

# Identifying Microaggressions

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**ALA** OFFICE FOR DIVERSITY, LITERACY  
& OUTREACH SERVICES

# Learning Objectives

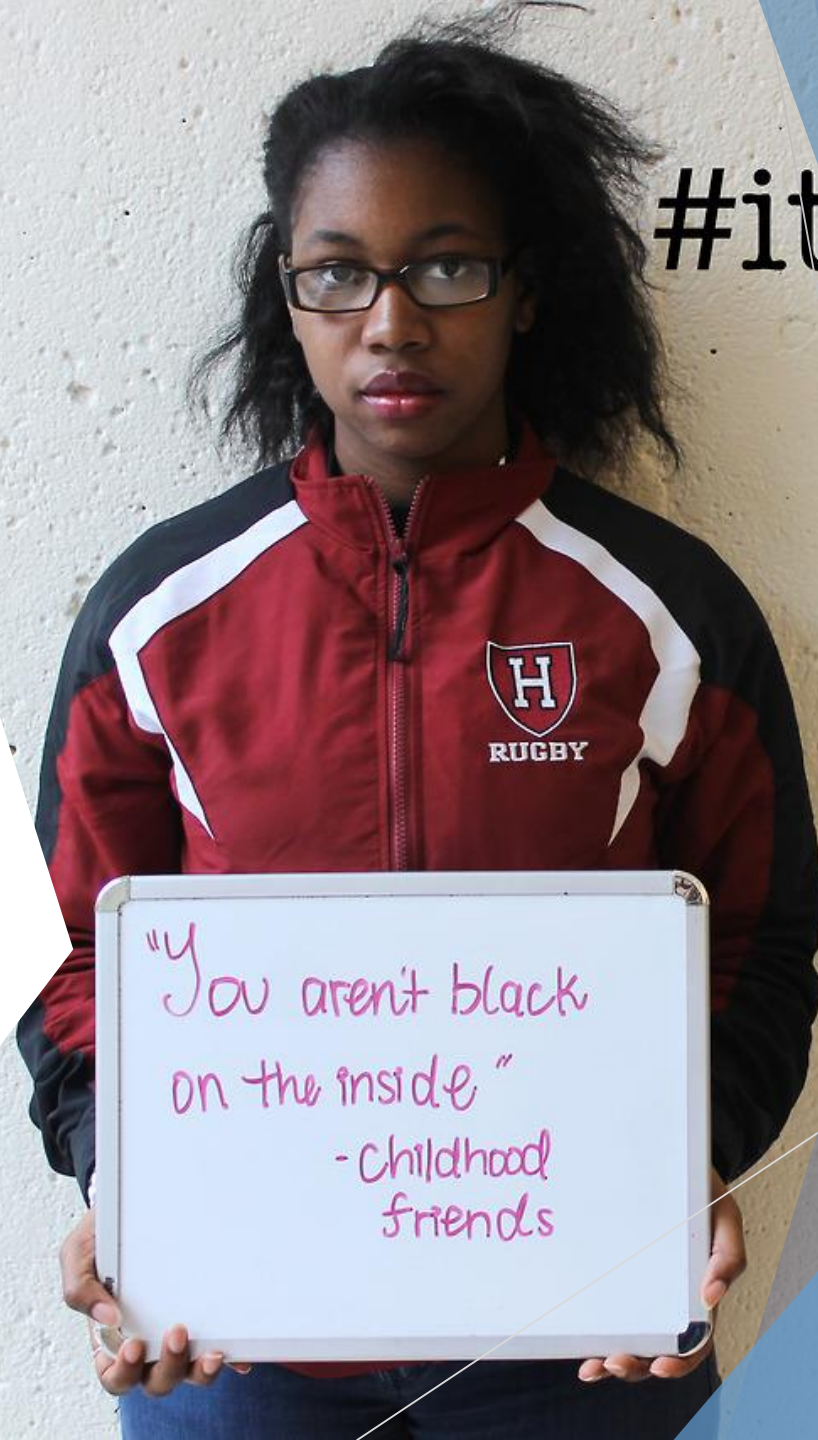
- ▶ Define microaggressions
- ▶ Discuss how microaggressions may impact librarianship
- ▶ Begin to identify way to recognize and possible responses to microaggressions.

# Microaggressions

► Microaggressions are the **brief everyday slights, insults, indignities, and denigrating messages** sent to people of color [LGBTQIA+, people with disabilities, immigrants] by **well-intentioned** [people] who are unaware of the **hidden messages** being communicated.

Dr. Derald Wing Su  
Columbia University

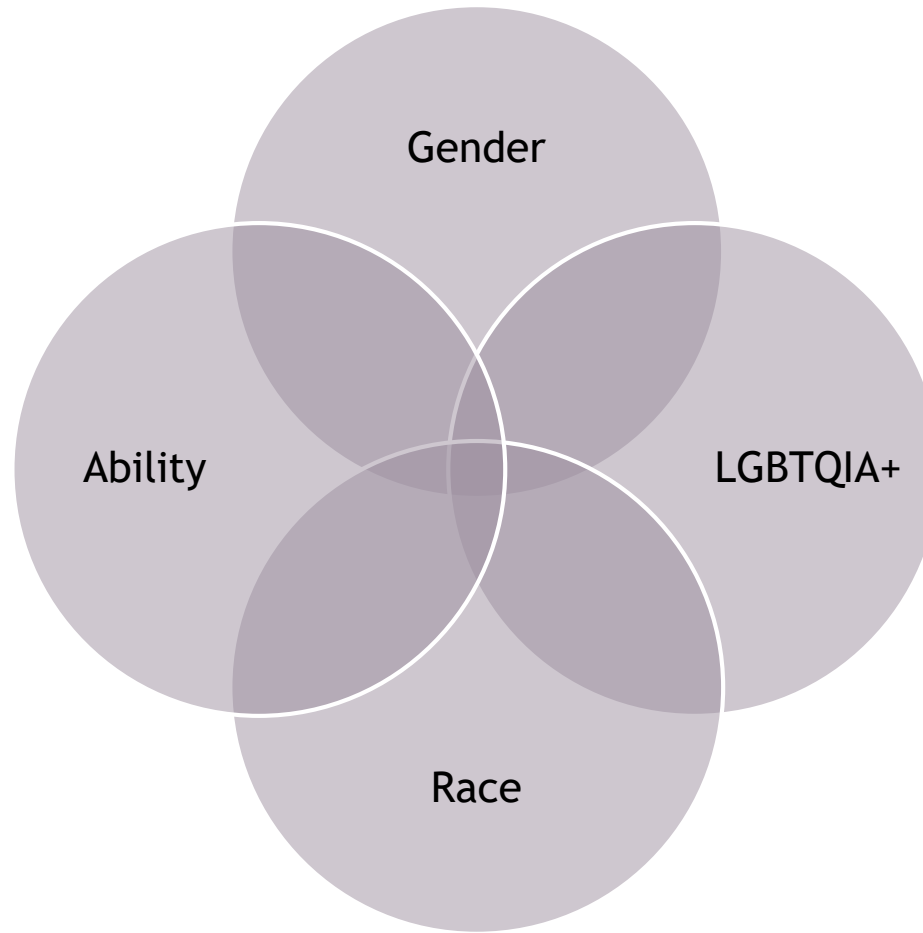
<http://itooamharvard.tumblr.com>



#itooamb

## Intersectionality

We all possess many identities. It's possible to be discriminated against and also hold privilege.



# Examples of Microaggressions in Comments



“Stop crying and acting like a girl.”



”I’m always being called by the name of my co-worker; the only other black person at work.”

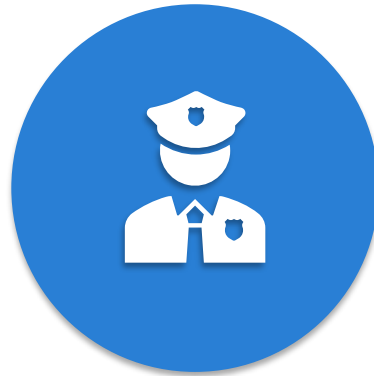


“That’s so ghetto!”

# Overt & Deliberate Acts of Bigotry



**HATE CRIMES**



**VIOLENCE**



**LEGISLATION THAT CREATES  
BARRIERS BASED ON SOCIAL  
IDENTITIES**

Subtle

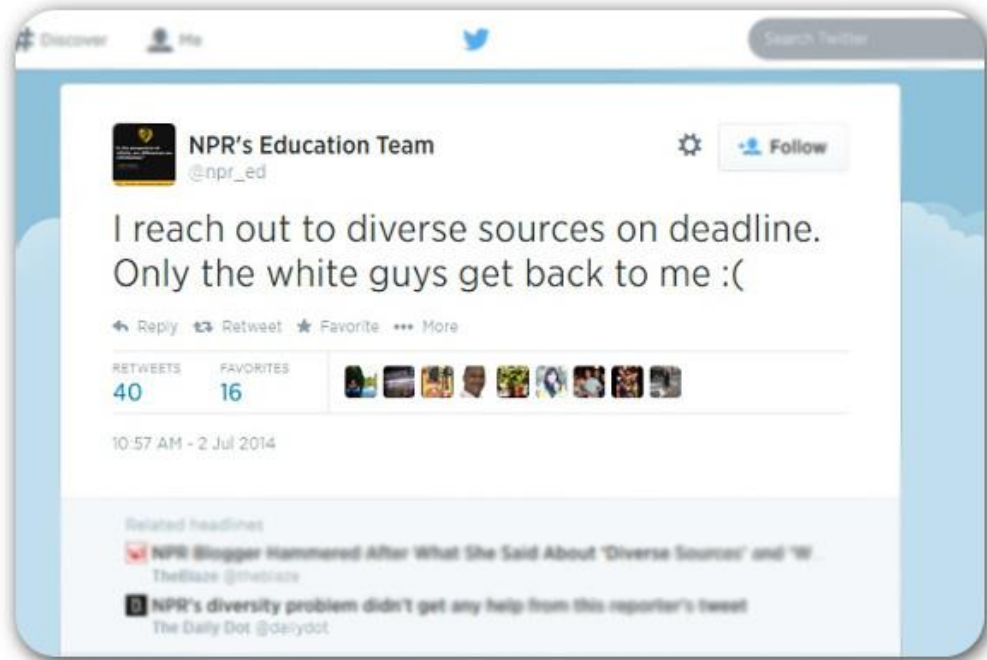


Unintentional



Ambiguous

# Common Characteristics of Microaggressions



What is the  
message  
here?



**Microaggressions**  
in  
**Everyday Life**

**Race, Gender, and  
Sexual Orientation**



# Themes and Messages

# Theme: Ascription of Intelligence

## Microaggressions

- ▶ “You are a credit to your race.”
- ▶ ”How did you get into that school?”

## Message

- ▶ People of color are generally not as intelligent as white people.
- ▶ You do not belong in this educational institution.

# Theme: Alien in Own Land

## Microaggressions

- ▶ “Where are you from, originally?”
- ▶ “You speak English really well.”

## Message

- ▶ You are a foreigner
- ▶ You do not belong here.

# Theme: Color Blindness

## Microaggressions

- ▶ “I don’t see color.”
- ▶ “There is only one race; the human race.”
- ▶ “I treat everyone the same.”

## Message

- ▶ Your identity is not relevant.
- ▶ Your experiences are not real.

# Theme: Criminality

## Microaggressions

- ▶ A person of color being followed around a store.
- ▶ Locking your car door when you see a group of people of color.

## Message

- ▶ You are dangerous.
- ▶ You cannot be trusted.

# Theme: Pathologizing Cultural Values

## Microaggression

- ▶ Asking a person of color to be “less animated” or “loud.”

## Message

- ▶ You need to assimilate to the dominant culture.

# Theme: Myth of Meritocracy

## Microaggression

- ▶ "My great, great grandfather was an immigrant. He worked hard and made something of himself."

## Message

- ▶ The playing field is even; so any problem encountered is because of the individual.

# Environmental Microaggressions

## Microaggressions

- ▶ A college or university with buildings only names after wealthy, white, heterosexual, cisgender men.
- ▶ Television shows/movies that feature predominantly white people.
- ▶ Overabundance of liquor stores & fast food restaurants in communities of color.

## Message

- ▶ You don't belong. There is only so far you can go here.
- ▶ You are an outsider. You don't exist.
- ▶ People of color are lazy and deviant.





# Imagery



## Microaggressions in Libraries

- ▶ Racial Microaggressions in Academic Libraries: Results of Minority and Non-Minority Librarians. Jaena Alabi, *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 41 (1), 47-53.

## Purpose of the study

- ▶ Investigate the prevalence of racial microaggressions in the academic library environment and determine whether non-minority librarians are conscious of racial microaggressions their minority colleagues are experiencing.

# Initial Findings

<b>Experience/Observation Statement</b>	<b>Minority Responses</b>	<b>Non-Minority Responses</b>
A colleague told me that I was hired because of my race.	7.3%	1%
A colleague accused me of being aggressive because of my race.	9.8%	2%
A colleague has told me that he/she was "color blind."	14.6%	1%

**“ I’m probably such a racist, but a black man dressed as Santa is just wrong. ”**

(via [microaggressions](#))

1 year ago

43 0 share

**“ Yeah, but you’re not that kind of Native. ”**

This has happened more than once.

A person complains about the lazy “Natives” downtown, suggesting they are all a bunch of ‘huffers’ exploiting the system. I respond by pointing out that I’m Metis (I have pale skin).

[race, ethnicity](#)

1 year ago

65 0 share

I patiently waited after class to ask my professor a question. He then began making sexual comments such as that I made him aware of his age because he could never get with me because I was out of his league. I felt uncomfortable so I left, with my question unanswered. I could not believe that my college professor prioritized his inappropriate comment over my question and ultimately the quality of my education, as I am no longer comfortable going to him for questions.

[gender, survivor](#)

1 year ago

56 0 share

**Teacher::** what do they (referring to a picture of Eastern women in hijabs)

**Student::** Terrorists.

**Teacher::** I was looking traditional, or worried Good, Tyler!

[ethnicity, religion](#)

1 year ago

**“ CAN YOU ”**

The “joking” rears friends, coworkers I tell them that used to have to me “it’s not like it’s not like you me feel like n

[ableism](#)

1 year ago

useums” in Santa Ana Pueblo, New Mexico.

How much native do you have in your blood

“How much native do you have in your

Submission at the ATALM 2017 poster

“Documenting Microaggression in Art and Museums” in Santa Ana Pueblo.

“You sound too educated to be Native...”

“So-and-so can probably speak more about \*insert any Native topic/culture/object/situation/history\* since they’re Native...” [being put on the spot]

microaggressions.com & lismicroaggressions.com

The background features a complex, abstract design of overlapping, semi-transparent blue geometric shapes, primarily triangles and polygons, in various shades of blue, ranging from light to dark. These shapes are layered to create a sense of depth and movement, particularly on the right side of the frame. The left side of the image is a plain white background.

# Addressing Microaggressions

# Impact on Individuals

- ▶ “microaggressions create a hostile and invalidating climate for people of color [LGBTQIA+, people with disabilities], saps their spiritual and psychic energies, and their cumulative nature can result in depression, frustration, anger, rage, loss of self-esteem, anxiety, etc.”

Dr. Derald Wing Su

# Reflections and Considerations

- ▶ What kind of risk will I be taking if I speak up?
- ▶ Do I have a sense of what I want to achieve when I speak up?
- ▶ Do I feel I am safe from physical or emotional abuse of any kind?



# Model the Behavior

- ▶ Model the behavior you want to address.
- ▶ One goal is education. It's not about winning a point or making someone feel bad or wrong. It's about opening a dialogue and helping someone understand something from a different perspective.

Focus on the event,  
not the person

▶ How to tell someone  
they sound racist, from  
Jay Smooth

▶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b0Ti-gkJiXc>



# Use yourself as a model

- ▶ None of us were born with knowledge we now have about equity, diversity, and inclusion. Use your own stories to demonstrate how you've “unlearned” certain harmful, inaccurate, and misleading assumptions or information.

# Reframe the Narrative

## Microaggression

- ▶ I don't see color. I treat everyone the same.

## Reframe

- ▶ People have different needs and experiences. We need to move from an equality model that treats everyone the same to an equity model that takes into account peoples needs in our responses.
- ▶ It is okay to see color. It exists and it's not all negative.

# Questions

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## ODLOS INITIATIVES



### ADULT LITERACY THROUGH LIBRARIES

In partnership with ProLiteracy, ODLOS provides free resources for libraries to expand adult literacy services, including an interactive online course on the priority areas and recommendations from the 2014 *Adult Literacy through Libraries: An Action Agenda*. Visit [bit.ly/Literacy\\_ActionAgenda](http://bit.ly/Literacy_ActionAgenda)



### AMERICAN DREAM LITERACY INITIATIVE

In partnership with ODLOS, ALA's Public Programs Office and Dollar General Literacy Foundation offer grants to U.S. public libraries to expand services for adult English language learners or for basic education and workforce development. Learn more: [ala.org/americandream](http://ala.org/americandream)



### LITERACY CLEARINGHOUSE

The ALA Literacy Clearinghouse brings together resources from across the Association that promote literacy across the lifespan. Content includes equity of access, multiple literacies, and recommended resources by populations served. Visit [literacy.ala.org](http://literacy.ala.org)

### SPECTRUM SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

This program recruits and provides scholarships to students from racially underrepresented groups to assist them with obtaining a graduate degree and leadership positions within



## ALA'S OFFICE FOR DIVERSITY, LITERACY AND OUTREACH SERVICES



### MISSION

Using a social justice framework, the ALA Office for Diversity, Literacy and Outreach Services (ODLOS) supports library and information science workers in creating responsible and all-inclusive spaces that serve and represent the entire community by:

- Supporting library workers' development of resources to address inequities
- Creating a professional culture in which equity, diversity, and inclusion are part of everybody's everyday work

Learn more: [ala.org/diversity](http://ala.org/diversity)



### CONTINUING EDUCATION

ODLOS offers a robust continuing education portfolio, including workshops and presentations, webinars, and consultations.

Sample workshop:

- Facilitating Conversations about Race

Sample webinar:

- Latina/o Outreach: Steps to Engaging Your Community

ODLOS provides one-time or ongoing consultations on strategic planning for equity, diversity, and inclusion.

Visit [bit.ly/ODLOSContinuingEd](http://bit.ly/ODLOSContinuingEd)



### OUTREACH TOOLKITS

ODLOS works with member groups to create toolkits and



# Thank You



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[www.ala.org/diversity](http://www.ala.org/diversity)