

# ALA OFFICE FOR DIVERSITY, LITERACY & OUTREACH SERVICES

Uncovering Privilege and  
Addressing Microaggressions

# Objectives

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- Examine the notion of privilege as a social justice concept
- Examine how privilege and implicit or unconscious bias create barriers for our patrons, staff, and community
- Explore how to identify and begin to address microaggressions



### **Diversity**

To create *understanding* and *appreciation* for cultural and social difference.

### **Cultural Competency**

Effectively *interacting* with people of different backgrounds and cultures.

### **Social Justice**

Focuses on *power dynamics* among different groups of people while acknowledging *historical* and *institutional inequities*.

# Social Justice

**Goal:** full and equitable participation of people from all social identity groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs.

A world in which the distribution of resources is equitable and sustainable, and all members are physically and psychologically safe, secure, recognized, and treated with respect.

**Process:** democratic and participatory; respectful and affirming of human agency; and builds capacity for working collaboratively with others to create change. The process involves exploring power and privilege within individuals, systems, and institutions.

Adapted from *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice Third Edition*



[https://www.ted.com/talks/dolly\\_chugh\\_how\\_to\\_let\\_go\\_of\\_being\\_a\\_good\\_person  
and become a better person?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/dolly_chugh_how_to_let_go_of_being_a_good_person_and_become_a_better_person?language=en)

# Privilege

- Privilege is benefitting from social group membership.
- It is the **systemic** favoring, validating, and including of certain social identities over others.
- Individuals cannot “opt out” of systems of privilege; rather these systems are inherent to the society in which we live.

# Types of Privilege

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Race (White Privilege)

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Gender (Male, Cisgender, Binary)

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Sexual Orientation (Heterosexual)

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Ability (Visible and Invisible)

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Religion (Christian)

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Unnamed social identities

# Everybody has privilege

- Individuals can come from a poor economic background but still have white privilege or male privilege.
- People of color may not have white privilege, but they may have gender privilege or heterosexual privilege.

# Social Construction

- Concept invented by humans
- Interpret human differences and justify socio-economic arrangements that benefit a dominant group

## Internal

Feelings

Beliefs

Values

## Interpersonal

Actions

Behaviors

Language

## Systems

### Structures

- media
- housing

### Institutions

- *New York Times*
- *Housing and Urban Development (HUD)*

# Privilege in Libraries Activity

	Yes	No	N/A
I can, if I wish, arrange to be in the company of people of my same gender identity most of the time.			
I can examine the majority of materials in my library, print or media, and see people of my race widely and positively represented.			
I can enter library spaces without taking into account physical accessibility.			
In my professional life and in my library activities, I feel welcomed and “normal” in the areas of public life, institutional life, and social life.			

# Implicit Bias

The **attitudes or stereotypes** that affect our **understanding, actions, and decisions** in an **unconscious manner**.

*(Adapted from the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity at Ohio State University)*

# Characteristics of Implicit Bias



Pervasive



Related to, but distinct, from explicit bias



May contradict our stated values and beliefs



Generally favor our own ingroup



Malleable

# Why does implicit bias matter?

- Affects decisions, behaviors, and interactions
- Connection to structural inequity
- Has broad negative impacts



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ECONOMIC VIEW

## *Pinpointing Racial Discrimination by Government Officials*



Dani Pendergast

By Justin Wolfers

Oct. 6, 2017



- 20,000 emails to local government employees
- Commonplace questions
- Half from someone with name associated with African-Americans
- Half from someone with name associated with Whites
- 13% more likely unanswered

# Implicit Bias in Professional Spaces

- Perceptions – how we see people and perceive situations
- Attitudes – how we respond to people and situations
- Attention – which identities and people we pay most (and least) attention to
- Listening – extent to which we actively listen
- Language – how we frame things

# A Lesson in How to Overcome Implicit Bias

**CODE SWITCH**

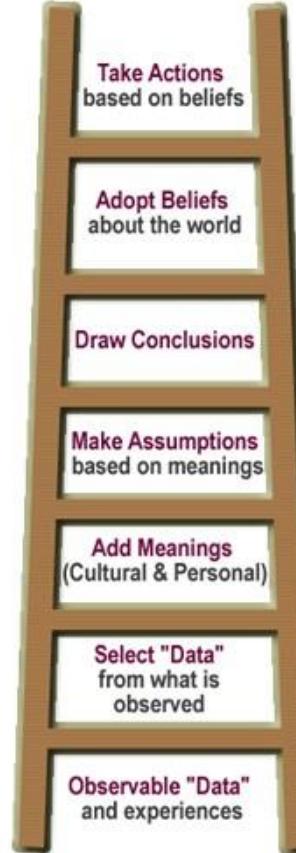


<https://www.npr.org/templates/transcript/transcript.php?storyId=604070231>

# Disrupting Implicit Bias with the Ladder of Inference

“Rethinking Thinking” by Trevor Maber, TED-Ed

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KJLqOclPqis>



Source: *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook*, Senge et al, 1994.

# RACIAL 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



# Overt & Deliberate Acts of Bigotry



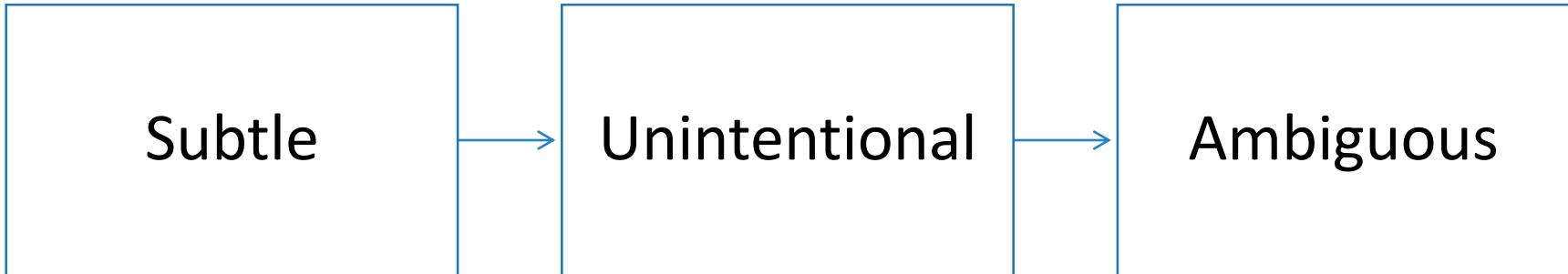
HATE CRIMES



VIOLENCE



LEGISLATION THAT CREATES  
BARRIERS BASED ON SOCIAL  
IDENTITIES

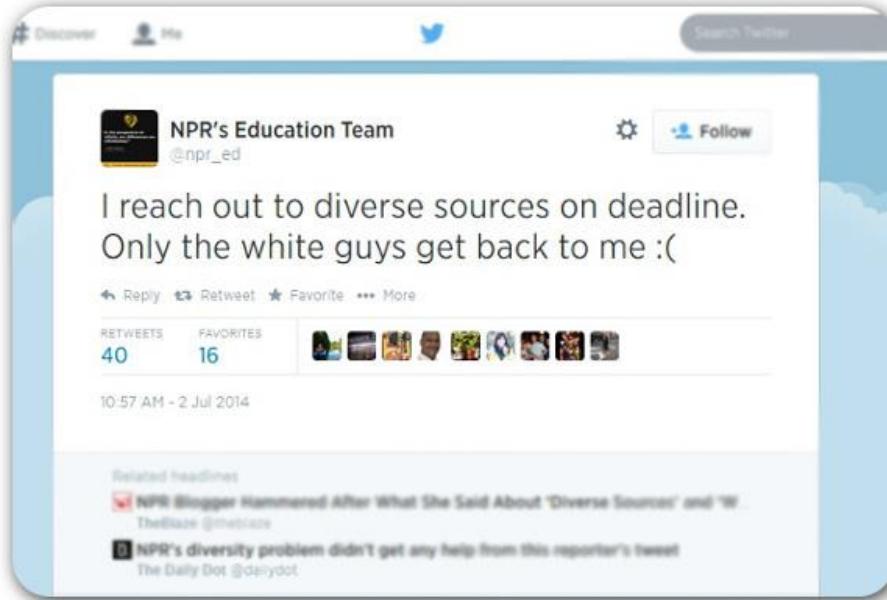


## Common Characteristics of Microaggressions

**WE JUDGE OURSELVES  
ON OUR INTENT  
AND  
WE JUDGE OTHERS ON  
THEIR IMPACT**

<http://saasystah.com/blog/intent-vs-impact>

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What is the message 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.

or

Your experiences are  
not about race.

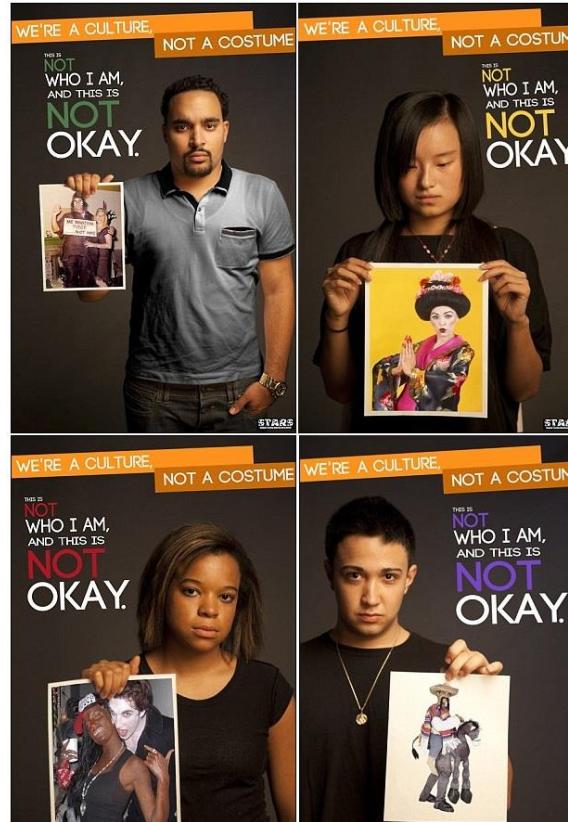
## Microaggressions in Everyday Life

Race, Gender, and  
Sexual Orientation





# Imagery



# Microaggressions in Libraries

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“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

To 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

Experience/Observation Statement	Minority Responses	Non-Minority Responses
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%

# 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



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8RfwuibEd3A>

# Reflections and Considerations

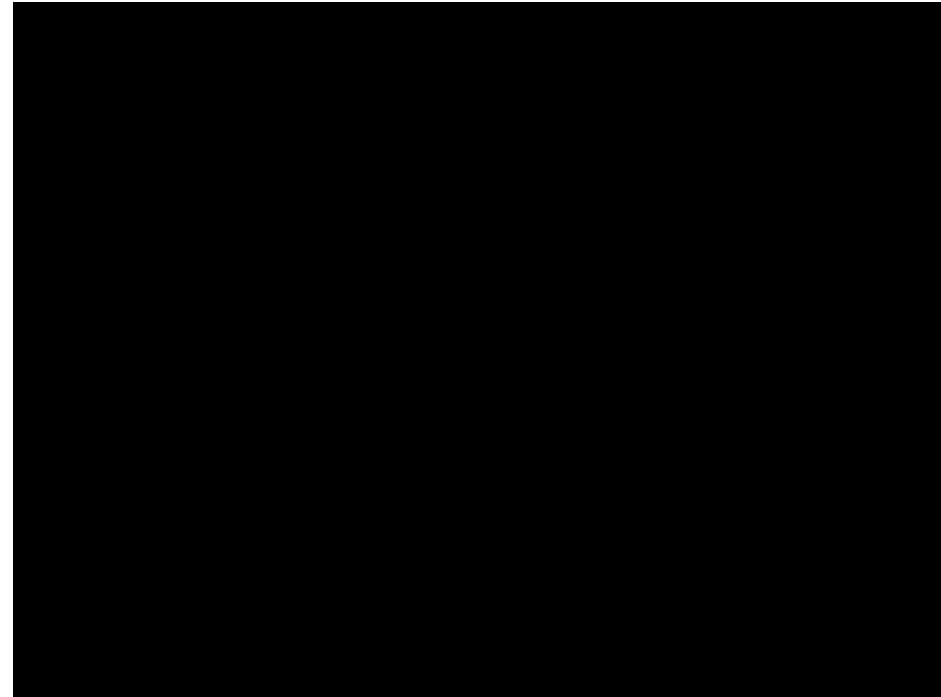
- What kind of risk will I be taking if I speak up?
- Do I have a sense of what I want to achieve if I speak up?
- Do I feel I am safe from physical or emotional abuse of any kind?

# Model the Behavior

- Model the behavior you want to address.
- Keep in mind that education is the goal.
- Use your own stories to demonstrate how you've "unlearned" certain harmful, inaccurate, and misleading assumptions or information.

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>

# Reframe the Narrative

## Microaggression

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

## Reframe

- We need to move from an equality model that treats everyone the same to an equity model that takes into account people’s needs and lived experiences.
- Race is a social construct. But it has very real implications and impacts.

# Questions for Reflection

- How are privilege, implicit bias, and microaggressions relevant to the work of libraries?
- What do you think the barriers might be to addressing privilege, implicit bias, and microaggressions in your work?
- What assets or opportunities exist to address privilege, implicit bias, or microaggressions in your work?

# Thank You

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