Calling it by its name

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Context: These poems have been created using the words of past and present learners from the health professions in India who have ever experienced othering during their training, and who have volunteered to talk about it. **Click here** to read the editorial about the project. Alternatively, you may right click over the hyperlinked text, copy the link, and paste it in a browser of your choice.

Ableism's boxes

If I cannot walk
without my crutches,
remember that I
still get places,
and I've long survived
the disdain in
your ableist gaze.

If I was able
to do all the duties
of internship in medical school
then why deny me
a postgraduate seat?
If you can't support me,
at least don't demoralize me.

Your back-biting,
your indifference,
might lower my self-esteem
and cause mental distress,
but I'm as good as you in some things
and as bad as you in others.

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If I do not fit
into the box
of your definitions,
it certainly does not mean
that I am wholly incapable.

I'm dutiful,
I'm a workaholic.
No sympathy please,
I am capable.

When teachers other

Why forget what you went through
when you were medical students?
Were you never anxious during vivas?

Patronizing us,
condescending,
as though we are filth.

When we ask for understanding,
we get othering.

I chose to speak against
rude, unprofessional consultants.
I am scum now.
Isolated, taught by humiliation,
ostracised by student peers
who opt for the benefits of flattery

I am not defective,
disturbed, a hard case,
as you like to say behind my back.
I am responsible
putting in my best effort.

Be careful what you say,
for your toxicity might be normalised
by some ill minds,
the very minds you should be teaching
not to discriminate.

People use "othering"
to suppress their inferiority complex.
Tell me, do you feel superior
when you crush me?

Consider this:
you wouldn't need this toxic technique
to make yourself appear credible
if you had the confidence
that you yourself were able.

I am a teacher myself now.
The othering ends with me.

Stand in line

Stand in line!
You're a student,
there's no space for you
in our constellation.

Don't you dare speak!
You're a junior.
Your voice adds nothing
to the conversation.

Call us abusive
if you misguidedly must,
but this is a rehearsal
for real life in medicine.

We'll isolate you for calling it out,
because segregation is a tool
we use with finesse
to counter naivety and ambition.

What is your full name?

'Pick a voluntary group of 5.'
Why does no one pick me?
It's the way I look...

Everyone seems happy.
Why is no one my friend?
It's the way I talk...

'What is your full name?'
You immediately profile me.
You see me,
but only through a lens
that magnifies my caste
and diminishes my hard work.

'Oh! You're a topper?
Anyway, you don't need
to work hard,
you will get admission easily.'

'Funny,
you don't look like
you're from a reserved caste.'

Reservation is a heated,
political issue,
but shine the light on caste
and everyone turns apolitical.

Why shy away from discussing
this insidious othering?
Reservation is no boon
if socio-cultural discrimination persists.

When will you understand?
You can't bemoan reservation
with the same breath that cheers on
caste superiority rhetoric.
Me?
I walk up the bright side.

It was reservation that empowered
this girl from a humble background;
I will stand my ground
and become the first doctor in my family.

Acknowledgment: without the authentic contributions made by the respondents, it would not have been possible to create poems on othering that illustrate such a wide spectrum of issues.