

HEI HEI DEPEW: Thank you all for logging in today for the Employee Assembly-- Community Building, Engaging in Difficult Conversations panel discussion. Based on the feedback from the 2020 Fall Employee Assembly Priorities Poll, staff have provided strong support for prioritizing diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts.

Staff have noted that globally, nationally, and locally, conversations are occurring surrounding these issues. There appears to be a need to have difficult conversations. But staff have also indicated how difficult it can be to engage with others on sensitive subject matter.

Staff have also noted how critical it is to be mindful and respectful of those with different opinions. How do we build our community, an inclusive and respectful community, when we engage with one another in dialogue, especially when we may have different opinions on very charged issues? What does free speech look like in the context of community building?

Today, we are joined by an esteemed panel of leaders here at Cornell-- Mary Opperman, the Vice President and Chief Human Resources Officer, Angela Winfield, the Associate Vice President for Inclusion and Workforce Diversity, Reginald White, Senior Human Resources Director for the Research Division and Employee-Elected Trustee, Dr. Nelson Tebbe, the Jane MG Foster Professor of Law, and Dr. Adi Grabiner-Keinan, the Executive Director for Undergraduate Diversity Education and Director of the Intergroup Dialogue Project.

They will provide their thoughts and suggestions on the subject matter. We will allow them some time at the end for a Q&A. Please use the Q&A function of this webinar to insert your questions. Then we will end with final thoughts. I am going to now pass the floor over to Mary Opperman.

MARY OPPERMAN: Thank you, Hei Hei. And once again, thank you to the EA for putting on these conversations. They're just so important.

Thank you in advance to our expert panel. I'm looking forward to hearing from all of you. But before we begin, I want to take a moment and note that our country has now lost over 500,000 people to COVID. And I know a number of us have lost family and friends to this virus. The magnitude of our loss in this country is staggering.

But for each of us who has lost someone close to us, the loss is also personal and very painful. So as we look to the future with some hope, please take care of yourselves. Recognize your feelings. Get the help that you need.

So today's conversation about engaging in difficult conversations is a really important one. As we strive to create an environment where all can thrive and fully engage in our efforts as a work community, we will be working with others whose experiences and approaches may be very different from our own.

We all benefit from learning and then practicing new skills. Traversing a difficult discussion can be challenging. But often, the outcomes, when we have the skills to do so effectively, are much improved when we engage together in a respectful and open way. Thank you all for coming. I look forward to learning with all of you.

HEI HEI DEPEW: Thank you. Angela Winfield?

ANGELA WINFIELD: Good afternoon, everyone. It's my pleasure to be with you today and to talk about this very important topic of communicating across different free speech and how to engage in this activity respectfully. And I want to talk about this from the perspective of free speech as a value. And I'll go into a little bit of what I mean by that.

So we often think about free speech as a right. That's not what I'm going to talk about today. I'll leave that to another time and perhaps another panelist.

What I want to talk about is free speech as a value. And what does that mean when you have that as a value? It is definitely one of our institutional core values, that we value free speech and the free exchange of ideas and the free expression of ideas.

How do you do that in a way that's respectful and that also supports and corresponds with our core value of creating a culture of belonging? At times, these two may seem like they conflict. But there is a way to marry them and have them work together to create the environment that we want.

So free speech as a value to me means that in order to have diversity-- diversity is essentially the composition of people, the composition of ideas, the composition of backgrounds-- that we have variety of them. And we have representation from all different marginalized identities, non-marginalized identities. That's diversity.

But how do we benefit from diversity? We benefit from diversity through inclusion and belonging. And that's where this idea of free expression and respectful engagement and discourse comes into play. In order to benefit from diversity, we need to hear and be open to ideas, a variety of them, some of them that we may have thought of ourselves, opinions that we may hold, opinions that we may not hold, as well as ideas that we disagree with or perhaps may even be offensive to us.

And I will stop there just for a moment to pause and say that I'm not talking about truly hateful, problematic, criminal speech that causes physical harm to anyone. I think that's a different category. But if we're talking about ideas that may be difficult for us to hear or an opinion that is offensive to our sensibilities but is not hateful, those are things that it is important to engage with.

And the reason why it's important to engage with those types of ideas is because if we silence, if we use silence as a tool, silence is a tool of oppression. It's often been used to marginalize the

voices that we need to hear. And it's important that we allow folks to express themselves and express their experiences, their opinions, and their thoughts so we can benefit from them.

So how do we do this? How do we do this when we know that there's a possibility that we're going to be encountering things that are difficult to hear? And I think one important thing to keep in mind-- and this is the one thing that I will focus on in my remarks. I'm sure we'll go deeper than this in some of the questions during the Q&A period-- is what can we do as individuals.

I know many of you have hopefully already begun the Advancing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at Cornell program that has been rolled out to all benefits-eligible staff. And in that program, we walk through this. We walk through the mission, vision, values.

We walk through social identity, the effects of power, privilege, oppression, and how that shows up in the workplace. And then we start to get into how to communicate across difference. And then what you'll see in the next modules that are coming up is that it's really about our individual roles.

What do we do? And what do we have control over? When we talk about free speech and discourse as a large societal idea and as a concept, it can be really difficult to figure out, how do I engage in this? What do I do personally with my colleagues, with my team, with my customers, and folks that I'm engaging with on a day-to-day?

And that's what I want to talk about, because that's what we have control over. We have control over our own behaviors, the way that we present ourselves, and the way that we engage when we're faced with dialogue or difficult discourse.

So as an individual, I think it's important to know your core values and how they match up with Cornell's. Do you value yourself, personally, free speech and expression? And if not, how do you align with that in the sense that when you're at Cornell, this is something that we benefit from and this is something that we value?

So working there to start-- and then also keeping in mind what respect is and what respect means. So respect does not mean that you agree with someone. Respect at a foundational level means that you recognize that as a fellow human being, that you can treat someone with dignity. Even if you disagree wholeheartedly with them, you yourself have a certain level of respect for all people. And you also have a certain level of respect for yourself and how you want to behave.

So when we think about listening and we think about discourse, listening as a really important part of that. What are you listening for? When you're listening and hearing someone share their opinion, are you only looking to challenge them? Are you only looking to find holes in what they're saying?

Or are you truly listening to understand and hear where they're coming from, even if it's difficult and especially when it's difficult, trying to understand and get clarification on where is this person coming from, where are these ideas coming from, so that you have a better understanding? I think it's really important to keep in mind what is your end goal in listening.

The other thing to keep in mind is what is your goal and purpose in sharing and having this conversation. Is it to share your perspective? Is it to persuade and try and change someone's opinion? Is it to prove that you're right and they're wrong?

I think these are all really important things to be aware of before you engage in dialogue, because dialogue really is about sharing. And it's the expression of ideas in a way that isn't harmful to each other and that brings us closer, even if we still disagree.

So keeping that in mind and keeping that we only have control over ourselves and how we show up, what is the impact that you want to have in the conversation and what is the experience that you want to gain from having respectful dialogue, because you may not be able to.

And I can probably even say you will not be able to change people's opinions by argumentation and debate. But what you can demonstrate is who you are and how you value free expression by the way that you listen and by the way that you share. And I will stop there.

HEI HEI DEPEW: Thank you, Angela. That was impactful. I'm going to send the floor over to Reginald.

REGINALD WHITE: So good afternoon, everyone. I'm happy to be here. I'm happy to have the opportunity to participate in this conversation.

Like Angela said, I want to pick up on her idea that what we have control over is our own individual behavior. And part of this conversation is really thinking about, well, who are we? And what is it about conversation that, one, makes it difficult, because we use the word "difficult" often within this context.

And also, we also use this conversation around or this language around "emotionally charged." And so part of the process, from my perspective, really is to go back even further to ask the question, what is the purpose of language in the first place?

So if you think about language as I'm a human being and I'm having a series of experiences and my desire is to share those experiences with you and so we agree on the meaning of the sounds that I make with my voice. And therefore, you get a glimpse into my experience.

And so when I'm in-- again, using the word that Angela used-- when I'm in dialogue with you and we are using language that has a shared meaning, the purpose of that, our engagement, is for me and you to share what is the experience we're having.

If in fact-- and part of what makes it difficult is that we find ourselves in situations where we are experiencing different things and we sort of associate that with something that is emotionally charged or somehow challenging to our point of view, our way of being, the whole experience, in my point of view, of being a human being is to, one, have your experience.

But also, the purpose of language is to join and build bridges with other human beings who are also having experiences. I like to say that we are all blindfolded touching a part of an elephant. And for each of us, we have this sort of perception that the thing we're experiencing, which feels very real to us, is the whole picture.

Well, of course, it's not. There are 8 billion people on the planet, and those 8 billion people are having a unique experience of what it means to be a human being today. And so in the space of being able to control oneself, one, it's the question of, how do I show up in the face of the experience that is unique to me versus the experience that is unique to other people?

So we talk about culture often. And culture, we talk about it as if it is experienced by all of us. But if we actually go and listen and pay attention, what we understand is that culture is experienced both as an institutional and a socialization piece, but also from individual perspectives.

Angela also mentioned the sort of conversation about our values. So one of the things I find really interesting watching people, interacting with people, and coaching people and traveling all over the world is this sort of question around, where do our values come from? We often sort of have our values.

We're born into a process through something called the "cycle of socialization." Some of you may have seen that. In the cycle of socialization, we're born into a series of conversations about the meaning of life itself, the meaning of the world, the meaning of us, and sort of as individuals in our family. And so that socialization becomes a sort of process where it's reinforced by lots of institutions.

And we have at various points in our lives opportunities to either go with what we've been taught or to learn something different. I also like to think about the fact that at Cornell University, lots of people have admitted that they don't know, but that they want to know.

And so if we can embrace that same spirit of learning, of growing, of having humility around in the face of having only our own human experience to go from and to grow from, that then the conversation where people begin to express different experiences and therefore different opinions doesn't become challenging to us. It becomes additive to us.

That is that I begin-- when I understand something about your experience, I have a broader view of what it means to be a human being in this place and in this time. So we talk about free speech and having different opinions.

I like James Baldwin's point of view, which says that you're entitled to your opinion. And I'm entitled to my opinion. But when we get to the place where we start to challenge my humanity, then it becomes really challenging. And therefore, in the conversation-- then the comment that Angela made earlier. When it gets violent, when you question whether I have the right to exist, that's where things get really difficult.

And so I think the opportunity for us in each of these places and spaces that we find ourselves, particularly in this time, is to begin to open our minds and our hearts to the experiences of other people and to then begin to choose for ourselves consciously from a place of information which values, which belief systems, we will choose for this moment, recognizing that as we get new information, we have the opportunity to change those things.

And in the space of being able to change those things, we have the opportunity to be fuller, more compassionate, more engaged human beings. So thank you.

HEI HEI DEPEW: Thank you, Reginald. Moving us on to Dr. Nelson Tebbe.

NELSON TEBBE: Hi there. Good afternoon. It's really nice to be part of this group. I feel a little humbled, because I'm not sure how much I can contribute to this deep and rich conversation.

I think I'm here because-- I've been invited to participate because I teach freedom of speech at the law school. And I write about the First Amendment, as well, among other topics in constitutional law. But the First Amendment doesn't apply to Cornell University, because Cornell is a private actor for these purposes. So in some sense, everything I'm expert in is totally irrelevant.

But I do understand a little bit about what the values of the First Amendment are, to use Angela Winfield's great expression. And I also understand-- although I'm not an expert in the campus code or university standards or procedures. But I understand that at a high level, the university endorses values and free speech and tries to live them out, as do many of us in our personal lives.

And so I thought I would just spend a minute just sort of speaking about those values as I understand them from constitutional law and just saying something about how they might intersect with the topic that we're discussing today, which is so important. So as I understand it, the question for today is, how do we engage in difficult conversations with those around us in a respectful and productive manner, especially when we share differing and perhaps emotionally charged perspectives?

It seems that the specific question is about navigating daily conversations with those around us. So I'll put to one side issues like invited speakers on campus or protests staged by members of the university community, and just focus on quotidian interactions with people we might

disagree with, whether they're students or other employees or faculty members or other kinds of constituents in the community.

I'm happy to discuss those bigger issues, as well, if people want to in the Q&A session. But I think I'll just try to focus on the application that seems most pertinent here.

A starting point, of course, is that everyone in the university community has the right to express themselves and to develop their ideas in conversation with others, including on really controversial topics and including in controversial ways. If anything, this is particularly true at a university, which is dedicated to the exploration and advancement of knowledge and ideas.

And we should expect that reasonable disagreement is a fixed feature of our community. This is not going to go away. It may wax and wane, but reasonable disagreement is why we're here. It's something to be embraced, rather than eliminated.

I think a corollary of that is that the university doesn't discriminate against any member of the community simply because of their viewpoint, except in very rare circumstances. So a university can set aside certain forums for certain topics or types of speech. So it can open up a theater for performing arts, but not political debate. Or it could establish a political student union for parliamentary debate and exclude the performing arts. All that is fine.

What it can't do, though, is violate viewpoint neutrality in any of those settings. So it couldn't establish a political union, for example, and exclude Republicans or communists. A university can also, without violating freedom of expression, set limits on the ability of people to speak in certain kinds of ways. So it can exclude harassment that effectively drives certain people out of the community or true threats or harmful defamation or imminent incitement to illegal activity or copyright violations and so forth.

There are types of speech that the university can and probably should regulate. But that doesn't mean that it can do even that on the basis of viewpoint or out of just simple disagreement with someone who might hold a view that the university or that some constituent or employee or administrator at the university thinks is wrongheaded or even harmful.

Importantly for our topic, I think respecting the expression of others does not mean that the university or its representatives cannot articulate and even vigorously argue for the values of the university itself, including free inquiry, mutual respect, publicmindedness, and so forth. So to put that a little differently, Cornell and its representatives can engage in speech and endorse particular viewpoints-- that is, the viewpoints of the university itself-- without violating the rights of anyone else.

So what do these general principles mean for these daily interactions that I take it to be our concern today? Well, in a way, they don't mean very much. I think the really tough questions

are the ones that Reginald White and Angela Winfield already addressed, which are about interpersonal civility and respect.

These are topics that concern morality and psychology and social dynamics, but not really law. But the commitment that law embodies not only to hearing, but even to protecting the viewpoints that we feel are wrongheaded or that cut against the core values of our community seems relevant.

So does the concept that there are limits on the ability of people to speak, even within the community. Limits-- so the liberties that interfere with the equal liberties of others can and should be regulated. For instance, the community can regulate speech by one individual that harasses another individual and makes it impossible for her to remain a full member, even if the offending speech also expresses ideas.

And finally, the distinction I mentioned just a minute ago between speech by members of the university community and the speech of or by the university community itself I think is fundamental. So some of this tension can be resolved by noticing that vigorously protecting the right of others to disagree and dissent is compatible with the ability of the University and its representatives to tenaciously defend the community's own values through expression and argument.

So that's kind of what I have to offer. But I'm interested in engaging in conversation with you all and with people who are listening a little later.

HEI HEI DEPEW: Thank you, Dr. Nelson Tebbe. As I had mentioned earlier, feel free to enter questions into the Q&A segment of this webinar. Now, I'm going to bring the floor over to Adi Grabiner-Keinan.

ADI GRABINER-KEINAN: Thank you-- so excited to be here. And I'm so thankful for this conversation. The fact that we are talking about communication across dialogue and free speech in the context of the workplace is such an important step for us as a community. I will try to connect with some of the things that my other colleagues discussed and to offer some other frameworks to think with and to think about.

One of the first things I want to mention is that when we engage in conversations across difference, when we try to put ourselves out there to be vulnerable, open, and to engage in something that might be challenging and difficult for us or really exciting and encouraging, we need to ask ourselves what are our goals.

Why are we engaging in this type of conversation? What are we trying to achieve in how we enter the conversation? What is our state of mind? Some of us might have very personal goals, such as expressing our ideas, sharing our perceptions with others, listening to others, and trying to grow and develop.

Some of us might have professional goals. We might try to create a more open and vulnerable working environment for us and for our colleagues. We might try to help others feel more included in the workplace.

And for some of us, it might be political goals that we have. We want to learn about an important issue. We want to try and convince somebody that we are right. Or we might want to show them that there is another way to look at things.

There are many, many goals. There are many desires. There are many interests when we enter this type of conversation, this type of engagement and interaction with another person.

I want to introduce a framework that really helped me reflect on the goals that I have, the goals I want to have, the goals I should have when I engage with others across difference, when I engage with others who might be so, so different from me or hold different opinions and views, but also with people who are very similar to me. And I want to strengthen my connection with them and to learn more about them.

Matt, I think I'm ready for the first slide. So this framework that I'm going to talk about in the next few minutes, we in IDP, Intergroup Dialogue Project, we call it the three D's, Debate, Discussion, and Dialogue. We hear people use these words in so many different ways. And I want to take a moment to really define and explain each form of communication and also to discuss why it's important to pay attention to the differences and how all of this is connected to my comment about goals and how we enter the conversation.

Let's start with debate. This is the next slide. In Western societies, many of us are trying to be effective debaters. Think about yourself, your colleagues, our students, our family members. We engage in debates everywhere-- on social media, in the classroom, in the workplace, with our families. It for me sometimes feels like I need an ongoing debate.

What is "debate" exactly? What do I mean by that? In debate, the primary goal is to win an argument or to defend a specific position or solution. I know that many times, when I engage in a conversation with another person, I want to win. I want to prove the other person that I know what is right, that I know what is true, and that I can win this conversation.

To achieve this goal in debate, we try to defend our view or assumption as truth. We prove that our solution is the only solution. There is no other way. We exclude other views or solutions, and we judge other viewpoints as inferior, invalid, or distorted. We focus on right and wrong, these dichotomies. And we convince others to agree.

Angela talked about listening and how important it is to think about how we listen. In debate, we listen to find flaws in another person's argument. We listen in order to win and to already share our opinion and our view. We don't really listen to the other person.

The next form of communication is discussion. This is the next slide. Discussion is quite different. And here, the primary goal is to increase clarity and understanding of a given issue or problem and identify some general truths, solutions, or next steps.

Many of us engage in discussions in the workplace. We try to solve problems to move forward, to work together in order to fix a problem. Here, in order to achieve the goal, we share information and present ideas. We seek answers and solutions.

We try to convince others and to surface different perspectives. The way we listen when we discuss is a little bit different from the way we listen when we debate. But still, in discussion, we are trying to convince.

We are trying to solve. We are trying to fix. We might try and listen more to the other person, but we have an agenda. And we are trying to promote a specific solution, understanding, or perception.

The next form of communication that I want to focus on-- and for me, this is the key for communication across difference-- is dialogue. And dialogue is very, very different and very difficult to practice because, as I mentioned at the beginning, we are trained as amazing debaters.

Primary goal of dialogue is to work toward mutual exploration of each other's ideas, perspectives, and emotions in order to create knowledge and meaning together. When I enter a dialogue, I don't have a solution. I don't have one truth. I don't have idea or perspective that I'm trying to convince the other person to adopt.

When we engage in dialogue, we are really trying to see the other person as a human being, even if they are very, very different from us. The goal here is to connect with another person, to learn from them, to share our own opinions and views, and maybe together try and find some shared understanding, shared knowledge, and to create something together, again, even if we disagree.

To achieve this goal, in dialogue, we try to understand the feelings, the beliefs, and experiences that inform our and others' opinions and views. So we also check our own biases and our own understandings of reality. We challenge preconceived notions and biases, including our own. And this is why it's so difficult, because we put ourselves in this process of examination and analysis.

We try to suspend judgment or, as I always say, to replace judgment with curiosity, to engage in a conversation with empathy and curiosity, and to really try and see the other person. We try to broaden our perspective and not to win an argument or to solve a problem. And we work as a collective.

In dialogue, we learn from mistakes, challenges, and conflicts. I can talk forever about dialogue, but I just want to pose a question, a quick question. Of course, you don't have to answer it now.

Try to think about yourself in the workplace and the kind of conversation that you have with your colleagues and with your supervisors and other people you work with. Which form of communication do you usually focus on, do you usually practice?

I know that I want to be in a dialogue mode as much as possible. But many, many times, I find myself debating or discussing, not really seeing the other person as a full human being and really trying to understand where they're coming from, and how we can create something together.

How to do it-- there are so many ways to do it. The good news is that we can learn how to dialogue. We can learn how to authentically communicate across difference. I want to offer one quick tool, because all of us are Cornell employees. Some of us are leaders here.

This is my last slide. And these are some community agreements. I think that it's very, very important not just to think about what we are talking about, but also how we are talking about things. And what are the boundaries of the conversation and how we want to frame the communication and the form of interaction?

Some things to think about, some things to maybe suggest in the context of the workplace when we engage in these types of conversations-- try to practice active and empathetic listening. And try to explore what it means to really, really listen. Be both teachers and learners.

When we engage in dialogue, we understand that we can teach others. But also, we can learn so much from others. Take space and make space. Try to create space for everybody to share, to engage in the conversation, but also push yourself to take space and to be part of the conversation, an active participant in the interaction.

Use "I" statements. I know that many times, I try to generalize and to say things like, "we women," "we immigrants," "we believe that," "we think that." In dialogue, we try to ground our perspective and personal experiences in "I" statements. Be here now. Be present. These conversations are difficult, and we need to be fully present.

Another important thing to keep in mind or to practice is how to embrace discomfort. These are not comfortable conversations. But from my experience, they are fulfilling, interesting, fascinating, and so, so important. When we engage in these kinds of conversations, we need to understand that discomfort is going to be a huge part of it.

And as I mentioned before, acknowledge judgments and assumptions, including our own. Thank you. I'm going to pause here.

HEI HEI DEPEW: Thank you. I want to now bring this section over to Michelle LoParco, the Vice Chair of the Employee Assembly, for the Q&A portion. Again, to all the staff joining us, please enter your Q&A into the Q&A segment on the bottom-hand corner of your webinar. Thank you. Michelle?

MICHELLE LOPARCO: Good afternoon. And thank you to the panelists for this introduction to how to have difficult conversations. I wanted to read a comment that came in from one of the staff responses just to sort of maybe kick this off and turn this more into a conversation about questions that come up when we have a hard time articulating things.

And this one is-- the question came from us to the staff. And it says, "How do we navigate free speech in the context of communicating across difference?"

And a new line replied to this and said, "I struggle with the notion of free speech when it clearly or blatantly is making a group of people to be less than. That was not the intent of the First Amendment." And I think that when we talk about free speech and we talk about saying how we feel, I think this kind of resonates with a lot of people.

Saying things doesn't mean you can-- doesn't make it right. So I just wanted to sort of kick off the conversation in that way, because I know that a lot of people struggle to have conversations and to not say the wrong thing. I myself am guilty of it.

And now, I want to go into our Q&A with the first question from an anonymous attendee. And they ask, "What is the best approach for dealing productively with supervisors who express sexist views or who treat women in a disrespectful or degrading way?"

For my wife, this has caused very deep wounds that affect every area of her life. She has been called out for mistakes in a demeaning way in front of other team members. Many women have left the center where she works because of the mistreatment by men." I'll leave it to you all to decide who wants to tackle that question and issue.

ANGELA WINFIELD: I can-- I'm sorry. I can start. And Mary, if you want to fill in for me? So this situation that's being described here is something that should be addressed. And I don't know that dialogue and direct dialogue with the supervisor would be the most appropriate situation.

So first off, what I'd say is for your wife, not that she is the source of the problem concerned, but making sure that she has the support that she needs-- so making sure that she's utilizing the available resources, including the faculty/staff assistance program and those types of things that are available.

The other thing that I would recommend in this situation-- because sometimes for difficult, challenging situations, especially workplace ones and ones that involve supervisors, where there are power dynamics involved, you can always reach out and solicit a third-party intervention to help facilitate some of these conversations.

So for instance, we do have the bias reporting system, the bias incident reporting system, where all sorts of bias, alleged discrimination, or alleged harassment can be reported. And it will be triaged by the appropriate office that can then work with you and discuss your options and help facilitate some of these conversations.

Mary, did I leave anything out? Or would you like to add anything?

MARY OPPERMAN: That was fabulous. Thanks, Angela. Just to build a teeny tiny bit on that because that was a great answer, I do think that when you're in a profound or acute situation at the workplace, that the skills you need to traverse that are slightly different than the ones that we're talking about now, because that power differential exists. And there might be a specific issue that is underlying that needs to be addressed.

So what I would recommend is that you use the tools that Angela gave to move through the current situation and then hopefully open the dialogue about understanding why this has happened and how to avoid this in the future-- so sort of a two-parter. Kind of get through the issue at hand. And then hopefully, with that outside help, loop back around to talk about the climate in the organization.

REGINALD WHITE: I also wanted to just add, this is where I think that the question of where our values come from and how we get to the place where we begin to express points of view that somehow are harmful to other people.

One of the things that just came up in the national press is-- and this goes back to socialization. So many of us grew up or our children grew up watching Jim Henson's Muppets. And they've recently started to stream all the seasons of their show or their shows on Disney Plus.

And they've now started to put a disclaimer that says many of the things that appear in some of the shows are offensive and shouldn't have been done when they were done. And they want to just acknowledge that it's there. But these kinds of things, such a popular show within our culture teaching children various ideas, this is how these ideas start to come about.

And so part of the process in terms of understanding what's happening when we're trying to deal with it, in addition to all the things that Mary and Angela said in terms of our processes, is also, from the human perspective, understanding both if I'm the person who's the offender, but also if I'm the person who's been offended, beginning to have that dialogue, as Adi said, around what is the human experience that creates this context where I have these points of view and I express them in a way that feels appropriate to me, but may not be appropriate to the person who's on the other end.

And how do I then use that experience to grow as a human being and to change my way of being such that it is more inclusive, because that's also our challenge in our environment is that many of us, we're socialized to act in ways that are offensive to other people because those

other people weren't in our experience and because there is huge institutional pressure and community pressure to have these points of view.

And if we're going to continue to sort of grow, it's to begin to understand the consequence of holding those points of view on the environments that we're, in this case, our workplace.

ANGELA WINFIELD: Absolutely. And I just want to say something quickly to underline what Reginald just said, because he mentioned some terms about the cycle of socialization and how do we get these ideas. I'm going to shamelessly plug, but it is a requirement that folks take the Advancing DEI course.

But if you want to learn more about this and you want to understand what is Reginald talking about, socialization, and how is this embedded, course three of that program dives into the cycle of socialization, how that shows up. And it also discusses the cycle of liberation and how we get ourselves out of that cycle so we can begin to see some of these problematic ideas that we hold and how it may be causing unintended harm to others-- so course three for that.

MICHELLE LOPARCO: Great. The next question is for Dr. Tebbe. "How does Dr. Grabiner-Keinan's framework of dialogue, debate, and discussion relate to the field of law? Is there space for communication beyond debate? And what might that look like?"

NELSON TEBBE: Hi. Thanks for that question. I think the questioner wants to know whether there's space within the legal apparatus itself for forms of communication other than debate. That's how I'm interpreting the question.

And I think this person is just curious about that. And I can see why, because legal structures and processes are often designed around outcomes. And all that matters is what a decision maker is going to do. So the advocates are kind of trying to persuade that decision maker to kind of rule or act in their favor. And a lot gets lost in that kind of constrained form of communication.

One thing that gets lost often is the voices of the people that are affected, because lawyers are representing them. So people don't get to tell their own story oftentimes in litigation. And that can be a missed opportunity, because a lot of times, people care about being heard and the ability to tell their own story in their own words more than they care about the outcome.

There's been really interesting empirical research by Tom Tyler at Yale University and others about this. So the legal system is kind of missing a lot of what Dr. Grabiner-Keinan rightly kind of is praising about other forms of interaction, especially dialogue but also, to some degree, maybe debate.

But to the degree that what we're talking about instead is does law place any constraints on the choice that Dr. Grabiner-Keinan put before us, I think the answer is no. We can all choose

among these three forms of interaction in our daily workplace interactions without constraint from law.

In other words, all these forms of interaction are permitted. And so it's up to us to decide which ones do we think are most productive. And there, I think she's very persuasive that dialogue has some real benefits, even though it can be very difficult to engage in.

ADI GRABINER-KEINAN: Thank you for these thoughtful comments. I think-- well, we actually started working with law school students around dialogue. And it's really interesting to see the potential and the opportunities that surface when you introduce this form of communication and start reimagining certain interactions and dynamics.

And I guess what I want to say is that it's important to encourage ourselves to reimagine our fields and to really examine the way we communicate and how we want to communicate and how it might look like if we have somewhat different goals in mind, somewhat different attention.

And when we are intentional about the way we show up and the way we see the other, I see a lot of potential there in many different fields, law and others, to interact in a different way, to surface certain narratives, to surface certain understandings about who we are as human beings, as Reginald mentioned, and what we believe in and what informs our beliefs and our assumptions. A lot of interesting things happen when we really dialogue, when we really open ourselves to this kind of interaction.

MICHELLE LOPARCO: Great. Thank you. Next question comes from Anneliese Truame.

"Could the panelists please discuss how to handle situations in which you see or experience a microaggression or other non-inclusive behavior at work? Many of us want to respond, and we have been encouraged to do so. But how do we do that effectively?"

ANGELA WINFIELD: I will start us off on that one. So this is a really great question, and it's an important one. And there's a lot of factors to consider. So one that we've already talked about is the power dynamics and what's going on. But you have some options in this case.

One is to respectfully raise the issue during, in the moment. Or you can also do it after it's occurred. So for instance, you can approach the person who either experienced the microaggression and say, I just noticed such and such happen during this meeting. What was your interpretation of that? How did that feel to you?

So you can engage in dialogue with the person who was impacted by it to make sure that your interpretation was similar to theirs. You could also approach the person who engaged in the microaggression and ask them in a curious way. And this is kind of the key thing. It's about curiosity and understanding.

What did you mean by this statement? Or can we pause here for a second? I heard you say such and such and such. Here's how I interpreted it. What did you actually mean? Is that what you meant by it?

So that's a place where you can engage in those kind of dialogue skills and thinking about what is your purpose. Going back to these slides and framework, what are you engaging in here? Are you highlighting the issue so that you can explain from your perspective and your understanding of what happened and how that landed for you and it could have landed for other folks? Or are you trying to debate, which is probably not the best option in that circumstance?

The other thing that you can do is if you're not comfortable raising the issue and calling the person in or out in the moment or afterwards, again, you can utilize other resources and reach out for support through the bias incident reporting system, where we have accountability conversations all the time with folks around things like this, how to have it themselves or intervening and having those conversations.

And also, again, another plug for Advancing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at Cornell-- the course that will be released next week, course five, is all about speaking up when we see things that happen that are not aligned with Cornell's values. And there's a lot of options in that particular module of the program.

So I encourage you to dive into there. Really engage with the practice exercises and some of the reflections in there. That will help you get your footing, because you do have options when something happens. And it needs to be something that's aligned with your personality, your values.

Sometimes, you may use humor. Sometimes, you may be more pointed. But there are options. And it is such an important thing to do.

And we know that it is impactful not only to the individual who's directly impacted by it, but also by folks who witness and see that happening on a team. So it is an important thing. It takes courage, and it also takes practice.

REGINALD WHITE: Just I add to that that it helps to understand microaggressions as a concept. Essentially, a microaggression is a behavior that marginalizes an individual from a marginalized group. And so what ends up happening is the person who's doing it often may not be aware.

And so the purpose in terms of this goes back to Adi's comment around which kind of language are we engaging in and what kind of approach are we using. If in fact the purpose is dialogue, then Angela's points around courage and inquiry and curiosity, et cetera, that creates the opportunity for learning, for growth, for changing behavior, because I'm not in the space where I'm having to debate where I'm trying to change your opinion or whether I'm trying to make you right or wrong.

It's raising an awareness that the thing you're doing is having an impact. And to Angela's point, the question is, is that your intention? Is that what you were actually trying to do? And often, people will say no.

Sometimes, people will say yes. They're actually intending to harm someone else. In that case, it's not a microaggression. It's a real aggression. But it's important then to sort of, again, think about how do we approach these things with the mindset that, in fact, a microaggression has nuance to it and therefore, from a place of curiosity, understanding both the impact on the person who was the victim of it-- and if you are that person, understanding your perspective-- but also understanding what was behind that situation.

The other thing I'll say about that is intention doesn't exonerate someone. So someone can't say, well, I didn't mean to hurt you. Therefore, I'm free. It's beginning to take responsibility for our behaviors and our actions, even when they have unintended consequences, and choosing to do something different in the future.

ADI GRABINER-KEINAN: Just one tiny thing to add, because this is all great-- and it's not about the very specific interaction at the moment. I agree with Angela and Reginald. These are great tips and ways to practice this kind of work.

I think we need to also think about the culture we are creating and participating in. How can we normalize this kind of intervening, this kind of interaction when we feel comfortable to ask questions, we feel comfortable to talk about intent and impact? How can we show up as vulnerable employees and say, you know what, I have a bias against this and that? Or I need to check the stereotypes I believe in.

Or in this situation, I said something in a way that probably made you feel 1, 2, 3. So the way we show up, the way we encourage others to show up, can create a culture where it's normal, OK, and legitimate to ask these questions and to explore them together, again, with curiosity and empathy and understanding that this is a difficult process that all of us need to do together.

If it's only one person that is courageous enough to say the thing, this is wonderful. But it's not enough as a community. It's not going to make the systemic change we are interested in.

REGINALD WHITE: Can I just add to that? When we normalize it, then it doesn't become difficult. When we make it a part of our culture, when we make it a way of being, then all of a sudden, this feels natural to us. We engage with each other from that place of learning. We engage from that place of being curious and growing as human beings because of our experiences with each other.

MICHELLE LOPARCO: Great. We're going to take one last question. And this comes from Devina.

And she asks, "How do we start the process of this open communication in this decentralized environment? How do we go about making this part of the Cornell culture to promote a safe environment to have a dialogue without the fear of retaliation from others who may not be open to listening?"

MARY OPPERMAN: So I'm not on the expert panel, but I'll get us started. And then our panel can fill in the rest. So I think that's a very good point that this is not a hierarchical place. And we don't really have a sort of top-down approach to things. And that's both wonderful in many ways and can be kind of limiting when we're trying to make a big change in our culture.

So my recommendation is to start small. Start where you are in the place and in the team that you feel the most comfortable with. And practice. Learn. Take the courses that we've offered.

Seek some advice. If you have a specific issue that you want to have emerge, don't feel that you have to do it on your own. Reach out to some of the experts that you've met and some of the places that we've shared. But start where you spend the most amount of your time.

And then with shared learning and shared conversations, those will build. And so if those are happening across the campus, they will eventually come together to intersect to create an openness to this way of communicating and dialoguing with one another. But let me turn it over to those who know.

ANGELA WINFIELD: I think that's exactly right, Mary. We talk about your locus of control and starting in the space where you are. So looking at that and if this is something-- because culture shifts-- especially in organizations as large as Cornell and as decentralized, change takes a long time. Culture change takes time. So there is a level of patience that's needed.

But if you in your areas where you can influence how dialogue happens, how folks respond happens, start using these tools in the spaces where you feel most comfortable-- if you're leading a team, if you happen to be a manager, using it with your team there, if you're happening to be a part of a committee or a work group, introducing some of these ideas there. And as it spreads, it will begin to connect up again and start to help shift the culture and normalize this sort of behavior so we can create a better sense of belonging.

REGINALD WHITE: I think in that same vein, this recognizing that we're a large place and a small place at the same time, meaning we're a small community. And therefore, what one person learns in one part of the university, even though we're decentralized, often, family members work together. Neighbors work together or work in different parts of the university.

And so there are opportunities for us to grow with each other because of the nature of our community. And so that's an opportunity to accelerate the process of culture change, because we recognize that within our environment, there's something unique and wonderful about the fact that we're all connected.

We're likely to see each other in Wegmans, when we can go back to Wegmans. We're likely to have family members who also work at Cornell. And that opportunity, sharing that information, then expands its opportunity for growth in the community.

HEI HEI DEPEW: Thank you. I want to provide the last minute to Mary Opperman for closing remarks.

MARY OPPERMAN: Thanks, Hei Hei. And I do note Adi's point. Stories stay. Lessons leave. The more that you can use your safe place to really grapple with the experiences and come out the other end with some shared lessons, the more those lessons will weave together a tapestry that we really want to see.

You've heard some great things today, and I hope that they are food for thought. Just like anything else, these are skills. And we learn our skills, and then we need to practice them. So as you think about what you're going to do as a next step, remember some of the things you've learned.

Oftentimes, we go into meetings, and we just wing it. We use our gut instincts. Recognize that this isn't one of those times where you want to just kind of wing it and use your gut, because our instincts are derived from our experiences. And so we all have different experiences that will influence how we take information in and then how we are able to participate in the conversation.

We communicate the way we've been taught, not necessarily the most effective way. And the more people's lived experiences come into that conversation, the more important it is for us to accept the fact that we know what we were taught. But it may be time for us to teach ourselves something else.

I'm going to just stop and say the first question we got about someone who yells or has what feels like a very demeaning style, that person may say, look, that's just the way we were in my family. Or that's the way I am in this other circumstance.

So our growing awareness will help us all. We're going to make mistakes. But I think if we're open to learning and honest with one another, I find this a very forgiving community.

Angela said, be curious. This is a fabulous place for us to all learn and get better at how we work together and bring together the very best of each of us. So be curious about one another. Ask open-ended questions without judgment.

And finally, whenever you can, try to assume positive intent. Many of us, myself included, make all sorts of embarrassing mistakes. But if the people that are reflecting that back to us assume a positive intent, it's much easier for me, for example, to stay open and learn. So with that, I'm going to thank you all again, thank the panelists and thank the EA, and send it back to Hei Hei.

HEI HEI DEPEW: Thank you. I want to extend my deepest gratitude to everyone today for participating in this discussion. The insight gained here today has been really informative and I believe helpful.

As the Employee Assembly continues to work to provide a voice for the staff, I encourage all staff to consider either joining an Employee Assembly committee, participating in an Employee Assembly meeting, or perhaps even, in the spring, running for an Employee Assembly seat. We have several seats available, so feel free to get in touch if you have any questions.

Again, I want to thank you all for your time and your engagement. Take care.