LIS Microaggressions Project: Exploring the Lived Experiences of Librarians and Archivists

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LIS Microaggressions

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“You’re a librarian? No way!”
A true story of two librarians and a presentation
What are microaggressions?

“Racial microaggressions are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color.”

– Dr. Derald Wing Sue

(Professor of Psychology and Education at Columbia University)
What are microaggressions? (cont.)

- More broadly, comments toward a member of any marginalized community
- They are often said by well-intentioned people not intending to be offensive
- It puts a name on a phenomenon that marginalized people experience regularly
Why do microaggressions matter?

• They demonstrate that racism is not a thing of the past
→ Is this a “post-racial” era?
→ They serve as signifiers of individuals’ implicit bias and internalized assumptions
→ They signal the need for ongoing dialogue about race
Why should they matter to LIS folks?

• They can foster hostile and uncomfortable work environments
• We must realize we are not neutral!
• We should strive to create inclusive, welcoming spaces in libraries and archives for both colleagues and patrons
How do they occur in libraries?

• Between librarians and patrons (directed toward the community, students, faculty, staff)
• From patrons toward librarians
• Among library staff
LIS MICROAGGRESSIONS PROJECT

An open forum for addressing the commonplace microaggressions occurring in our profession
LIS Microaggressions Project

• Blog (lismicroaggressions.tumblr.com) started in March 2014 by Cynthia Mari Orozco
• Incorporates anonymous posts from contributors submitted via Google form

Hello! Welcome to LIS Microaggressions, an online space for those working in libraries, archives and information fields to share our experiences with microaggressions within the profession. Inspired by recent grassroots social media movements, such as The Microaggressions Project, and I, Too, Am Harvard, this space aims to identify, acknowledge, and overcome the microaggressions that continue to exist in our profession and that are the real, lived, experiences of LIS professionals from marginalized communities today.
LISM Core Team

Elvia Arroyo-Ramirez, Princeton University
Rose Chou, American University
Simone Fujita, Art Center College of Design
Erika Montenegro, East Los Angeles College
Cynthia Mari Orozco, CSU Long Beach
Annie Pho, University of Illinois at Chicago
T-Kay Sangwand, UCLA
LIS Microaggressions Zine

• Founded in March 2015, 4 issues completed
• Compilation of post-it submissions
• Issues distributed both at conferences and available online
a space for librarians, archivists, & info professionals to share their experiences with subtle, denigrating microaggressions within the profession

LIS Micro Aggressions

volume 1. issue 1.

ARLIS / ARL / REFORMA

Forth Worth, TX / Portland, OR / San Diego, CA

March / April 2013
LIS Microaggressions
volume 1. issue 2.

Your words
hit the side of my face

a space for those working in libraries, archives and information fields to share their experiences with microaggressions

APALA 35 • ALA Annual
San Francisco • June 2015
LIS Microaggressions
Volume 1, Issue 3

but, you don't

LOOK LIKE

a space for those working in libraries, archives and information fields to share their experiences with microaggressions

NCAAL • SAA
St. Louis • Cleveland • August 2015
A space for those working in libraries, archives and information fields to share their experiences with microaggressions.
Common themes

• Inappropriate racial comments
• Comments driven by physical appearance
• Being singled out / made to feel unwelcome
• Professionals’ authority being questioned
• Experiences relating to white privilege / lack of diversity (in every sense) in our profession
Meanwhile at the academic library:

I need to speak to a librarian!

You are...

Well you look like a student!

You don't need a PhD to be a library director, you're young, and Latino.

I didn't know people would hand me a director slip due to my ethnicity.

Everyone else chose to meet an hour later.

Yes, I suppose you are the minority in the class...

ME

Asian

(i was the only one raising my hand)

New white librarian to me:

“What’s your name?”

[I say my name.]

“Is that how you like to be called?”

“I know that when people come to this country they change their name.”

[I was born here.]
If I hire you, are you and going to speak Spanish all day?

Once I was struggling with memorizing some of the more obscure parts of the Dewey decimal system. My co-worker laughed at me and said, "You're Aslan, shouldn't you be good at numbers?"

"What's your name? Oh, well I'm going to call you [unrelated name in English] because I can't say your name."

At an interview, I told the library dean I was interested in diversity in librarianship, and he said, "You really think that's a worthwhile research topic?"
From Associate University Librarian: “I really like it when you wear your hair like that, smooth, relaxed style. I’m thinking ‘Thanks, but it will be spiked and funky as soon as I get to my hairdresser!’”

“But you’re the only white person here!”

— This is what a fellow POC staff person said to me, which was totally bewildering because I’m not white at all, but obviously that’s how she read me.

As I was performing opening duties, a co-worker greeted me with an accusatory WHO ARE YOU?

even though
1) I was wearing both my name tag & work badge,
2) I had been working at this library for one year, and
3) we had already met before.

“Oh, you’re not a Buddhist; you’re still a Jew. I’ve known Jews and you’re still a Jew.” ~ my boss
LIBRARIAN TO STUDENT: WHAT NATIONALITY ARE YOU?

STUDENT: CHINESE + IRISH

LIBRARIAN: WOW, WHAT A CRAZY MIX THAT IS!

mixed race librarian nearby realizes that student now hates library

This is how my supervisor introduced me to everyone at my first day at work: "This is — our Multicultural Intern." She said this to every person we met. Was I in a diversity program? Yes. Did I want to be labeled?

Patron: Are you from China?

Me: No.

Patron: Oh, I wanted to tell you my China travel stories.

Do you still speak Spanish?

uhh... what?... still? I don't speak spanish and never have. This person and I literally just met. uhm...

NO.

Oh, that's too bad.
Feedback from project participants

“I submitted to LISMicro one time, it made me feel better. Vindicated. Visible. It’s important.”

“Mailed out my @LISmicroagress zine submission today. It was surprisingly freeing to write down my story and send it away.”
Contact LIS Microaggressions

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Contribute to Volume 2!

(*I have post-its!*)
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