

FM REVIEW 2016 27 COMMENTS

COMMENTS TO EDITOR: This is a passionate, well-written essay that I would like to see in the journal. However, at this point it is more an opinion piece than a personal story. It cites research to support points about stigmatizing language and implicit bias. After the powerful introductory paragraphs, it is mostly written in the third person, which again makes it sound like rendering an opinion rather than telling a story. I would like to ask the author to rewrite in a more narrative form before we send it out for review.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR: This is a powerful essay, and represents a perspective we need to see more frequently in the journal. However, in its current form it does not meet the criteria for a narrative essay, the main focus of which should be telling a personal story. Your essay is essentially an opinion piece offering valuable insight into a term bandied about without much thought. Unfortunately, the journal does not publish such pieces, no matter how meritorious.

We strongly urge you to recast the essay in a more personal form. The opening paragraphs about discovering your identity as an African-American represent exactly the kind of writing we seek in the narrative essays. Perhaps you can continue in this vein? Eliminate or greatly reduce the research summaries and citations. For example, you could make the point about the stigmatizing nature of the term in one sentence (and include a citation or two if you wish). If you do include some of this research, explain how it intersects with your life. What is it like to be carelessly associated, even by implication, with the "black cloud"? Similarly for the Black Doll research - it is a highly disturbing study, but in the narrative essay, you don't need to "prove" your points, you just need to show us your experience of being on the receiving end of passive stigmatizing language.

Most importantly, tell a story. Help the reader understand what it was like for you as an African American the first time you heard the phrase "black cloud of residency." What would it mean for you personally if it were reframed in a prideful learning mode? Share an anecdote or two about the "black cloud" that will help readers rethink their language and force them to consider their implicit biases. Confront us with a little of your own pain or discomfort so that we cannot avoid the consequences of our actions. If you rewrite the piece in the first person, I think you will move closer to the tone that we are looking for.

You are a skillful, assured writer. As an example, we loved the metaphor of the "rain" from a black cloud causing the resident to bloom. If you could recast more of the essay along these lines, it would reflect the kinds of original insights not based in research but rather in imagination and lived experience that we hope authors will contribute in this section.

COMMENTS TO EDITOR II: Although a reviewer whom I respect voiced concern that this is more an opinion piece than a story, in my view it falls on the right side of an admittedly blurry line. The essay contains one story about the author's discovery of her "blackness"; and another story about her encountering the "black cloud" appellation and what that means to her. I think within this context, her musings about how this term might be changed to remove racist implications remain more personal than prescriptive. Nevertheless, I've asked her to revisit this issue, especially in the last

paragraph. Otherwise, the essay is well-written and provides a valuable perspective that we hear too little in family medicine.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR II: Thank you for this significant reworking of your original essay. You are a talented writer, and the essay is engaging and well-crafted. On the whole, it successfully addresses the issue of telling a story rather than expressing an opinion. However, reviewer 2 still had concerns on this point. We encourage you to look specifically at the last paragraph, and try to reframe your thoughts about bias, stereotyping and altering the term "black cloud" as a personal musing rather than as a prescription. How do you feel personally about language used in medicine that is explicitly or implicitly racist? How does such language complicate your role as a black physician? What would it mean to you if this term - and other racist language - fell into disfavor? By reworking this last section from a more personal perspective, you will still convey a powerful message while ensuring that the essay is not advocacy for a point of view, no matter how meritorious.

COMMENTS TO EDITOR III: The author has done a superb job of addressing reviewer and editor concerns. The essay now conforms beautifully to the narrative essay section. It is not an opinion piece about the phrase "black cloud," but a story which both educates and uplifts. I would accept it instantly except that the final sentence uses the word "just" twice, which is awkward. But the meaning changes subtly depending on which word is removed, so I feel this needs to be the author's decision. Once this issue is decided, I strongly recommend accepting this piece.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR III: Thank you so much. You've done a brilliant job of reworking the concluding paragraphs. The second to the last provides a non-didactic primer on racism; while the latter embraces the on-call experience in a way that both educates and lifts up.

The concluding sentence is terrific, but contains a wee stumble that requires your clarification: you use the word "just" twice, which seems awkward and unnecessary. One of these should be deleted. But in studying the sentence, I realized that removing one versus the other subtly changes the meaning, and I feel you should be the one to make this decision. Please let us know how you'd like this sentence to read.

Also, on p. 4, line 41, an "I" is missing. Line 43, again to avoid the use of "the term" twice in a single sentence, the second time you might consider substituting "the phrase." These extremely small possible changes are indicated in the attached ms.

We have no further concerns and are delighted to bring your thoughtful insights before a wider audience.

By the way, your response to reviewer 2 re racism was so erudite and nuanced - it really educated me as to the relationship between privilege and racism, and why your example is more the former than the latter. Thank you!

COMMENTS TO EDITOR III: The author has accepted minor stylistic changes. This essay is definitely ready to be accepted. It provides useful insights into how racism and privilege operate through

unconscious micro-aggressions, and shows how problematic a “throw-away” line can be. I hope it will be illuminating to our readership.

COMMENTS TO AUTHOR III: Wonderful, moving, and illuminating essay. Thank you for the comment in your "author response" about your simultaneous membership in different groups, some of which convey privilege and some of which can elicit bias. Once again, I've learned something from your sensitivity to these nuances. I am confident that FM readers will also learn a great deal from this honest and hopeful essay.