



Promoting an Inclusive Culture: Outcomes from Active Bystander Training

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Abstract

All too often graduate students have indicated being the recipient of biased or inappropriate language when talking to faculty, staff or other students within their programs or colleges. Despite the fact that promoting an inclusive culture is a priority for many institutions across the country and is seen as an important component for supporting the retention of graduate and undergraduate students, faculty and staff, many colleges still struggle with this issue. Based on conversations with graduate students experiencing this issue we developed Active Bystander training. The training is aimed at educating participants about implicit bias and how to interrupt it in the course of conversation without causing defensiveness. We invited faculty, staff and students to participate so that everyone could benefit. We collected pre-and post-survey data to assess the prevalence of bias and impact of the training on participants. The results of the pre-survey show over 70% of respondents experienced or observed some form of bias in the 2-month period preceding the training with a similar percentage of respondents indicating they did not intervene. The major reason given for why people did not intervene was “not knowing what to do or say”. These data highlight the prevalence of bias and necessity of providing the tools to interrupt it. After the training nearly 90% of respondents indicated they felt better equipped to respond in these situations and nearly all were motivated and committed to doing so. This study is a step forward in supporting inclusion and retention of our graduate students. At the request of the training participants, we will host opportunities to practice what they learned and will periodically survey our graduate students to assess the impact of the training.

Introduction

There is a growing desire among schools and colleges of engineering to be inclusive. According to the National Science Foundation (NSF), women and underrepresented minorities (African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans) represent 24.1% and 6.4% of the engineering graduate student population in the U.S. [1]. As programs strive to diversify they also desire to be inclusive. Inclusion is an important factor in supporting the retention of individuals from marginalized and/or underrepresented groups. In order to do so, it is important to address issues like microaggressions and implicit bias. Microaggressions are subtle unconscious insults directed toward minorities, women, or those from a subordinate group [2], [3]. Implicit bias refers to subconscious opinions or stereotypes that influence our understanding, behaviors, and decisions [4]. These subtle or unconscious behaviors can negatively affect recipients. Researchers have shown faculty regardless of gender were equally likely to exhibit bias against female students and these biases lessened the support provided to female students [5]. Microaggressions can demean, invalidate, or make those from marginalized groups feel inferior [6]. It appears that these behaviors do not support inclusion but instead serve to undermine it. Creating an inclusive climate is a growing trend, need, and desire in higher education. This study aimed to examine the prevalence of bias and whether training could provide participants the tools to respond and motivate them to do so.

Methods

Active Bystander Training

The training was developed in partnership with the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity at The Ohio State University. In brief, we worked with the facilitator to develop active bystander training. The training included content on implicit bias and microaggressions, and the rationale for being an active bystander and how to do so. Faculty, staff and graduate students from three colleges on The Ohio State University campus were involved in the development of this training. The Ohio State University is a large urban research-one institution with over 59,000 students on main campus and over 46,000 faculty and staff. We integrated several accounts of bias expressed by students, faculty and staff from the three colleges that participated in the development of the training. The three colleges were the Colleges of Engineering, Arts and Sciences (ASC), and Food, Agriculture, and Environmental Sciences (CFAES). The training lasted an hour and a half and participants were provided the option to attend in-person or virtually. The total number of participants was 248, 24% were faculty, 59% were staff, 10% were graduate students, and 1.6% were undergraduate students. Participant demographics were further disaggregated by college.

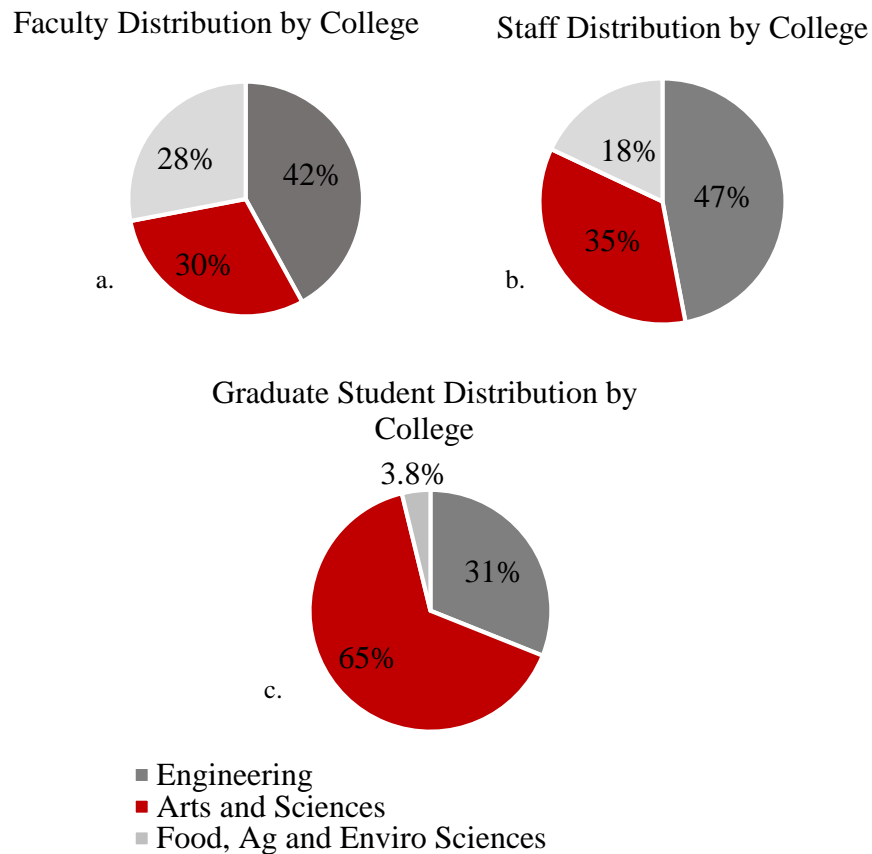


Figure 1. Illustrates the distribution of faculty, staff, and graduate student attendees by college.

Of the faculty who participated 42% were from Engineering, 30% were from ASC, and 28% were from CFAES (Figure 1a). Of the staff who participated 47% were from Engineering, 35% were from ASC and 18% were from CFAES (Figure 1b). Of the graduate students who participated 31% were from Engineering, 65% were from ASC and 3.8% were from CFAES (Figure 1c). All of the undergraduate students were from Engineering. The employment or student status of 3.6% of participants was unknown. The age, gender, gender identity and race/ethnicity of the attendees is unknown but will be assessed for upcoming trainings.

Training Assessment and Analysis

Data were collected using pre- and post-surveys to assess the prevalence of bias and the impact of the training. Figure 2 shows the questions asked in the pre-survey and Figure 3 shows the questions asked in the post-survey. The pre-survey was distributed using the Qualtrics online survey tool. The post-survey was distributed in hard copy form to in-person participants and the Qualtrics tool was used to obtain virtual participant feedback. The survey results were quantified. The IRB for this study is in preparation.

Figure 2. Active Bystander Training Pre-Survey Questions

1. In the last 2 months, have you experienced or observed a comment that made you uncomfortable or was inappropriate?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
2. Did anyone intervene?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
3. If you chose not to intervene, please select why:
 - a. Fear of safety
 - b. Fear of judgement
 - c. You didn't know what to say or do
 - d. The incident did not bother you
 - e. You did not feel comfortable intervening
4. What is your current level of understanding of what it means to be an active bystander?
 - a. High
 - b. Moderate
 - c. Slight
 - d. No understanding
5. What is your current comfort level with being an active bystander?
 - a. Extremely comfortable
 - b. Somewhat comfortable
 - c. Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable
 - d. Somewhat uncomfortable
 - e. Extremely uncomfortable

Figure 3. Active Bystander Training Post-Survey Questions

1. Because of this training, do you feel better equipped to respond to an uncomfortable or inappropriate comment?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
2. Because of this training, how likely are you to respond to an uncomfortable or inappropriate comment?
 - a. Extremely likely
 - b. Likely
 - c. Neither likely or unlikely
 - d. Unlikely
 - e. Extremely unlikely
3. How motivated are you to respond to uncomfortable or inappropriate comments?
 - a. Extremely motivated
 - b. Motivated
 - c. Neither motivated or unmotivated
 - d. Unmotivated
 - e. Extremely unmotivated

Results

The pre-survey results indicate that 73% of respondents experienced or observed some form of bias in the 2-month period preceding the training (n=337; Figure 4a.). This indicates at least 246 discrete incidences of bias and underscores the prevalence of this issue. When considering the desire to be inclusive these data suggest a need to mitigate this issue to prevent a sense of exclusion by those who are recipients of or observed these comments. When respondents were asked whether they intervened, 73% indicated they did not (n=226; Figure 4b.). Without intervention, the offender may not be aware of wrongdoing and bystanders may feel the sentiments are supported, further isolating the recipient or marginalized individuals.

The thought of intervening is likely to be common for individuals who observe such comments. However, how to do this is not always clear. There were numerous reasons why individuals did not respond. Twelve percent expressed a fear of safety, 10% expressed a fear of judgement, and 29% did not feel comfortable intervening. The largest percentage of respondents, 45%, expressed not knowing what to say or do as the reason they did not intervene (n=165, Figure 5). When asked the overwhelming majority of respondents (93%) had some knowledge of what it means to be an active bystander, with 12% expressing a high level of understanding, 48% a moderate level, and 33% expressing a slight level (n=317; Figure 6a.). When respondents were asked about their comfort level with being an active bystander 43% indicated some level of comfort, 26% expressed neither comfort nor discomfort and the remaining 32% expressed some level of discomfort (n=317; Figure 6b.). Together these results suggest respondents had an awareness of

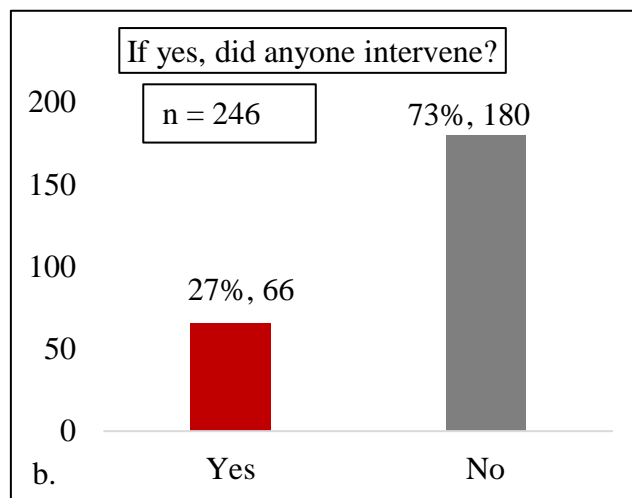
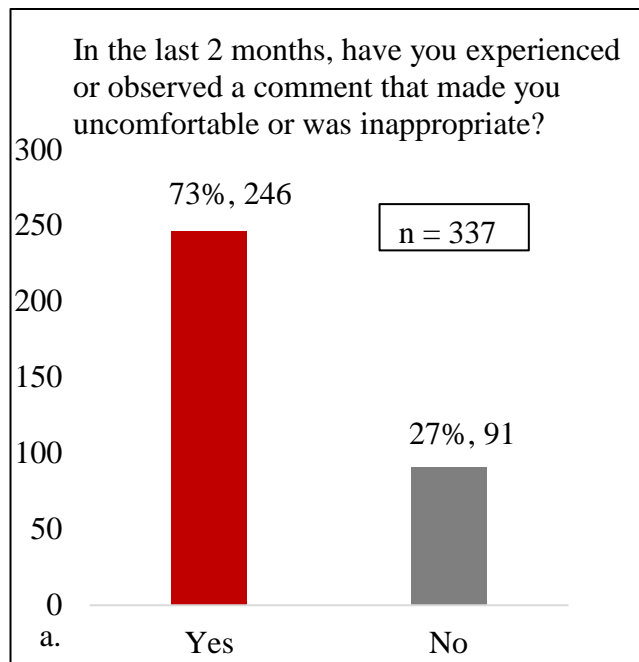


Figure 4. Illustrates pre-survey data on the prevalence of bias and whether respondents intervened.

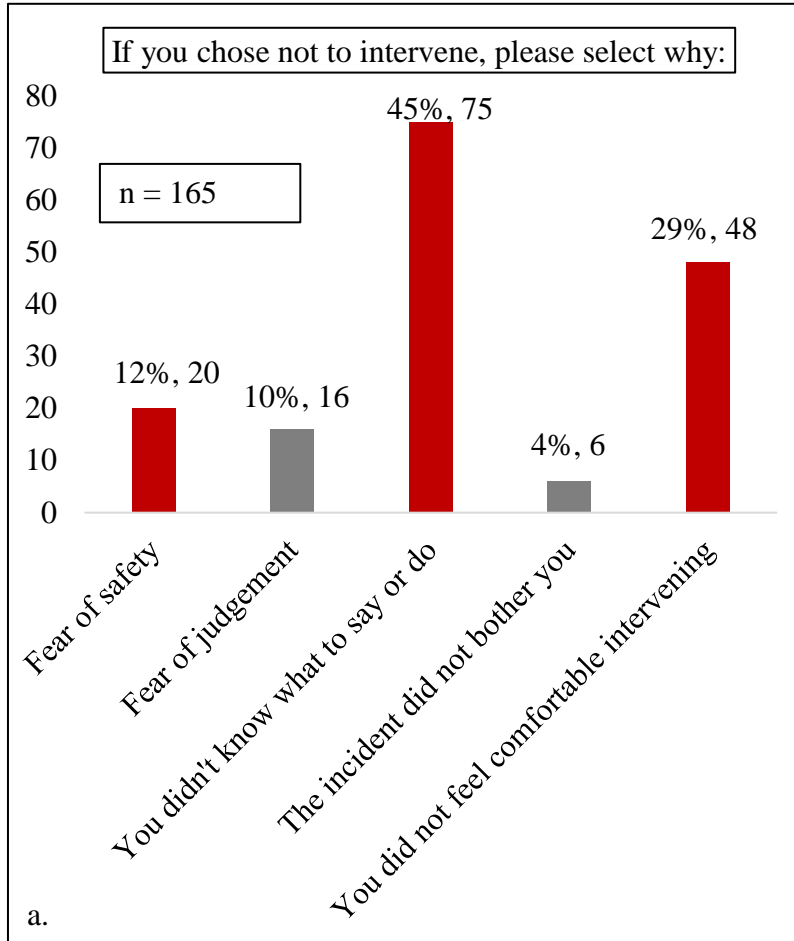


Figure 5. Illustrates pre-survey data regarding reasons why bystanders did not intervene.

what it means to be an active bystander and many are comfortable doing so. However, nearly half lacked the tools to appropriately address these situations.

The data suggest the training positively impacted the participants. Ninety-six percent of respondents felt better equipped to respond to an uncomfortable or inappropriate comment, while 4% did not (n=124; Figure 7a). When asked how likely respondents were to respond to an uncomfortable or inappropriate comments 89% indicated they were extremely likely or likely to respond because of attending the training (n=139; Figure 7b). Eighty-seven percent of respondents indicated they were motivated to respond to such comments (n=127; Figure 8a). Lastly, an overwhelming 99% expressed a willingness to commit to being an active bystander (n=127; Figure 8b).

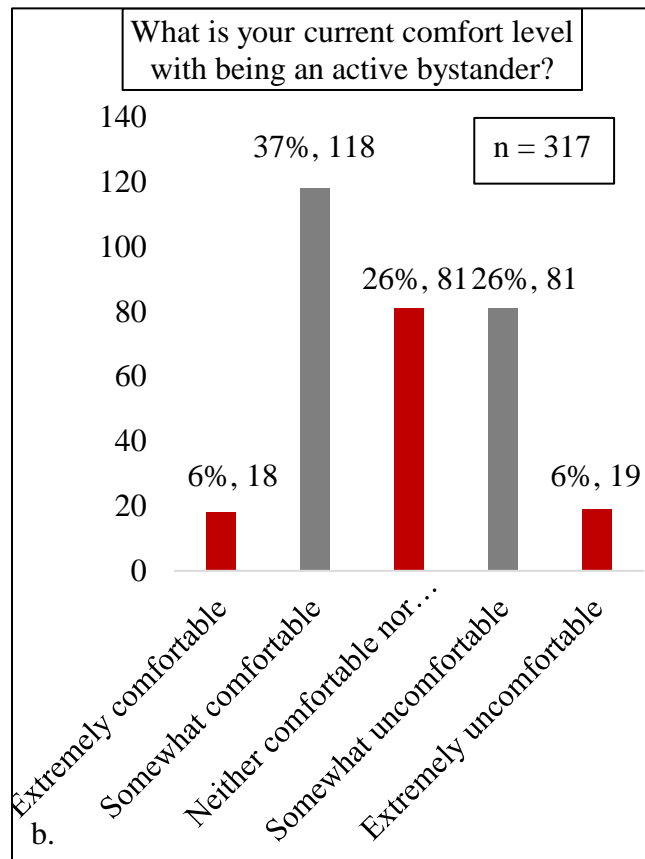
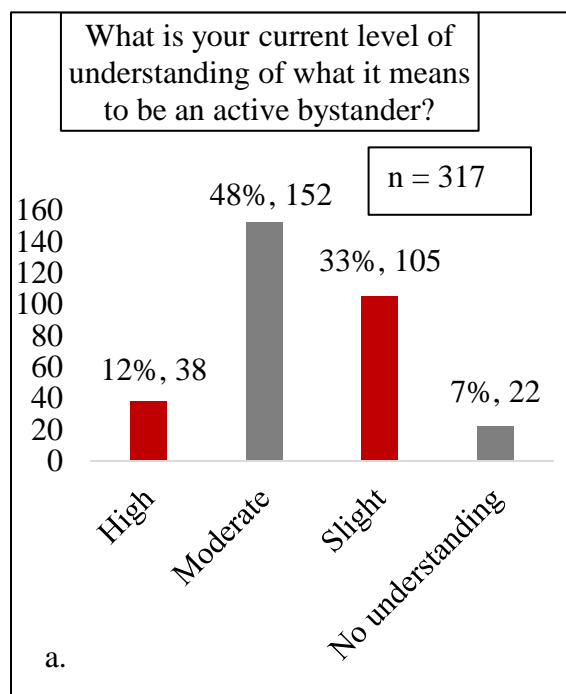


Figure 6. Illustrates pre-survey data regarding respondents understanding of and comfort with being an active bystander.

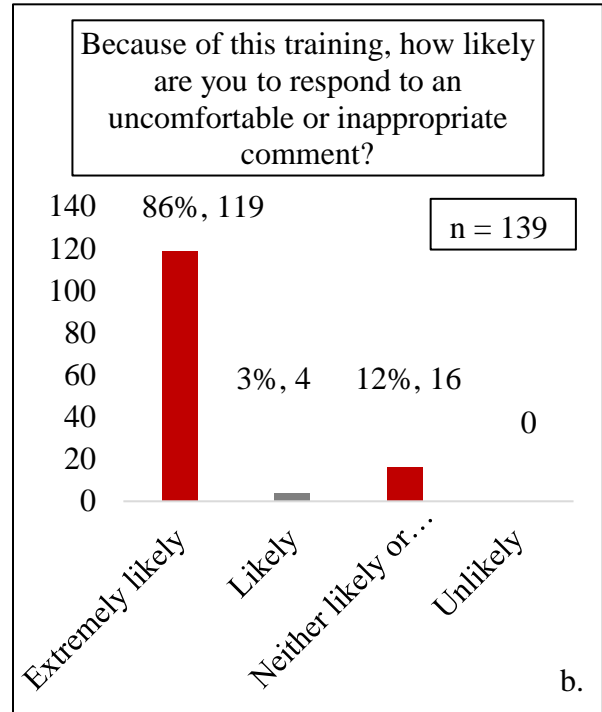
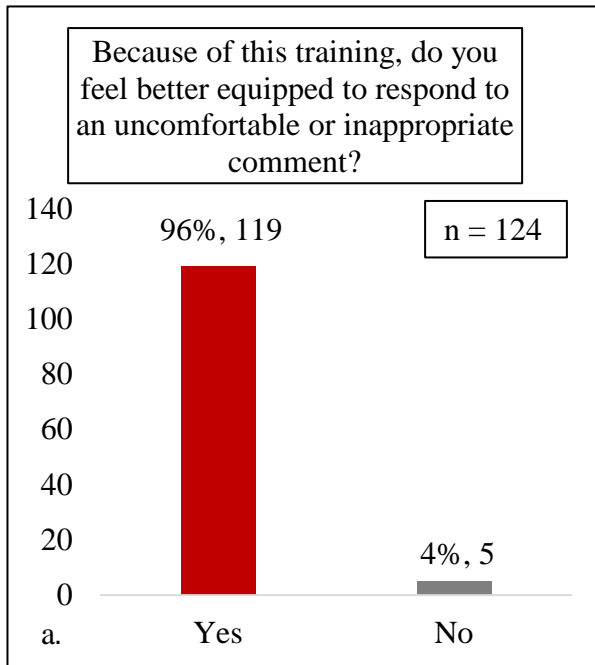


Figure 7. Illustrates post-survey data regarding how well equipped and likely to intervene respondents were following the training.

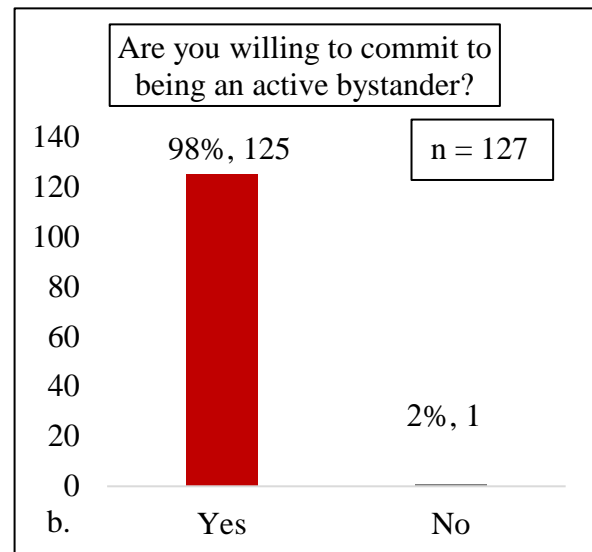
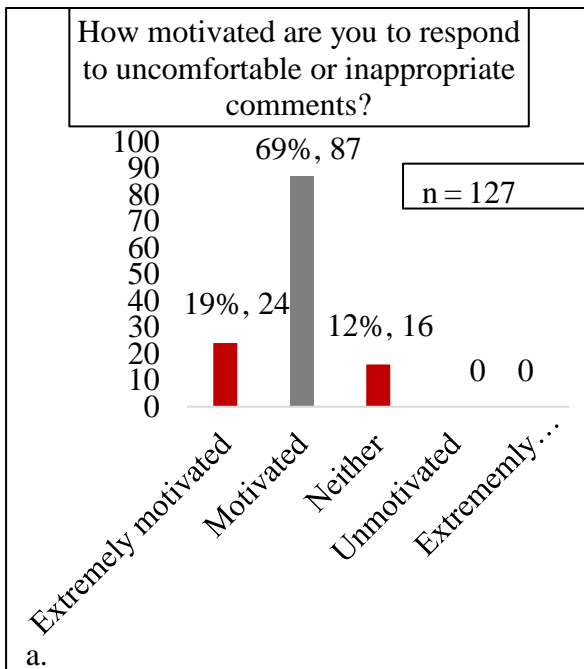


Figure 8. Illustrates post-survey data regarding respondents level of motivation and commitment to being an active bystander.

Conclusion

The study findings highlight the prevalence of biased comments and the lack of knowledge as to how to address them. For colleges and universities working to build an inclusive culture, incidences of microaggressions or implicit bias can undermine these efforts. Active bystander training addresses the critical issue of not knowing what to do or say. In order to mitigate bias we need to be aware of it and know how to address it. Otherwise, it will continue to be an issue and stifle the progress we seek to make. In order to change our cultures we need strategies and/or interventions that will help us educate ourselves and others about what to do when these situations arise. This training serves as an effective strategy to support inclusion by providing us the tools we need.

Future Work

This is a work in progress. Moving forward we will continue to offer these trainings to educate more people and will expand the survey instrument to capture more demographic data. Additionally, we will provide opportunities for participants to practice their intervention strategies.

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