

Racial Microaggressions:

Redressing Inequities for Men of Color in
Community Colleges

Drs. J. Luke Wood & Frank Harris III

Co-Directors, Community College Equity Assessment Lab
San Diego State University



Workshop Objectives

- Describe the concepts of unconscious bias and racial microaggressions
 - Explain the relationship between unconscious bias and racial microaggressions
 - Recognize the ways in which unconscious bias and racial microaggressions impact educational practice with boys and men of color
-



Implicit Bias

Defining Implicit Bias

- Implicit bias is “the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an implicit manner. Activated involuntarily, without awareness or intentional control. Can be either positive or negative. Everyone is susceptible” (Kirwan Institute, 2016, p. 14).
- Implicit bias is characterized by “the introspectively unidentified (or incorrectly identified) traces of past experience that mediate attributions of qualities to members of social categories” (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995, p. 15).
- “The science of implicit cognition suggests that actors do not always have conscious, internal control over the processes of social perception, impression formation, and judgment that motivate their actions” (Greenwald & Kreiger, 2006, p. 946).

Defining Implicit Bias

- Implicit bias is “the **attitudes** or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an implicit manner. Activated **involuntarily**, without awareness or intentional control. Can be either positive or negative. Everyone is susceptible” (Kirwan Institute, 2016, p. 14).
- Implicit bias is characterized by “the introspectively **unidentified** (or incorrectly identified) traces of past experience that **mediate attributions of qualities** to members of social categories” (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995, p. 15).
- “The science of implicit cognition suggests that actors do not always have conscious, internal control over the processes of social perception, impression formation, and judgment that **motivate their actions**” (Greenwald & Kreiger, 2006, p. 946).

Defining Implicit Bias

Implicit bias is the result of system 1 thinking

SYSTEM 1

- Unconscious reasoning
- Implicit
- Automatic
- Low effort

SYSTEM 2

- Conscious reasoning
- Explicit
- Controlled
- High effort

Kahneman, D. (2011). Thinking, fast and slow. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.

Defining Implicit Bias

Implicit associations are most likely to drive behavior under the following conditions:

- Situations that involve ambiguous or incomplete information
- Circumstances in which time is constrained
- Times when cognitive control is compromised (e.g., when experiencing stress or insufficient sleep)

(Bertrand, Chugh, & Mullainathan, 2005)

The Primacy Effect

- Implicit associations are most likely to drive behavior under the following conditions:

Primacy effect refers to the fact that individuals tend to give more weight to information presented earlier when forming opinions and making decisions.

Forming Implicit Bias

- Children pick up on nonverbal cues around them, which influence their development of implicit associations

“Young children can catch bias from an ‘infected atmosphere’—that is, by observing nonverbal bias exhibited by other people around them. What is more, preschool children generalize this bias to other individuals. Thus, exposure to nonverbal bias could be a mechanism for the spread of social bias throughout the world in the hearts and minds of children and adults” (Skinner, Meltzoff, & Olson, 2016, p. 7).

Forming Implicit Bias

- Several factors influence the formation of associations, such as:
 - Media
 - Nonverbal behaviors of others
 - Attitudes of friends and family members
 - Interactions
 - Observations of social roles
 - Perception of social value

Outcomes of Implicit Bias

- These possible behaviors result from implicit associations:
 - No outward behavior
 - Nonverbal response (e.g., stepping back, avoiding eye contact, crossing arms, clutching purse)
 - Verbal response (microaggressions)

Implicit Bias in Healthcare

- “Research supports a relationship between patient care and physician bias in ways that could perpetuate healthcare disparities” (Chapman, Kaatz, & Carnes, 2013, p. 1507).
- In response to vignettes, pediatricians with higher levels of pro-White implicit racial bias were more likely to prescribe painkillers to White patients as opposed to Black patients (Sabin & Greenwald, 2012).
- Black patients treated by primary care clinicians with higher race bias (as measured by the IAT) report feeling low confidence in their doctor, and that they receive less respect than other patients (Cooper et al., 2012).

Implicit Bias in Hiring Decisions

- In-group bias can cause employers/hiring committees to seek candidates who are most like themselves.
- Candidates' names, accents, and physical appearances can activate employers' implicit biases.
- “In the hiring process and other decision-making occasions, allowing adequate time to make decisions is vital” (Kirwan Institute, 2014).

Implicit Bias in Hiring Decisions

- Participants with higher pro-White bias (as measured by the IAT) spent more time looking at positive information on CVs/resumes of White candidates versus candidates from other racial/ethnic backgrounds.

“Our implicit attitude would seem to be directing our unconscious eye movements to provide exactly the information it wants for a ‘rational’ decision. This is both extraordinary and very worrying” (Beattie, 2013, p. 241).

Implicit Bias in Education

- The Yale Child Center study found that pre-school teachers spent more time looking at Black children than White children when looking for disruptive behaviors (Gilliam et al., 2016).
- Teachers in the study who were given background information about a student engaging in challenging behavior reacted more empathetically only if the teacher shared the same racial identity with the student.



Racial Microaggressions

Defining 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.” (Sue et al., 2007)
 - Microaggressions are pervasive, normal, daily occurrences
 - “put-downs”, “subtle snubs”, “dismissive looks”
 - Often more psychologically damaging than direct acts of racism
 - “A thousand daily cuts.” (Ladsen-Billings)

Addressing Microaggressions

- Most people view themselves as good, caring, ethical people.
- Reacting to their behavior and naming it racist or discriminatory can be difficult to comprehend.
- Often the initial reaction to addressing microaggressions is:
 - Explain away the microaggression
 - Become defensive in response
 - Accuse others of offending them

Addressing Microaggressions

	Environmental	Public	Private
Verbal	-	“wow, you’re so articulate”	“you are different than the rest of them”
Non-Verbal	Images that are denigrating or exclusionary	A step back	Avoiding the elevator

The Influence of Microaggressions

- “You’re different than us.”
- “You don’t belong here.”
- “You’re not intelligent or capable.”
- “People of color are lazy and don’t care.”
- “Your experiences and perceptions are wrong.”
- “You’re being too sensitive.”
- “You are a criminal.”
- “You are dangerous.”
- “Racism doesn’t exist.”
- “You are not of worth.”

Types of Microaggressions

MICROINSULT

- Ascription of intelligence
- Assumption of criminality
- Second-class citizens
- Pathologizing culture
- Different norming *
- Athletic boundedness*

MICROINVALIDATION

- Alien in own land
- Outsider on own campus *
- Color blindness
- Myth of meritocracy
- Denial of individual racism
- Transference/Avoidance of racial intervention *

Types of Microaggressions

MICROINSULT

- **Ascription of intelligence**
- **Assumption of criminality**
- **Second-class citizens**
- **Pathologizing culture**
- **Different norming**
- **Athletic boundedness**

MICROINVALIDATION

- Alien in own land
- **Outsider on own campus ***
- **Color blindness**
- Myth of meritocracy
- Denial of individual racism
- Transference/Avoidance of racial intervention *

Ascription of Intelligence

- “Assigning a degree of intelligence to a person of color based on race” (Sue & Colleagues, 2007, p. 276)

- Examples:
 - “You are so articulate!”
 - “This is a calculus class. Are you sure you are in the right place?”
 - “When we would have group projects, I would be the last picked because they would assume that I don’t know as much as they do”
 - “There have been times when I’ve answered a question and then I get responses like “Wow! I didn’t expect you to know that!”

Assumption of Criminality

- “Assuming a person of color is dangerous, criminal, or deviant based on race” (Sue & Colleagues, 2007, p. 276)
- Examples:
 - “A White man or woman clutching their purse or checking their wallet as a Black or Latino approaches or passes” (Sue & Colleagues, 2007, p. 276)
 - Following students of color around the campus bookstore to make sure they don’t steal anything
 - Checking a student’s ID at night time because it is assumed he must be on campus to steal something

Second-Class Citizen

- “Occurs when a White person is given preferential treatment over a person of color” (Sue & Colleagues, 2007, p. 276)
- Examples:
 - A person of color being mistaken for a service worker
 - A faculty member calling on a White student several times while disregarding students of color who raise their hands during class
 - Overlooking a student of color at a student services counter to attend to a White student

Pathologizing Culture

- “The notion that the values and communication styles of the dominant/White culture are ideal” (Sue & Colleagues, 2007, p. 276).
- Examples:
 - “Those students don’t care about education.”
 - “They are lazy.”
 - “They really aren’t here to learn.”
 - “They are just here for the financial aid.”

Different Norming

- “Assuming/having the authority to negatively categorize or uncategorize people of color” (Harris III & Wood, 2016)
- Examples:
 - “When I talk about those Blacks, I really wasn’t talking about you.”
 - “I don’t think of you as Asian.”
 - “You are not like the rest of them.”
 - “You’re different. You work hard.”
 - “Why can’t all minorities be like you?”

Athletic Boundedness

- “The assumption that people of color (particularly men of color) are athletes” (Harris III & Wood, 2016)
- Examples:
 - “You look like a ballplayer.”
 - “What sport do you play?”
 - “When is the next game?”
 - “How is the season going?”
 - “Are you on scholarship?”

Outsider on Campus

- “Assuming a person of color does not belong in academic spaces” (Harris III & Wood, 2016)
- Examples:
 - “Can I help you? What building are you looking for?”
 - “May I ask to see your ID? I just need to make sure you are a student.”
 - A student saying to another student, “Oh, you go to school here?”

Colorblindness

- “Denial or pretense that a White person does not see color or race” (Sue & Colleagues, 2007, p. 276)
- Examples:
 - “When I look at you, I don’t see color.”
 - “America is a melting pot.”
 - “There is only one race, the human race.”

The R.A.V.E.N. Approach

- **Redirect** (intervene) (correct) (pull aside)
- **Ask** probing questions for clarity
 - “I think I heard you say.....what did you mean by that?”
 - “I want to make sure I understand what you were saying, were you saying that...?”
- **Values** clarification
 - “You know, in this department we work hard to create a space that is safe and welcoming for all students.”
 - “What you just said is not in alignment and/or inconsistent with our institutional values that prioritize equity and inclusion.”
- **Emphasize** your own thoughts and feelings
 - “When I hear your comment, I think/feel”
 - “Many people might take that to mean.”
 - “In my experience. . . .”
- **Next Steps**

Examples

“I had specifically chosen a class to take with three other of my friends that were barely starting college. We all are Mexican and we all look stereotypical--you would just think bad about us when you look at us as a group together. And we are all sitting there in the corner of a classroom and one of the first things this student says to us is, ‘know there are cameras in here and everything so don't try to bring any weed or knives or anything like that.’ He said it kind of like a joke. I laughed but I really didn't think it was funny.”

**Ascription of
Intelligence**
**Assumption of
Criminality**
Second-Class Citizens
Pathologizing Culture
Different Norming
Athletic Boundedness
**Outsider on Own
Campus**
Color Blindness

Examples

The professor was facilitating a conversation on police brutality. It was a difficult discussion because there were people in the room who had personally experienced challenges with law enforcement and others who felt that the conversation was disparaging police officers. During the conversation, one student said out loud "There are certain communities that are more likely to commit crime. I'm sorry, but the truth is, and I'm not trying to be racist, but some Black and Latino communities are dangerous. Come on, we all know that [Bad/Poor Neighborhood] isn't as nice as [Good/Rich Neighborhood] , just watch the news. So, yeah, I'm not totally surprised that there are more issues with police in those bad communities."

**Ascription of
Intelligence**
**Assumption of
Criminality**
Second-Class Citizens
Pathologizing Culture
Different Norming
Athletic Boundedness
**Outsider on Own
Campus**
Color Blindness

Examples

I'm not the type to participate in class a lot. I'm generally the shy type. But, I had a psychology class last semester that required in-class participation or else you didn't get points. So, I was more talkative in class than normal. During one of the lectures, the professor was talking about intelligence and intelligence testing. Students were asked, based on the reading, what were factors that lead to differences in scores. One person said, "well, race is one factor. IQ tests have shown that Blacks and Hispanics aren't as intelligent as Whites." Another student said, "yeah, there is a lot of research to support this, in fact I just read a book from the library that talked about this." Seeing that the conversation was steering off course, an older White student tried to counterbalance the comments by saying "but they are great at other things like sports – just look at the NBA, they are incredible athletes which requires a different type of intelligence."

**Ascription of
Intelligence**
**Assumption of
Criminality**
Second-Class Citizens
Pathologizing Culture
Different Norming
Athletic Boundedness
**Outsider on Own
Campus**
Color Blindness

Examples

During class, we were in small groups. The professor had each group talking about contemporary issues in politics because we were preparing for our final papers. Our group had the topic of immigration. One student in the group said, “well, you know some of them are rapists and drug-dealers.” The student said this as a joke, but it fell flat on the other students. Thinking we missed the joke, the student said it again, “some of them are rapists and drug-dealers.” Several of the group members laughed, awkwardly. Right then, the professor walked up to us and asked what we were laughing about because the other groups were looking at us wondering what was going on.

**Ascription of
Intelligence**
**Assumption of
Criminality**
Second-Class Citizens
Pathologizing Culture
Different Norming
Athletic Boundedness
**Outsider on Own
Campus**
Color Blindness

Examples

A matriculation staff person is in the cafeteria and walks up to a table when she sees students that she recognizes. The students are having a conversation on police brutality. It is a difficult discussion because there were people at the table who have personally experienced challenges with law enforcement and others who felt that the conversation was disparaging police officers. During the conversation, one student said out loud "There are certain communities that are more likely to commit crime. I'm sorry, but the truth is, and I'm not trying to be racist, but some Black and Latino communities are dangerous. Come on, we all know that National City isn't as nice as La Jolla, just watch the news. So, yeah, I'm not totally surprised that there are more issues with police in those bad communities." Several students of color look to her to see if she will say something.

**Ascription of
Intelligence**
**Assumption of
Criminality**
Second-Class Citizens
Pathologizing Culture
Different Norming
Athletic Boundedness
**Outsider on Own
Campus**
Color Blindness

Examples

Three staff members are in the financial aid office. One person, Karen, overhears her colleagues Rachel and Kevin, chatting informally. Rachel had just assisted a Cambodian student who had been having some trouble completing her paperwork. Rachel became impatient and frustrated because of the time required to assist the student. As Rachel walked away from the counter, she rolled her eyes and said to Kevin, “I don’t know why students like her are here. She can barely speak English. There is no way she can pass a class. She’s probably just here for the financial aid anyhow.” Kevin laughed and said in response, “Yeah, I know. What a waste of money, she’ll be gone by census.”

**Ascription of
Intelligence**
**Assumption of
Criminality**
Second-Class Citizens
Pathologizing Culture
Different Norming
Athletic Boundedness
**Outsider on Own
Campus**
Color Blindness

Examples

Two staff members are training a new employee on how to use the PeopleSoft system. One staff member explains that the system provides access to information on students that is protected by FERPA. The trainee responds saying, “absolutely, I have been trained on this system at my last institution, I’m very familiar with it and recognize the importance of being careful with these records.” Breaking the tone of the conversation, the staff trainer responds saying “yeah, don’t be using this information to get a bunch of new credit cards.” The joke seemed very out-of-place and was accentuated by the fact that the staff trainer is a White male and the new employee is an immigrant woman from West Africa. The other staff person is shocked by the statement but is worried about confronting their colleague in front of the trainee (who they don’t really know).

**Ascription of
Intelligence**
**Assumption of
Criminality**
Second-Class Citizens
Pathologizing Culture
Different Norming
Athletic Boundedness
**Outsider on Own
Campus**
Color Blindness

Examples

Louis, who identifies as Native American and works in the campus library, was asked to do a presentation to his colleagues on a new computer use policy he had been asked to develop. At the conclusion of Louis' presentation, Eric, another Library staff person, raised his hand to ask a question. Before asking the question, Eric said to Louis in complementary and enthusiastic tone, "Wow Louis, I was so impressed by your presentation. I had no idea how articulate and smart you are."

**Ascription of
Intelligence**
**Assumption of
Criminality**
Second-Class Citizens
Pathologizing Culture
Different Norming
Athletic Boundedness
**Outsider on Own
Campus**
Color Blindness

Examples

Frank is an African American student in his early 50's and a veteran who has recently returned to college. He went to the bookstore to purchase books and supplies. After standing in line for a few minutes, he was the next customer in line. The clerk looked past him, and asked the student behind Frank, "May I help you?" Frank said, "excuse me sir, I was next in line." The clerk responded by saying, "I'm sorry sir, I didn't realize you were standing here for a purchase, I will get to you next." Unhappy with the situation, Frank walked to the counter and said: "I'm sorry sir, but I waited in line like everybody else, I need to be served now." The clerk replied: "Sir, you need to calm down or I will be forced to call campus police."

**Ascription of
Intelligence**
**Assumption of
Criminality**
Second-Class Citizens
Pathologizing Culture
Different Norming
Athletic Boundedness
**Outsider on Own
Campus**
Color Blindness