor (when appropriate for the situation or your relationship with a colleague)

Stopping Bias

- Learn about bias
 - How it sounds
 - How it looks
 - Be particularly concerned with *implicit bias*
- Interrupt it!

What is Implicit Bias?

It is NOT explicit bias

These are the biases built into society.

- These are shortcuts to help you make sense of the world
- Sometimes those shortcuts have negative effects

We receive the implicit message about what is good and what is bad from the day we are born.

We must take conscious steps to overcome our implicit biases.

I Don't Have Bias!

We all have bias

- It's part of being able to function in our complex world: our brain categorizes items to process them faster
- Most of it is implicit

Harvard has created implicit bias tests:

<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/>

Why Does It Matter?

Implicit bias can cause:

- Those microaggressions
- Stereotype threat
 - Occurs when a person is concerned that his or her actions will reflect negatively on a group
- Failure to recognize greatness
- People to not meet their full potential

What do we do?

- First, we learn to recognize and understand implicit bias.
 - We can't stop something we don't understand

Types of Bias

Bias takes many forms, some common ones:

- Performance Bias
- Performance Attribution Bias
- Competency vs. likeability
- Maternal Bias
- Conformity Bias
- Affirmative Action Bias
- Self-Serving Bias

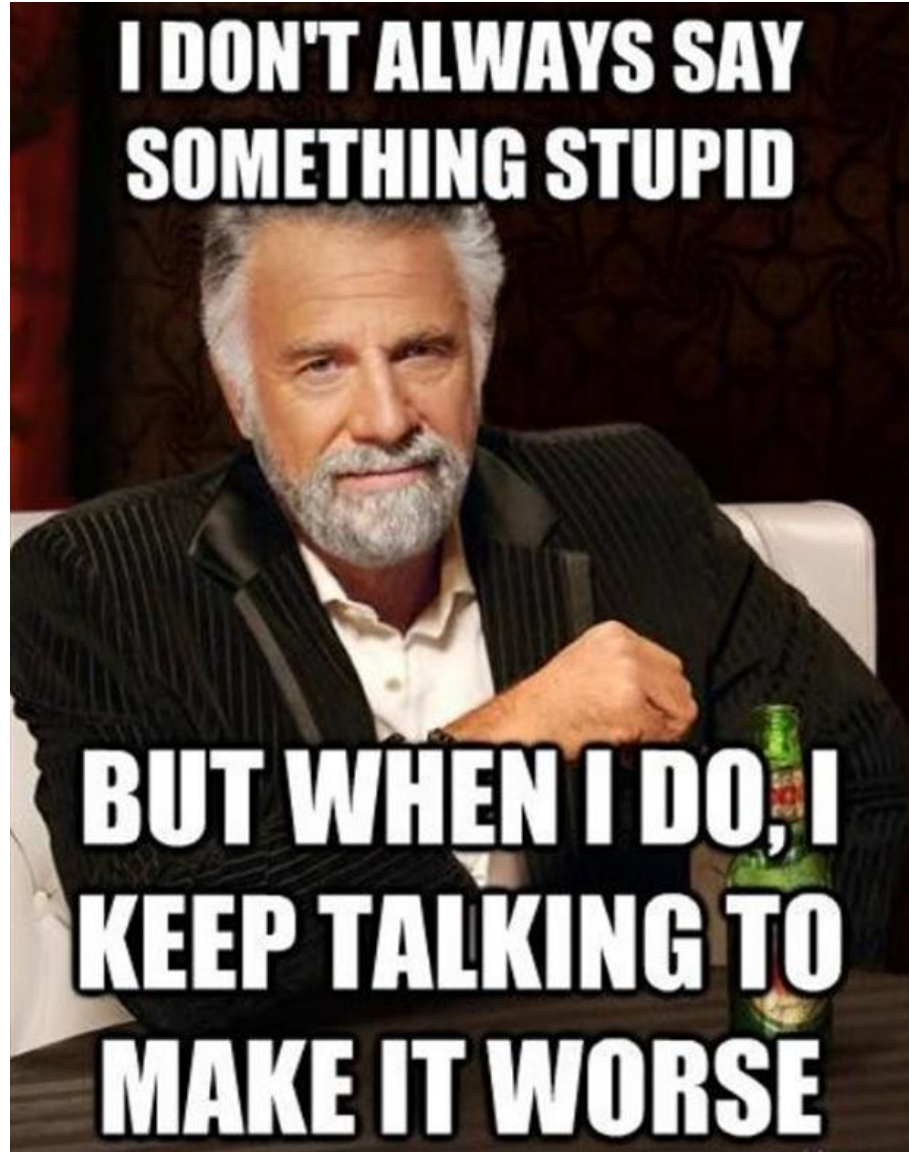
What do we do?

- First, we learn to recognize and understand implicit bias.
 - We can't stop something we don't understand
- Then, we speak up and stop it.

Oh no!

- *You* have said or done something that was misinterpreted/not well considered/not good.
- First: Don't be this guy:

**I DON'T ALWAYS SAY
SOMETHING STUPID**



**BUT WHEN I DO, I
KEEP TALKING TO
MAKE IT WORSE**

Oh no!

- *You* have said something that was misinterpreted/not well considered/not good.
- First: Don't be this guy:
- Second: Stop talking, and just apologize. We all make mistakes.
- "Whoops! I didn't mean that. Of course we want your opinion/want you here/your skills are amazing."

Case Studies

Decidedly unwelcoming environments and their effects:

- GitHub
- Uber
- Or find one of your own!

References

- Interrupting Bias in Academic Settings from NCWIT:
<https://www.ncwit.org/resources/interrupting-bias-academic-settings>
- Male or “Majority-Group” Allies: Creating Inclusive & Productive Workplaces:
https://www.ncwit.org/sites/default/files/workshop_maleadvocacy.pdf
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