



Mentor-mentee scenarios that are harmful to minority students and how to change

Scenario

A head of laboratory has specific expectations for how a new graduate student should present their work, but has not communicated this effectively. The graduate student has now presented in a way that is not in alignment with the standards in the lab.

A mentor has placed high expectations on the research of their protege. The mentee questions their ability to achieve these goals and feels intense imposter syndrome.

A member of your lab uses they/them pronouns. They have come out to your lab, but are often misgendered by your head of laboratory.

A trainee has been outed to their community as LGBTQIA+ by a peer without their consent.

Harmful Response

The mentor assumes that the graduate student will learn as they go. After their presentation the mentor blames the graduate student for their mistakes.

The mentor leaves the mentee alone to deal with their insecurities.

Or
The mentee asks for help, but the mentor ignores or is too busy for this request.

Say nothing to the head of lab and hope that the person stands up for themselves.

Apologize to them afterward and suggest ways that they can advocate for themselves.

Pretend it never happened.

or

Confront the outed trainee in a public setting and ask them questions about how they identify.

Allyship in Practice

Define and communicate your expectations from the beginning and as the relationship evolves. Be willing to adjust your expectations!

Create intermediate reachable goals to empower your mentee.

Help them mitigate their fear of failure by having a conversation about it.

Remind the head of lab of this lab member's pronouns when misgendering occurs.

If the behavior is not changed, bring the topic up in a 1:1 meeting with the head of lab.

Check in with the trainee in private to make sure they are alright!

Have a discussion with the peer that outed this trainee so they understand the implications of their actions.