

We Can No Longer Remain Silent

Category: Racism

written by Olapeju Simoyan | June 21, 2020

A patient walked in with her child, who was probably about four years old. I greeted the child, but he wanted nothing to do with me. He said, "I don't like her. I don't like that color!" I thought maybe I'd misunderstood him. Then he said, loud and clear, "I don't like Black." His mother, obviously embarrassed, told him that wasn't a nice thing to say, and I had to carry on with the visit as if nothing had happened.

Sometimes the prejudice is more subtle. A white male physician colleague is repeatedly referred to as "Dr. So-and-So" in my presence, while I, also a physician, am addressed by my first name. It's not a matter of familiarity, because the male physician has worked at the facility for much longer than I have, so if it was based on familiarity, *he* should have been the one to have been addressed by his first name. Could it have been a matter of superiority? That explanation didn't hold when it came to another white male physician who was actually training under me when I noticed the same disparity. Could it have been a matter of gender? Race? Both? Possibly. I know the people involved did not mean to disrespect me, but I can't help wondering what leads them to do so without even realizing it.

I recently shared a post on social media that was an account of an interracial couple's experiences with racism, and, to my surprise, someone suggested that it was somehow "racist" and "separatist" of me to be sharing such posts. I really struggled to understand and didn't get a response when I asked, as politely as I possibly could, for an explanation. Perhaps his discomfort with the topic is all the more reason why these conversations are so important.

It is unhealthy for those of us who experience racism in various forms to continue to suppress our feelings and stay silent. It is also an opportunity for those who do not experience racism to recognize that our experiences are real. Martin Luther King Jr. dreamed of a nation where his children would be judged by their character, and not their skin color. For this to occur, we must acknowledge that racial injustices still exist and work together to eliminate them. It starts with honest conversations.

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