



## **SEAS Center for Women in Engineering**

Fall 2019

Faculty Handouts

Background and Reading Materials on  
Unconscious Bias and Microaggressions.

### **What is Unconscious Bias**

Social stereotypes about certain groups of people that individuals form outside their own conscious awareness. Everyone holds unconscious beliefs about various social and identity groups, and these biases stem from one's tendency to organize social worlds by categorizing.

Unconscious bias is far more prevalent than conscious prejudice and often incompatible with one's conscious values.

#### Unconscious Bias

- Bias that we are unaware of & which happens outside of our control
- Happens automatically & is triggered by our brain making quick judgements & assessments of people & situations
- Influenced by our background, cultural environment & personal experiences

#### Implicit Bias

- Refers to the same area that unconscious bias does BUT questions the level to which these biases are unconscious especially as we are being made increasingly aware of them
- Once we know biases are not always explicit, we are responsible for them
- Need to recognize & acknowledge biases & find ways to mitigate their impact on our behavior & decisions

#### Factors that contribute to our biases

- Early life experiences
- Media and news programming
- Cultural biases (passive observations of who occupies valued roles and devalued roles in the community)
- Yourself

How does unconscious bias impact your role as a faculty member?

- Research has found that unconscious bias can heavily influence recruitment and selection
  - What are ways we could work to overcome the influence of unconscious bias in the faculty recruitment process? In the classroom?
- How will you work to reduce bias in your interactions?

### **What are Microaggressions**

Definition: A comment or action that subtly and often unconsciously or unintentionally expresses a prejudiced attitude toward a member of a marginalized group (such as a racial minority)

Microaggressions are the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights toward people of color and/or underrepresented groups.

Intent vs Impact

- A paper cut of bias delivered, whether intentional or unintentional, under the guise of civility, logic, curiosity or assistance.
- Bias under the guise of civility: Your English is excellent
- Bias under guise of logic: As a woman I know what you go through as a minority
- Bias under the guise of curiosity: No, where are you really from?
- Bias under the guise of assistance: If you were a real engineer, you would understand

### **Somethings to think about:**

When people discuss microaggressions, a common response is that they are “innocent acts” and that the person who experiences them should “let go of the incident” and “not make a big deal out of it.”

Derald Wing Sue has argued that the impact of subtle prejudice, such as microaggressions, is more harmful than the impact of blatant discrimination.

Leaving microaggressions unaddressed can have as much of a negative impact as the microaggression itself

## Additional Readings

Alwan, A., Doan, J., and Garcis E., (2018) Microaggressions as a barrier to effective collaboration between teaching faculty and academic librarians: An analysis of the results of a US and Canadian survey. *The International Journal of Information, Diversity and Inclusions* 2(3), [publish.lib.umd.edu/IJIDI/](http://publish.lib.umd.edu/IJIDI/) This paper looks at status based microaggressions in Higher Education and its impact on team collaboration.

Griggith, D., (2018) Avoiding implicit messages that turn job candidates off. *HigherEd Jobs* <https://www.higheredjobs.com/articles/articleDisplay.cfm?ID=1593>. This article has short, but far from exhaustive, list of microaggressions that arise during interviews and campus visits.

Harrison, C., and Tanner, K., *Language Matters: Considering Microaggressions in Science*, *CBE—Life Sciences Education* • 17:fe4, 1–8, Spring 2018 (<https://www.lifescied.org/doi/pdf/10.1187/cbe.18-01-0011>) Reviews definitions and concepts of microaggressions, microinsults, microinvalidation. “ While the research literature is expanding, there is already evidence that microaggressions can lead to arrange of psychological impacts that can impede learning, engagement and belongingness in a scientific or academic setting (page 4)

Patton, S. Dear White American. *ChronicleVitae* (2014). <https://chroniclevitae.com/news/775-dear-white-academics> This op-ed contains remarks said to scholars of color and how they are heard by these scholars.

Sensoy, O., and DiAngelo, R., “We are all for diversity, but...” How faculty hiring committees reproduce whiteness and practical suggestions for how they can change. *Harvard Educational Review: Winter 2017, Vol. 87, No. 4, pp. 557-580.* (<https://doi.org/10.17763/1943-5045-87.4.557>). This paper reviews and analyses the most common practices that block diverse faculty hiring. They offer constructive suggestions as alternative practices including operationalizing diversity and avoiding ‘coded’ language.

Smith, L., Mao, D. and Deshpande, A., *Talking across worlds: Classic microaggressions and higher education* (2016) *Talking Across Worlds”: Classist Microaggressions and Higher Education*, *Journal of Poverty*, 20:2, 127-151, DOI: [10.1080/10875549.2015.1094764](https://doi.org/10.1080/10875549.2015.1094764) This qualitative study focuses on the impact of microaggressions in graduate students, especially students coming from poor or working class backgrounds.

Souza, T., *Responding to microaggressions in the classroom: Taking action* (2018) *Faculty Focus*. <https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/effective-classroom-management/responding-to-microaggressions-in-the-classroom/> This article has many suggestions for faculty and students in higher education on how to take **ACTION** rather than feeling frozen when faced with a microaggression.

Yang, Y., Carroll D.W., *Gendered Microaggressions in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics* (<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1174441.pdf>) Addresses two questions: whether and to what degree female faculty in STEM fields experience various types of gendered microaggressions and whether such experiences differ based on participants’ rankings. Results showed that female faculty participants (n=102) experienced being silenced, marginalized, sexual objectification and ranking did not predict aggressions

Microaggressions Table

*Adapted by Patricia A. Burak, Ph.D., Tae-Sun Kim, Ph.D., Amit*

Themes	Microaggression Examples	Implicit Message
Alien in Own Land: When Asians and Latinos are assumed to be "foreigners"	"Where are you from? Where were you born? You speak good English. You don't even speak with an accent. How long have you been in the States?"	You are not American.
Ascription of Intelligence: Assigning intelligence to a person based on race, gender or (perceived) abilities.	Assuming that Asians are naturally more intelligent in the sciences and math.	Asians are naturally gifted in the sciences and math; they do not work hard for it.
	Assuming that it is unusual for a Black or Latino person to be in an academically rigorous program or prestigious university.	People of color are not as intelligent as White people. It is unusual for them to be intelligent or articulate.
	"Oh, you are a bio major? Are you studying to be a nurse?" (when said to a woman)	Women are not smart enough to be doctors - men would rarely, if ever, be asked this question.
	"You get a note taker for every class? Why can't you take your own notes?" (when said to a student with a learning disability)	Students with learning or other invisible disabilities are not smart enough.
"Intrinsic Skills" and "Personality Types": Using stereotypes of race, gender and sexual orientation to assume an individual's interests and talents.	"You're gay? You have to give me some decorating tips!"	All gay men are interested and talented in interior design and decorating.
	"Women in power lead by emotion and are too sensitive!"	Women are "genetically" emotional and sensitive; They are not intelligent, rational and impartial.
	"Are you here on a basketball scholarship?" (when asked of Black students)	Black people are good at basketball and that is the only way they would be able to attend our college.

<p>"Color Blindness": Statements that indicate that a White person does not want to acknowledge race (or a heterosexual person does not want to acknowledge sexual orientation) - <i>Please note that use of the term "blindness" itself is very problematic here.</i></p>	<p>"When I look at you, I don't see color."</p>	<p>Denying a person of color's racial or ethnic experiences</p>
	<p>"America is a melting pot."</p>	<p>Assimilate to the dominant culture.</p>
	<p>"She's so independent, you wouldn't even know she's in a wheelchair!"</p>	<p>Wheelchair users are unable to be independent</p>
	<p>"There is only one race, the human race."</p>	<p>Denying the individual as a racial or cultural different being</p>
	<p>"I don't support gay rights because they are 'special rights' - everyone is equal!"</p>	<p>Denying that queer people are treated differently in our society</p>
<p>Criminality: A person is presumed to be dangerous, criminal, or deviant based on their race, nationality and/or sexual orientation.</p>	<p>If something comes up missing or a fight ensues, a Black or Latino person is assumed to be the culprit.</p>	<p>You are a criminal.</p>
	<p>If a group of Black male students are walking down a street with dark hoodies, they are assumed to be dangerous.</p>	<p>You are dangerous and poor. You do not belong at the university.</p>
	<p>If a group of Black or Asian students are sitting together in a public place, they are "self-segregating" or must be talking badly about White people.</p>	<p>You are not to be trusted in a group; you are out to harm the majority.</p>
	<p>"Beware of people wearing a head scarf! Why are you dressed like Osama?"</p>	<p>You are part of the enemy. I don't trust you. Your clothing identifies you as a terrorist. I don't need to know anything else about you. I need to be wary of people like you.</p>
	<p>"I wouldn't want my children to be taught by gay/lesbian teachers."</p>	<p>LGBT people are sexually deviant and would try and recruit young people in to the "gay lifestyle" or even sexually abuse them.</p>

Denial of Individual Prejudice: A statement made by those with social privilege to deny that they have that privilege or any oppressive thinking	“I can't be racist. My friend is Puerto Rican ... I voted for Obama ... My girlfriend is Asian, etc.”	I am immune to racism because I have had positive associations or relationships with people of color.
	“As a woman, I know what you go through as a racial minority.”	Your racial oppression is no different than my gender oppression. All forms of discrimination are equal.
	“I am not homophobic - I have gay friends, and I love Project Runway!”	I am immune to homophobia because I have LGBT friends and/or I associate with mainstream stereotypes of queerness.
Myth of Meritocracy: Statements which assert that race, class, gender, abilities or sexual orientation do not play a role in life success.	“I believe that the smartest and most qualified students should be admitted. The most qualified person should get the job.”	People of color are given extra unfair benefits because of their race.
	“We all know she got hired because she is a woman!” (often said in a male dominated field)	Women are not as qualified as male candidates; gender was "used" as a way to get ahead.
	“I don't see why students with ADHD get extra time to complete exams? Everyone would benefit from having extra time on exams!”	Students with learning or other invisible disabilities are not smart enough - they are just using the system to get an unfair advantage.
	“Everyone can succeed if they work hard - just look at Obama!”	People of color are lazy, incompetent, and just like to complain if they don't get what they want. Individual exceptions (such as President Obama) are evoked to justify this stance.
Second Class Citizen: Occurs when a person with social privilege is given preferential treatment over people with oppressed identities.	When the needs or complaints of White parents, students, alumni and faculty are taken more seriously than those of people of color.	White people are more valued customers and employees. People of color should be content with what they get.
	A Black professor is mistaken for a service worker.	People of color are not as successful as White people; it's unlikely that they would occupy a high status position.

	<p>“I have done a lot for <u>you people</u> or <u>your race</u> or <u>minorities</u> ...”</p>	<p>You are a lesser being who needs to be grateful for the charity given to you by the majority.</p>
	<p>“We can't have a woman president! All of the world leaders are mostly men, and they would just walk all over her!”</p>	<p>Women's leadership abilities do not compare to that of men.</p>
	<p>“I'm not sure if we should hire a blind person for this job - there is no way she could do as well as a normal person.”</p>	<p>People with disabilities are unable to perform job duties at the same level as able bodied individuals. There are no accommodations (such as adaptive technology) that could mitigate any performance concerns.</p>
	<p>“We can't have a lesbian chancellor! She would come in with her own agenda, and we don't want an activist leader- It would disrupt alumni giving!”</p>	<p>Assumes that all LGBT people have an "agenda" and that all straight people do not. Discrimination is often justified through raising alarm about morale, money or other material threats.</p>
<p>Religious or Cultural Superiority: When a person assumes that their race, religion, or culture (broadly defined) is better than those of others</p>	<p>“You have to cover your head? It's too bad that women are so oppressed in your culture!”</p>	<p>Your religious or cultural traditions are inferior and oppressive. Everyone in your country is "backwards." Women have no agency at all.</p>
	<p>“You are engaged to someone you never met? What about falling in love? You didn't stand up for your independence?”</p>	<p>Your traditions are ridiculous. Your parents don't care about you. The only way to get married is the way we do it here.</p>
	<p>“Why do I have to live with foreigners? Their food stinks and their clothes smell!”</p>	<p>People from other countries are inferior. My culture and traditions are better. Living with someone from another country will somehow diminish my quality of life.</p>

<p>Environmental Microaggressions: Ways in which larger systems beyond the individual realm (such as institutional policies and practices) work to maintain systems of privilege and oppression.</p>	<p>A college of university with buildings all or mostly named after White upper-middle class males or heterosexual couples.</p>	<p>You don't belong. You are just visitors here. There is only so far you can succeed. Your achievements will not be memorialized.</p>
	<p>Many of the university events are held in inaccessible spaces, or spaces that require significant work and planning to access. In addition most university events do not have sign language interpreters.</p>	<p>Your attendance and participation is not as important to us. If you want to come, you need to plan ahead of time - it is your responsibility to ensure your access to these events.</p>
	<p>A college or university that does not offer classes in race, gender, LGBT or disability studies OR does not require its graduates to learn about these inequalities.</p>	<p>Learning about people of color is not important; they have not contributed to the U.S. The histories, issues, and perspectives of White people is essential knowledge for success during and after college.</p>
	<p>There is no women's center on campus.</p>	<p>Women students' needs are not as important to us. Women are treated equally to men.</p>
	<p>A university schedules its big career fair on a day that has been designated as a day without classes to respect the religious practices of some students, faculty and staff</p>	<p>Your religion and practices are unimportant to us. Your religious observances should not take precedence over a university function. Your access to careers is unimportant to us.</p>
	<p>It costs significantly more for LGBT faculty and staff to cover their partners under the university's health insurance because this is a federally taxed benefit.</p>	<p>Institutions expect LGBT faculty and staff to cover this difference out of pocket. Your family's well-being is not as important to us.</p>
	<p>The only options for gender on university forms are "male" and "female."</p>	<p>Transgender individuals do not belong or matter here.</p>
	<p>TV shows and movies that feature predominantly White characters, without "diverse" representation of people of color.</p>	<p>You don't exist. If you do exist, it is as a one or two dimensional stereotype.</p>



Overcrowding of public schools, lack of sidewalks, overabundance of liquor stores, and lack of green groceries in communities of color.

People of color don't or should not value education, fresh food, exercise and a quality living environment.

Sue, Derald Wing. "Racial Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Implications for Clinical Practice." *American Psychologist*. 2007. 271- 286.