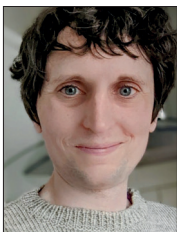


Identity: does it affect the training experience?

BY ALEX ASHMAN, MEHWISH SHARIF AND KAREN CHUI

Our identity can be influenced by many factors, both internal and external to ourselves. One may say that if one has not had to consider one's own identity at any time, perhaps that in itself is a privilege? Equally, one may find one's own identity is an asset, a benefit; it is something to celebrate and enjoy. What does identity mean to trainees, and how - if at all - can it affect the training experience? We are delighted that these trainees chose to share their eye-opening experiences with *ENT & Audiology News*. As always, we welcome your comments and discussion on our social media links.



Alex Ashman, FRCS,

ENT Specialty Registrar, Thames Valley Deanery; Publicity Lead, RCS England Pride in Surgery Forum (PRISM), UK.

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What does your identity mean to you, and what aspects of your life define or support your identity?

My identity means not fitting into a stereotypical box that everyone assumes I should fit in to, and being able to express myself in a manner that feels authentic rather than enforced. How others treat me plays a significant role in how safe a space feels, and I've been in environments that are inclusive and those that are very much not. I feel communal and collaborative roles are very important to me, including caring

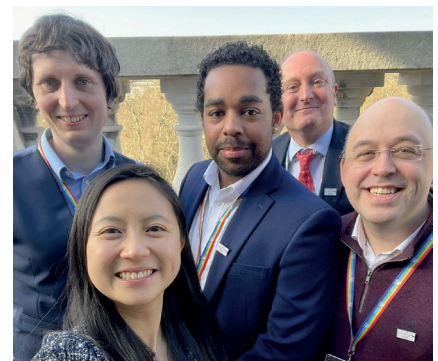
for my two children, supporting friends and colleagues, and working to make sure everyone is included.

What are the challenges or benefits of your identity as a trainee?

I worry about losing support from trainers, either due to the harmful stereotypes and misinformation about trans people out there, or because they just don't get what being trans is about. I've experienced transphobia in the workplace that makes me reluctant to share my identity at work. But being in this situation gives me a unique perspective that I can use to make things better for future trainees. It's led me to educate myself on the experiences of other minority groups, and that helps me to better understand and empathise with patients and colleagues from other backgrounds.

What do you wish trainers knew, or could do to support your identity?

I wish trainers would just take trans colleagues' identities at face value, just treat it as another way in which people



Dr Alex Ashman (top left) and Mx Karen Chui (bottom left) with Pride in Surgery Forum colleagues at the inaugural Out At The College LGBTQ+ surgical conference.

naturally vary, and at least be considerate. For instance, using pronouns correctly, not misgendering trainees in reports, and not making pejorative comments about LGBTQ+ patients and colleagues. Beyond this, it would be great to see trainers being openly supportive of trans and LGBTQ+ trainees, taking opportunities to learn about different identities, and speaking up as active bystanders when they witness discrimination. Having some formal education or accreditation for trainers would be better still.



Mehwish Sharif,

Lady Medical Officer, Fatima Jinnah Institute of Chest Disease Quetta, Balochistan, Pakistan.

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What does identity mean to you, and what aspects of your life define or support your identity?

Identity means to have discovered something about oneself. I think every person has an identity they discover over time. My identity is linked to my hearing loss. My hearing loss motivates or influences every aspect of my life, including when I thought about whether or not I would achieve my medical career. My family have supported me every step of the way. My life story and identity could have a great

impact on people who are facing challenges about their hearing loss. My aim of pursuing something, to challenge the world about what is possible, helped me to stay motivated and embrace my identity.

What are the challenges or benefits of your identity as a trainee?

Unfortunately, I have faced many challenges as a deaf medical student and deaf doctor. During my school years, none of my teachers or those with authority knew how

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Mehwish Sharif at work at Fatima Jinnah Institute of Chest Disease Quetta in Pakistan.



to support a hearing-impaired child who uses hearing aids. This may be different to my peers in other countries. In school, my teacher always degraded me and told my parents I was not doing well, but without sharing feedback or showing where I was failing.

Afterwards, my parents supported me to move on from this. I always wished to become doctor. I worked hard, and it was a struggle, but I passed the entrance test of medical college. The challenges continued during medical school. An example was during my anatomy exam; during the Viva I asked the examiner to write the question on paper as I couldn't hear him.

He refused, called me disabled, and told me I can't become a doctor. After graduation, I visited the head of radiology to discuss postgraduate training; he refused to give me admission because of my hearing impairment and my hearing aids.

In every step of my medical career so far, I have faced people try to humiliate me but, in a way, my deaf identity meant I had an aim and ambition to show that hearing-impaired people can become doctors.

What do you wish trainers knew, or could do to support your identity?

I wish my trainers would understand hearing loss. I wish they would not simply see my

deaf identity as a barrier and problem, but engage with the potential, and often simple measures to support me, like repeating sentences clearly or writing things down. They should be aware of the struggles hearing-impaired students, trainees and colleagues may face, e.g. the challenges of differentiating auscultation sounds with a stethoscope; they should also be aware that there are options to navigate this.

Instead of pointedly asking if I am 'listening properly' during lectures, they could engage and guide me regarding careers advice and postgraduate options. During the examination season, they shouldn't object to my use of hearing aids; instead, they can support reasonable adjustments, as any candidate with mitigating circumstances receives in other countries or educational institutions.

I hope that due to cultural change amongst trainers, they're able to support the potential of the next generation of students with hearing impairment who are interested in a medical career. I currently am considering moving abroad; nevertheless, I wish I had trainers who made me feel like I could achieve my goals even if I stayed.



Karen Chui, MRCS,

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What does your identity mean to you, and what aspects of your life define or support your identity?

The diversity of my identity contributes to shaping my lived experiences and interactions with people and the world. The visible and invisible aspects of my identity, which determine my values and understanding of the world, influence not only how I act and behave but also how others react and behave towards me. Being an out, Chinese surgeon and an active part of the LGBTQ+ community in surgery supports my identity as a genderqueer person and enables me to be my authentic self and provide the best care for my patients.

What are the challenges or benefits of your identity as a trainee?

When you have open-minded and supportive trainers who are interested in understanding parts of your identity, it enables reverse mentoring and mutual learning about how to create change for equity and inclusion in surgery. I've had amazing trainers demonstrate active allyship for underrepresented groups, and we all grow together. The biggest challenge of my identity as a genderqueer person is discrimination and microaggression in the workplace, and training opportunities being taken away due to homophobia/transphobia.

What do you wish trainers knew, or could do to support your identity?

My hope is for trainers to be open minded to the discussions and work required to bring about change for a more equitable and inclusive profession. The conversations and actions are difficult, as we are challenging the status quo and confronting some of the unconscious biases and privileges we hold. Trainers can support LGBTQ+ trainees by understanding the barriers they may have faced during their career, and proactively empowering trainees for training and development opportunities. Trainers are

in positions of authority and mentorship, hence trainers visibly and audibly speaking up against homophobia/transphobia towards LGBTQ+ trainees and patients is extremely impactful for the surgical profession and patient care.

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