

# MICROAGGRESSIONS

## small actions that are a BIG DEAL

### What are Microaggressions?

Microaggressions refer to occurrences and encounters that subtly reinforce systems of power and privilege. They are things that people say or do, often without malice or racist intentions, that marginalize people of underrepresented communities. They can take the form of verbal, nonverbal or environmental manifestations.

Libraries and information organizations are not immune to these microaggressions. They exist in our library catalogues, archives, research, professional organizations, and interpersonal interactions. You can read more about microaggressions at <http://bit.ly/1ok0snN>.

“Why are there so many scholarships for minorities? I work hard and get nothing, and they get money just because they happen to be Black or Asian or something?”

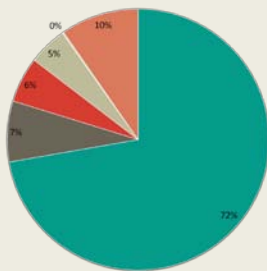
- from an LIS student FB page

### Microaggressions in Massachusetts

Institutional and cultural biases are a part of every day life, and can show themselves in many ways. Research has shown that these biases are common in the academic environment. Implicit prejudice can influence the academic experience, from test grades to faculty mentoring, causing real impact on student learning and career prospects.

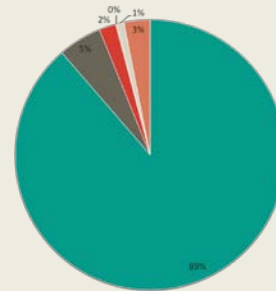
Population of Massachusetts by Race, Census 2010

■ White only ■ African American ■ API ■ American Indian ■ Bi or multiracial ■ Latino



Number of Credentialed Librarians by Ethnicity, 2009-2010, ALA Office for Diversity

■ White ■ African American ■ API ■ American Indian ■ Bi or multiracial ■ Latino



This lack of minority representation in librarianship is what is known as an *environmental microaggression*. Librarian demographics can send a message to faculty, students, staff, other librarians, and prospective students and families. What message is your library sending?

### Allies in the Library

It's clear that library staff, especially professional library staff, don't always reflect the diversity of our communities or patrons. So it's very important to practice being a good ally. No matter what community you identify with, you'll always have the chance to ally with other diverse communities. This applies not only to race and ethnicity, but other facets of our identities like gender, sexuality, age, religion, and disability.

#### Good Ideas

- Post job listings in places like the ALA ethnic affiliates to attract a strong field of diverse candidates.
- Hire people that reflect the makeup of your user population.
- Encourage library staff to pursue a master's degree in librarianship.
- Host potlucks to share cultural foods like hotdogs, quinoa, lo mein, jerk chicken, lobster rolls, bagels, and Jello salad.
- Listen in order to learn about someone.
- Take the time to read more about cultural bias, microaggressions, and institutional racism.
- Partner with minority student groups for programming at the library.

#### Bad Ideas

- Draw a false dichotomy between wanting to hire “the best candidate” or “a diversity candidate”.
- Assume that your colleagues or patrons can speak for their communities.
- Claim that you “don't have a culture” because you're “just American”.
- Assume that your colleagues or patrons belong to a culture that has a certain set of stereotypes.
- Ask “Where are you from?” repeatedly.
- Physically touch someone without their permission.