IDENTIFYING & RESPONDING TO MICROAGGRESSIONS

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GROUNDING ASSUMPTIONS

• The work of equity and diversity is about creating community, which involves building trust through careful listening, respectful disagreement, and taking risks
• We respect each other’s confidentiality; pay attention to what is yours to share – and what is not
• Growth and learning can be uncomfortable; remember it’s ok to make mistakes - we all do
• Individuals and organizations can – and do – grow and change, but it doesn’t happen overnight
• It’s ok to take care of ourselves; practice forgiveness and letting go, so you can sustain yourself in this work

Adapted from Jamie Washington, Washington Consulting Group
LEARNING OBJECTIVES

• Introduce the concept of microaggressions
• Discuss how microaggressions can impact the work we do in libraries
• Begin to identify some ways to respond to microaggressions
MICROAGGRESSIONS

Racial microaggressions are the brief and everyday slights, insults, indignities and denigrating messages sent to people of color by well-intentioned [people] who are unaware of the hidden messages being communicated.

-Derald Wing Sue, Columbia University
Stop crying and acting like a little girl.

I'm always being called by the name of my coworker; the only other black person at work.

That's so ghetto.
OVERT AND DELIBERATE ACTS OF BIGOTRY
INTENT

- Subtle
- Unintentional
- Ambiguous
nprEd  
@npr_ed

I reach out to diverse sources on deadline. Only the white guys get back to me :

10:57 AM - 2 Jul 2014
43 RETWEETS 19 FAVORITES

Anya Kamenezza
@anya1anya

@latinorebels @npr_ed hi. I regret it a lot. Was sharing momentary frustration at daily struggle to find diverse sources (1)

6:00 AM - 7 Jul 2014
1 FAVORITE
“We thought it was important to show that both marginalization and identity consciousness do not come from thin air; they are formed from structures of power and privilege that are both very personal and hard to see. The concept of microaggressions makes them a lot more tangible and less abstract.”

Vivian Lu, Columbia University
THEMES AND MESSAGES

Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation by Derald Wing Sue
LOOK DIFFERENT

http://www.lookdifferent.org/videos/6-your-english-is-so-good
“Where are you from?”
“You speak good English.”

Theme: Alien in Own Land

Message: You are not American
You are a foreigner
Ascription of Intelligence

Microaggression

"You are a credit to your race."

Asking an Asian person for help with math or science.

Theme

People of color are generally not as intelligent as whites.

Message

All Asians are intelligent and good in math/sciences.
“I don’t see color.”

“There is only one race, the human race.”

Color Blindness

Denying a person of color’s racial/ethnic experiences

Microaggression

Theme

Message
Microaggression: Clutching purse or wallet when a person of color walks by. Following a person of color in a store.

Theme: Criminality/Assumption of criminal status.

Message: You are a criminal. You are dangerous.
Pathologizing Cultural Values

Microaggression

- Dismissing an individual who brings up race in a work setting.
- Telling a person of color that they are too loud/animated.

Message

Assimilate to dominant culture.
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Leave your cultural baggage outside.
Theme

Myth of Meritocracy

Microaggression

"I believe the most qualified person should get the job."

"Men and women have equal opportunities for achievement."

Message

People of color are given extra unfair benefits because of their race. The playing field is even, any problem is with the individual.
ENVIRONMENTAL MICROAGGRESSIONS

Macro-level microaggressions, which are more apparent on systemic and environmental levels

- A college or university with buildings that are all named after White heterosexual upper class males
- Television show and movies that feature predominantly White people, with no representation of people of color
- Overcrowding of public schools in communities of color
- Overabundance or liquor stores or fast food restaurants in communities of color

MESSAGE—

- You don’t belong/You won’t succeed here. There is only so far you can go.
- You are an outsider/You don’t exist.
- People of color don’t/shouldn’t value education
- People of color are lazy and deviant.
WE’RE A CULTURE, NOT A COSTUME.

Students Teaching About Racism in Society from Ohio University
MASCOTS
“Racial microaggressions create a hostile and invalidating climate for people of color, saps their spiritual and psychic energies, and their cumulative nature can result in depression, frustration, anger, rage, loss of self esteem, anxiety, etc.”

-Derald Wing Sue
DO YOU SEE WHAT I SEE? ACADEMIC LIBRARIANS’ EXPERIENCES OF RACISM

Jaena Alabi, Auburn University Poster at Joint Conference for Librarians of Color 2
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 may be experiencing.
INITIAL FINDINGS

- Non-minority staff were less likely to experience microaggressions in the workplace.
- Non-minority staff were less likely to observe microaggressions happening in the libraries.
14.6% Minority – 1-2% Non-Minority

A colleague has told me that he/she was color-blind.

A colleague said that people of color do not experience racism anymore.

A colleague has told me that people should not think about race anymore.
Microaggressions can also be committed by people in marginalized groups.

When the co-chair of your library’s diversity committee uses the words “pussy” and “bitch” and thinks it’s acceptable because he is gay.
ADDRESSING MICROAGGRESSIONS
ASSESS THE SITUATION

- Find a way to pause from assuming or reacting right away. If it is the first time and the incident is new, you could ask the person to repeat what he/she said or did.

- Your first concern must be that you are safe from physical, emotional, or psychic abuse of any kind.
ASK YOURSELF...

- What kind of risk will I be taking if I do this?
- Is this particular action worth my time and effort?
- Do I know what I want to achieve?
MODEL THE BEHAVIOR

- Always model the behavior you want from the person or people you are confronting.

- It is also a good idea to stay away from being sarcastic, snide, mocking or arrogant (even though this can be very tempting).

- Again, the goal here is education. It’s not about winning a point or making someone feel bad or wrong. It’s about helping them understand something from a different perspective.
FOCUS ON THE EVENT, NOT THE PERSON

By directing the conversation to the behavior, event, or comment you will decrease the likelihood of defensiveness.
Use yourself as an example. None of us were born with the knowledge we now have about equity and diversity. Use your own stories of how you’ve “unlearned” certain hurtful, inaccurate, and misleading information.
The best “equity and diversity education” comes when we are able to help someone understand a particular topic or issue using a different frame – with different assumptions and different conclusions.

Example -- Affirmative action as a social promotion policy is no different than benefits for

- a student being accepted to a college because their parents previously attended the same college
- REFRAAME - Always been preferential treatment, what’s new is WHO is benefitting
CASE STUDY: PATRON BEHAVIOR

A non-traditional returning student who identifies as gay and is also Lakota comes to the reference desk to ask how to print something. The staff person, knowing you need to log in with your student id, asks the student for an ID.

The student sends a complaint to the director of the libraries because they feel like they were singled out and possibly profiled as not being a student by the staff person.

How do you respond?
What should you consider?
THANK YOU

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