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“Racial Microaggressions in Academic Libraries:  
Results of a Survey of Minority and Non-Minority Librarians”

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**Abstract**

There is relatively little literature on racism within the profession of academic librarianship. To investigate academic librarians' experiences of racism, this research project uses the framework of racial microaggressions, which are subtle, denigrating messages directed toward people of color. According to the results of an online survey, some librarians of color have had racial microaggressions directed at them by their colleagues. Non-minority librarians, however, are unlikely to recognize these disparaging exchanges.

Keywords: academic libraries, racism, diversity, racial microaggressions

## Introduction

Diversity has received increased attention in the library and information science literature over the past four decades. The articles, books, and conference papers on diversity in librarianship tend to focus on recurring themes such as depictions of racial/ethnic minorities in children's literature; developing and assessing multicultural collections; designing programming for various user populations; or recruiting, mentoring, and retaining a diverse workforce. There is relatively little in the LIS literature that explicitly addresses racism within the profession, however.

This research project is a preliminary attempt to address this gap. It uses the framework of racial microaggressions, which psychologist Derald Wing Sue and colleagues (2007) define as "brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to people of color because they belong to a racial minority group" (p. 273). The project seeks to answer two questions: 1) Are academic librarians of color experiencing racial microaggressions from their library colleagues? 2) Do white academic librarians observe these derogatory exchanges directed at minority colleagues?

## Literature Review

### Racism in Libraries

Racism and racial discrimination are seldom discussed explicitly in the LIS literature, despite the presence of works chronicling the experiences of minority librarians, such as *The Black Librarian in America* (Josey, 1970), *In Our Own Voices: The Changing Face of Librarianship* (Neely & Abif, 1996) and "Tenure and Promotion Experiences of Academic Librarians of Color" (Damasco & Hodges, 2012).

The few LIS articles that do explicitly address racism discuss several themes that are consistent with the growing literature on racial microaggressions. Elizabeth Martinez Smith (1988), Deborah Curry (1994), and Cynthia Preston (1998) all note the pervasiveness of racism in American society. According to Smith (1988), "*It is always there*. For a person of color, the final question they must ask themselves is, 'Was it my color?'" (p. 39). In addition to acknowledging the persistence of racism, Hall (1988), St. Lifer and Nelson (1997), and Josey (1999) all suggest that racism has become more subtle.

Smith (1988) also touches on another theme—that one's race or ethnicity can influence whether or not one notices racism. This theme was further supported in an article by two *Library Journal* editors, Evan St. Lifer and Corinne Nelson (1997), who surveyed white librarians and librarians of color about their perceptions of racism in the profession. St. Lifer and Nelson (1997) concluded that "librarians of color see a major problem; whites do not" (p. 44).

Discussions of racism within the profession are important because as Curry (1994) has suggested, racism in academia can contribute to early burn-out among minority librarians and can make these librarians less effective at recruiting other minorities to the profession. Efforts to diversify the profession are unlikely to be successful if we do not address the persistence and prevalence of racism within academic libraries.

### Microaggressions in Higher Education and Psychology

The term *microaggression* was coined by Chester Pierce, a professor in Harvard's education and psychiatry departments, to describe the more subtle expressions of racism that were becoming common. Pierce (1970) declared that these "offensive mechanisms are usually a *micro-aggression*, as opposed to a gross, dramatic obvious *macro-aggression* such as lynching" (p. 266). In a subsequent work investigating racism in television commercials, Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez, and Wills (1978)

further define microaggressions as “subtle, stunning, often automatic, and non-verbal exchanges which are ‘put downs’ of blacks by offenders” (p. 66). Subsequent research on racism in such work by Delgado and Stefancic (as cited by Solórzano, 1998), noted that victims had “become sensitized to its subtle nuances and code-words – the body language, averted gazes, exasperated looks, terms such as ‘you people,’ ‘innocent whites,’ ‘highly qualified black,’ ‘articulate’ and so on – that, whether intended or not, convey racially charged meanings” (p. 125). This led to an expanded definition of racial microaggressions by Solórzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000): “microaggressions are subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) directed toward people of color, often automatically or unconsciously” (p. 60).

Sue et al. (2007) noted that while literature on contemporary racism was abundant, the subtle nature of racial microaggressions made this form of racism “difficult to identify, quantify, and rectify” (p. 272). They further argued that “without an adequate classification or understanding of the dynamics of subtle racism, it will remain invisible and potentially harmful to the well-being, self-esteem, and standard of living of people of color” (p. 272). Because of this, Sue and colleagues developed a taxonomy of racial microaggressions, initially identifying three forms of racial microaggressions: *microassaults*, *microinsults*, and *microinvalidations*. A *microassault* is “an explicit racial derogation characterized primarily by a verbal or nonverbal attack meant to hurt the indented victim through name-calling, avoidant behavior, or purposeful discriminatory actions” (p. 274). *Microassaults* tend to be blatant and easier to identify than either *microinsults* or *microinvalidations*. *Microinsults* are “communications that convey rudeness and insensitivity and demean a person’s racial heritage or identity. *Microinsults* represent subtle snubs, frequently unknown to the perpetrator, but clearly convey a hidden insulting message to the recipient of color” (p. 274). For example, when a white person says to a person of color, “Wow! You’re so articulate,” he may intend this as a compliment. However, the person of color this statement is directed toward may interpret it as a back-handed compliment—the speaker assumed that I would not be well-spoken because people of my race are stereotyped as unintelligent or inarticulate. *Microinvalidations* are “communications that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person of color” (p. 274). Colorblindness, or professing not to see another’s race, is an example of a *microinvalidation* because it denies the experiential reality of people of color who are treated differently because of their race.

In addition to presenting a classification scheme for racial microaggressions, Sue et al. (2007) also note that the subtle nature of microaggressions makes them particularly difficult to defend against. For example, a single microaggression can often be dismissed as a misunderstanding or rationalized with a non-racist explanation, which can make identifying a microaggression challenging. Even when a person of color determines that a microaggression has occurred, she may be trapped in a no-win situation—if she responds, she will expend energy educating someone who may respond defensively; if she does not respond, she may feel anger and guilt at herself or internalize the microaggression. Additionally, the pervasiveness of such subtle, denigrating messages and their cumulative effect has been connected to negative outcomes in a number of qualitative studies. In particular, research on the experiences of students and faculty of color report that being inundated with these negative messages, as well as the energy required to respond to racial microaggressions, leads to minority students and faculty experiencing self-doubt, frustration, isolation, anxiety, anger, and fatigue (Solórzano et al., 2000; Constantine, Smith, Redington, & Owens, 2008; Griffin, Pifer, Humphrey, & Hazelwood, 2011; Harper et al., 2011; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009; Pittman, 2012). In addition to these emotional and psychological effects, racial microaggressions can create a negative campus racial climate (Solórzano et al., 2000), can lead to diminished academic performance for students (Yosso et al., 2009), and can have negative consequences for promotion and tenure for faculty (Griffin et al., 2011).

In addition to qualitative studies, several researchers have recently developed quantitative scales to measure the experiences of racial microaggressions. Mercer, Zeigler-Hill, Wallace, and Hayes (2011) developed the Inventory of Microaggressions Against Black Individuals (IMABI) to measure African Americans' experiences of microinsults and microinvalidations. The Racial Microaggression Scale (RMAS), created by Torres-Harding, Andrade, and Romero Diaz (2011), focuses on several themes and categories identified by Sue and colleagues. The Racial and Ethnic Microaggression Scale (REMS) described by Nadal (2011) and also based on previous work by Sue and colleagues, focuses on measuring commonplace, everyday microaggressions that people of color encounter. The REMS contains 45 microaggressive statements that are grouped into six themes or subscales: 1) Assumptions of Inferiority, 2) Second-Class Citizenship and Assumption of Criminality, 3) Microinvalidations, 4) Exoticization/Assumptions of Similarity, 5) Environmental Microaggressions, and 6) Workplace and School Microaggressions. Respondents are asked to indicate the number of times that they have experienced each stated microaggression in the past six months, with a 5-point scale: "0 = I did not experience this event in the past six months" and "5 = I experienced this event 5 or more times in the past six months," (Nadal, 2011, p. 476). According to Nadal (2011), "results through two large samples provided evidence of reliability through satisfactory internal consistency estimates and evidence of validity through correlations with other scales, suggests that the REMS is an adequate measure of racial microaggressions" (p. 477).

### Methodology

This research sought to answer the following questions: 1) Are academic librarians of color experiencing racial microaggressions from their library colleagues? 2) Do white academic librarians observe these derogatory exchanges directed at minority colleagues? Based on previous literature, it was hypothesized that minority respondents would be more likely to both experience and observe racial microaggressions. The null hypothesis was that there would be no significant difference in the responses of minority and non-minority participants.

For this study, an online survey was used to collect data from both minority and non-minority academic librarians. Most of the survey items were adapted from the REMS described in Nadal (2011), with a revised version of at least one item from each of the six REMS subscales represented. The language of each survey item was modified to focus on librarian-to-librarian interactions. Also, since the survey sought to gauge both experiences and observations of microaggressions, the statements adapted from the REMS were used twice—once to ask participants about their experiences, and then again to ask about their observations. So, the REMS statement, "An employer or co-worker treated me differently than White co-workers," was modified to read "A colleague treated me differently than White colleagues," for the experience section of the survey, and further revised to "A colleague treated another librarian differently than his or her White peers" for the section of the survey focused on observations. Additional survey items were created based on themes identified by Solórzano et al. (2000) and Griffin et al. (2011). Unlike the REMS, which used a precise 5-point scale, this survey used a 6-point Likert scale with qualitative descriptors: 1 = *Never*, 2 = *Rarely*, 3 = *Occasionally*, 4 = *Often*, 5 = *Regularly*, and 6 = *Frequently*.

After a series of demographic questions, the survey was segmented into three major sections. In the first section, participants were asked to respond to statements depicting racial microaggressions by noting the frequency with which they had experienced each. This section contained 20 items which were separated into two groups of 10 items each. This allowed the opening statement to be repeated about half-way down the survey webpage so that participants would not have to scroll up to see the rating scale or directions. The second section was almost identical to the first, except that participants

were asked to note how frequently they had observed a particular racial microaggression being directed toward a fellow librarian. In the third and final section of the survey, participants were asked to note the degree to which they agreed with 7 statements, each of which represented either a microinvalidation or an environmental microaggression. At the end of each section, a text box was provided for additional open-ended comments.

Participants were recruited through three ACRL listservs to which the author subscribed: ILI-L (Instruction Section list), LES-L (Literatures in English Section list), and EBSS-L (Education and Behavioral Sciences Section list). Any academic librarian regardless of race was eligible to participate. The survey was open from February 15, 2012 to March 30, 2012. All responses were collected anonymously.

The data were analyzed using Microsoft Excel. Survey items, overall mean scores, and mean responses for non-minority and minority participants are included in tables 8, 9, and 10.

### Results

Of the 185 people started the survey, 139 participants completed it, making the completion rate 75.1%. All survey questions were optional; therefore, responses for individual items may not always add up to 139.

#### Demographics

The racial distribution of respondents can be seen in Table 1. Of those participants who finished the survey, most selected only one race. The majority of respondents, 70.5% (or n=98) identified themselves as white/Caucasian. For the purposes of data analysis, respondents have been divided into two groups: non-minority, where respondents selected only white/Caucasian; and minority, where respondents selected any racial category other than or in addition to white/Caucasian (29.5% or n=41).

Race Selected	Number of Responses	Percentage
White/Caucasian (only)	98	70.5%
African American	13	9.4%
Hispanic	7	5.0%
Asian	4	2.9%
Native American	1	0.7%
Multi-racial or selected multiple responses	16	11.5%

The majority, 86.3% (n=120), of participants identified themselves as female, while 12.9% (n=18) identified as male. Participants also had the option to select “transgendered” or “prefer not to answer,” but no respondent selected either of those options. One participant did opt not to select an answer for this question.

Tables 2-7 show the distribution of responses to demographic questions about age, geographic location, years as a librarian, years at current institution, type of institution, and type of position. The majority (64.0%, n=89) of respondents were under 44 years old, and participants were geographically spread out across the United States, with a few respondents (3.6%, or n=5) located in Canada. Most participants had been a librarian for 9 years or less (64.7%, n=90), and most had been at their current institutions for less than 9 years (78.4%, n=109); see Tables 4 and 5 for more details. Respondents predominantly

worked at Baccalaureate colleges, master's colleges or universities, or research universities, and just under half (42.4%, n=59) of participants were in tenured or tenure-track positions.

Age range	Number of respondents	Percentage
Under 35	54	38.8%
35-44	35	25.2%
45-54	26	18.7%
55-64	20	14.4%
65 or older	3	2.2%
no response	1	0.7%

Location selected	Number of respondents	Percentage
Northeastern US	39	28.1%
Midwestern US	36	25.9%
Southern US	32	23.0%
Western US	24	17.3%
Canada	5	3.6%
Other	2	1.4%
No response	1	0.7%

Years selected	Number of respondents	Percentage
0-4	47	33.8%
5-9	43	30.9%
10-14	13	9.4%
15-19	14	10.1%
20-24	8	5.8%
24-29	7	5.0%
30+	5	3.6%
No response	2	1.4%

Years selected	Number of respondents	Percentage
0-4	76	54.7%
5-9	33	23.7%
10-14	14	10.1%
15-19	4	2.9%

20-24	6	4.3%
24-29	2	1.4%
30+	4	2.9%

Type selected	Number of respondents	Percentage
Associate's college	12	8.6%
Baccalaureate college	28	20.1%
Master's college or university	45	32.4%
Research university	48	34.5%
Special focus institution	2	1.4%
Tribal college	0	0.0%
Other	3	2.2%
No answer	1	0.7%

Position selected	Number of respondents	Percentage
Tenured	24	17.3%
Tenure-track	35	25.2%
Other	79	56.8%
No response	1	0.7%

### Microaggression Statements

After the demographic questions, the first section of survey questions asked participants to rate how frequently they had experienced 20 forms of racial microaggressions. Participants responded using a 6-point Likert scale: *1=Never and 6=Frequently*. Means were calculated for three groups: all respondents, non-minority respondents, and minority respondents. Table 8 shows each survey item and the mean scores for the 20 experience questions, from highest overall mean to lowest overall mean.

Experience Statement	Overall Mean Response	Non-minority Mean Response	Minority Mean Response
A colleague has told me that he/she was color-blind.	1.81	1.66	2.18
A colleague treated me differently than White colleagues.	1.70	1.10	2.47
A colleague has told me that people should not think about race anymore.	1.66	1.54	1.95



I was told that people of all racial groups experience the same obstacles.	1.65	1.49	2.05
I was told that people of color do not experience racism anymore.	1.65	1.50	2.00
A colleague told me I was overly sensitive about issues of race.	1.54	1.36	1.95
A colleague told me that I was “articulate” after he/she assumed I wouldn’t be.	1.46	1.22	2.03
A colleague was unfriendly or unwelcoming toward me because of my race.	1.45	1.26	1.89
A colleague of a different racial group has stated that there is no difference between the two of us.	1.42	1.26	1.80
My opinion was overlooked in a group discussion because of my race.	1.34	1.13	1.84
I was ignored at work because of my race.	1.34	1.10	1.88
I was told that I complain about race too much.	1.30	1.17	1.60
A colleague assumed that I would have a lower education because of my race.	1.29	1.00	1.97
A colleague told me that all people in my racial group are all the same.	1.29	1.27	1.33
A colleague’s body language showed they felt threatened by me because of my race.	1.26	1.10	1.66
A colleague assumed that my work would be inferior to people of other racial groups.	1.25	1.07	1.67
A colleague told me that I was hired because of my race.	1.22	1.03	1.65
A colleague acted surprised at my professional success because of my race.	1.22	1.00	1.76
A colleague accused me of being aggressive because of my race.	1.18	1.03	1.53
A colleague assumed that I would not be intelligent because of my race.	1.16	1.00	1.54

The survey’s second section followed a similar pattern as the first, except the survey items were reworded so that participants were asked if they had observed racial microaggressions directed toward colleagues. Means were calculated for the same three groups: all responses, non-minority responses, and minority responses. Table 9 shows each survey item and the mean scores for all of the observation questions.

Table 9: Observations
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<b>Observation Statement</b>	<b>Overall Mean Response</b>	<b>Non-minority Mean Response</b>	<b>Minority Mean Response</b>
A colleague treated another librarian differently than his or her White peers.	1.64	1.36	2.30
A colleague told another librarian that he or she was color-blind.	1.62	1.44	2.08
A colleague said that people of all racial groups experience the same obstacles.	1.55	1.39	1.95
A colleague told another librarian that he or she was overly sensitive about issues of race.	1.53	1.37	1.92
A colleague was unfriendly or unwelcoming toward another librarian because of his or her race.	1.51	1.37	1.86
A colleague said that people of color do not experience racism anymore.	1.50	1.35	1.84
A colleague told another librarian that people should not think about race anymore.	1.49	1.39	1.73
A colleague said that all people in a particular racial group are all the same.	1.49	1.37	1.81
A colleague's opinion was overlooked in a group discussion because of his or her race.	1.48	1.24	2.11
A colleague assumed another librarian was being aggressive because of his or her race.	1.47	1.26	1.97
A colleague was ignored at work because of his or her race.	1.45	1.27	1.89
A colleague said that another librarian complained about race too much.	1.44	1.27	1.84
A colleague told another librarian that he or she was hired because of his or her race.	1.40	1.23	1.81
A colleague's body language showed they felt threatened by another librarian because of his or her race.	1.39	1.18	1.92
A colleague of one racial group told a librarian of a different racial group that there was no difference between the two of them.	1.38	1.18	1.84
A colleague assumed that another librarian's work would be inferior because of his or her race.	1.33	1.16	1.75
A colleague told another librarian that he or she was "articulate" after having assumed he or she would not be.	1.33	1.15	1.78
A colleague assumed that another librarian would have a lower education because of his or	1.30	1.10	1.81

her race.			
A colleague acted surprised at another librarian's professional success because of his or her race.	1.29	1.03	1.92
A colleague assumed that another librarian would not be intelligent because of his or her race.	1.24	1.08	1.65

Questions in the final section of the survey asked respondents to what extent they agreed with 7 statements. This section also used a 6-point Likert scale which indicated degree of agreement/disagreement rather than frequency: 1 = *Strongly Disagree*, and 6 = *Strongly Agree*. Table 10 lists each statement and the mean score for three groups: overall responses, non-minority responses, and minority responses.

Statement	Overall Mean Response	Non-minority Mean Response	Minority Mean Response
People of my race hold administrative or leadership positions at my university/institution.	4.70	5.36	3.15
People of my race hold administrative or leadership positions in my library.	4.49	5.28	2.63
Racism is less prevalent in higher education than it was 15 years ago.	3.53	3.80	2.89
Racism is less prevalent in academic librarianship that it was 15 years ago.	3.48	3.74	2.86
Racism is not an issue in academic libraries.	2.37	2.51	2.08
My colleagues treat me differently because of my race.	2.20	1.96	2.78
Racism is not an issue in higher education.	2.03	2.21	1.60

Each section of the survey contained an open-ended text box for comments, and approximately 130 comments were submitted. A content analysis of these comments could provide valuable qualitative data about the experiences and awareness of racial microaggressions in academic libraries. While a future analysis of this qualitative data is planned, the present article focuses on the survey's quantitative data.

### Data Analysis

Separate composite scores—one for the group of experience statements and one for the group of observation statements—were calculated for each participant. An independent samples t-test was used to determine significance. The *t*-statistic for each set of composite scores was calculated using Excel's

Analysis Toolpak; results from both t-tests can be seen in tables 11-12. For the experience statements, the  $t$ -statistic was 3.67, the two-tailed  $t$  critical value was 2.02, and the p-value was 0.0007. For the observation statements, the  $t$ -statistic was 3.02, the two-tailed  $t$  critical value was 2.02, and the p-value was 0.004. Since the  $t$ -statistic is greater than the two-tailed  $t$  critical value for both groups of statements, the null hypothesis can be rejected. The difference in responses from minority and non-minority librarians is statistically significant.

**Table 11: Experiences**

t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Unequal Variances

	<i>Minority composite scores</i>	<i>Nonminority composite scores</i>
Mean	35.146	22.722
Variance	454.278	39.953
Observations	41	97
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	43	
t Stat	3.6651	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.0003	
t Critical one-tail	1.6811	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.0007	
t Critical two-tail	2.0167	

**Table 12: Observations**

t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Unequal Variances

	<i>Minority composite scores</i>	<i>Nonminority composite scores</i>
Mean	36.947	24.021
Variance	665.186	76.884
Observations	38	96
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	40	
t Stat	3.0213	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.0022	
t Critical one-tail	1.6839	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.0044	
t Critical two-tail	2.0211	

## Discussion

In both the experience and observation sections of the survey, the mean responses from minority participants are consistently higher than the mean responses of non-minority participants, indicating that minority participants both experienced and observed racial microaggressions more often than non-

minority respondents. In the third section of the survey, non-minority respondents agreed to a much greater extent than minority respondents with statements about people of their race being in leadership positions and about racism being less prevalent. Both minority and non-minority respondents more strongly disagreed with the notion that racism is not an issue in higher education than they did with the suggestion that racism is not an issue in libraries.

Of the 41 minority participants, 6 (14.6%) reported never having experienced any of the twenty stated microaggressions. Each statement, however, had at least 4 minority participants (9.8%) who experienced the microaggression occasionally or more often. This suggests that some academic librarians of color do experience racial microaggressions from colleagues in their workplaces.

Table 13 lists all of the experience/observation statement pairs and the percentage of respondents who indicated experiencing or observing the microaggression more than occasionally. The table makes it clear that while minority survey participants report experiencing racial microaggressions, very few (or no) non-minority respondents report observing such encounters. This pattern holds for all but one of the experience/observation statement pairs: “A colleague told me that all people in my racial group are all the same”/ “A colleague said that all people in a particular racial group are all the same.” No minority respondents reported experiencing this microaggression more than occasionally, but 1 non-minority respondent indicated that he or she had observed this frequently. The pattern suggests that non-minority academic librarians do not recognize racial microaggressions that their minority colleagues could be experiencing.

Table 13: Percentage of respondents selecting “often,” “regularly,” or “frequently”		
Experience Statements / Observation Statements	Minority Responses	Non-minority Responses
A colleague treated me differently than White colleagues.	22.0%	
A colleague treated another librarian differently than his or her White peers.		0%
A colleague assumed that I would have a lower education because of my race.	17.1%	
A colleague assumed that another librarian would have a lower education because of his or her race.		0%
A colleague has told me that he/she was color-blind.	14.6%	
A colleague told another librarian that he or she was color-blind.		2.0%
My opinion was overlooked in a group discussion because of my race.	14.6%	
A colleague’s opinion was overlooked in a group discussion because of his or her race.		1.0%

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<p>I was told that people of color do not experience racism anymore.</p> <p>A colleague said that people of color do not experience racism anymore.</p>	14.6%	1.0%
<p>A colleague told me that I was “articulate” after he/she assumed I wouldn’t be.</p> <p>A colleague told another librarian that he or she was “articulate” after having assumed he or she would not be.</p>	14.6%	0%
<p>A colleague has told me that people should not think about race anymore.</p> <p>A colleague told another librarian that people should not think about race anymore.</p>	12.2%	3.1%
<p>A colleague told me I was overly sensitive about issues of race.</p> <p>A colleague told another librarian that he or she was overly sensitive about issues of race.</p>	12.2%	1.0%
<p>A colleague acted surprised at my professional success because of my race.</p> <p>A colleague acted surprised at another librarian’s professional success because of his or her race.</p>	12.2%	0%
<p>I was ignored at work because of my race.</p> <p>A colleague was ignored at work because of his or her race.</p>	9.8%	2.0%
<p>A colleague accused me of being aggressive because of my race.</p> <p>A colleague assumed another librarian was being aggressive because of his or her race.</p>	9.8%	2.0%
<p>A colleague assumed that my work would be inferior to people of other racial groups.</p> <p>A colleague assumed that another librarian’s work would be inferior because of his or her race.</p>	9.8%	0%

I was told that I complain about race too much.  A colleague said that another librarian complained about race too much.	7.3%	1.0%
A colleague's body language showed they felt threatened by me because of my race.  A colleague's body language showed they felt threatened by another librarian because of his or her race.	7.3%	1.0%
A colleague told me that I was hired because of my race.  A colleague told another librarian that he or she was hired because of his or her race.	7.3%	1.0%
A colleague of a different racial group has stated that there is no difference between the two of us.  A colleague of one racial group told a librarian of a different racial group that there was no difference between the two of them.	7.3%	0%
I was told that people of all racial groups experience the same obstacles.  A colleague said that people of all racial groups experience the same obstacles.	7.3%	0%
A colleague assumed that I would not be intelligent because of my race.  A colleague assumed that another librarian would not be intelligent because of his or her race.	7.3%	0%
A colleague was unfriendly or unwelcoming toward me because of my race.  A colleague was unfriendly or unwelcoming toward another librarian because of his or her race.	4.9%	2.0%
A colleague told me that all people in my racial group are all the same.  A colleague said that all people in a particular racial group are all the same.	0%	1.0%

### Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, the survey was only sent to three ACRL listservs, which limits the potential pool of participants. Second, participants were asked to select their race based on a set of pre-

defined categories. It is possible that some participants may have selected a race other than or in addition to white, and yet not identify or not be perceived by others as non-white. Minority participants who are not identified as non-white by others are less likely to experience microaggressions based on their race. Third, there were too few respondents from each racial category to analyze results by individual race, so all non-white participants were grouped together as minorities. As the research on racial microaggressions shows, certain microaggressions are more common for members of particular racial groups (Sue, Bucceri, Lin, Nadal, & Torino, 2007; Sue et al., 2008); combining the racial categories makes it impossible to differentiate between the experiences of different group members. Additionally, the qualitative labels used on the survey scale—"often," "regularly," and "frequently"—are not as precise as the response scale for the REMS, and respondents may not have perceived any difference among these degrees of frequency. Another limitation of this study is that minority and non-minority participants were asked to respond based on their personal experiences and observations, rather than experiencing and observing the same encounter. It is possible that the non-minority participants in this survey reported fewer observations because microaggressions occur less frequently at their specific institutions.

### Conclusion

Previous research has shown that minority students and faculty of color experience a range of racial microaggressions from other students, professors, and administrators on their college and university campuses. To determine whether academic librarians of color face similar experiences, this research project sought to answer the following questions: 1) Are academic librarians of color experiencing racial microaggressions from their library colleagues? 2) Do white academic librarians observe these derogatory exchanges directed at minority colleagues? According to the results of this survey, some academic librarians of color do experience racial microaggressions from colleagues in their workplaces. In particular, academic librarians of color noted that they are treated differently than their white peers. Minority academic librarians are also more likely to perceive racial microaggressions directed toward colleagues. However, non-minority librarians are unlikely to report observing racial microaggressions. This suggests that the disconnect between perceptions of minority and non-minority librarians, as previously noted by Smith (1988) and St. Lifer and Nelson (1997), persists.

Despite increases in programs aimed at recruiting minorities to librarianship, the *Diversity Counts 2009-2010 Update* (2012) reports that 86.1% of librarians in higher education are white. Librarianship could benefit from future qualitative studies on the experiences of librarians from specific racial groups. Additional research that investigates what role racial microaggressions may play in deterring people of color from entering into or remaining in academic librarianship could inform improvements to diversity recruitment and retention efforts. Without a deeper understanding of how issues such as racism affect us and our organizations, it will be difficult to succeed in increasing the representation of minorities within academic librarianship.



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