

Tool for Identifying Bias in Sources

Many sources you will want to use for curricular purposes have bias in them. While bias is a normal part of our existence within societies, some biases are harmful. Biases that are harmful present social norms that exclude historically and widely marginalized people.

One way to identify if a source has bias is to consider the following questions organized around social identity markers used in the United States. While having some form of bias does not immediately mean you discard the curricular resource because **context matters**, it is important to know how to evaluate the impact of the bias. The questions below are designed not as a checklist, but rather as a guide to begin identifying bias. Use this tool as a starting place to help you vet and assess the bias in a resource and determine whether or not the resource can be edited/modified and used.

Race/Ethnicity	Gender	Sexual Orientation	Ability
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Does this source present Whiteness as the standard or norm? <input type="checkbox"/> Does this source depend on a harmful stereotype about race/ethnicity to make sense? <input type="checkbox"/> Does this source leave out concepts of race and ethnicity when it could be added for deeper context? <input type="checkbox"/> Does this source demonstrate positive racial identities (for historically marginalized people)? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Does this source present gender binary as the standard or norm? <input type="checkbox"/> Does this source depend on a harmful stereotype about gender to make sense? <input type="checkbox"/> Does this source villainize any points of view outside of the gender binary in some way? <input type="checkbox"/> Does this source demonstrate positive gender identities (for historically marginalized people)? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Does this source present heteronormativity as the standard or norm? <input type="checkbox"/> Does this source depend on a harmful stereotype about sexual identity to make sense? <input type="checkbox"/> Does this source exclude LGBTQ+ perspectives or voices? <input type="checkbox"/> Does this source villainize any non heteronormative points of view in some way? <input type="checkbox"/> Does this source demonstrate positive sexual identities (for historically marginalized people)? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Does this source present able-bodied, neurotypical people as the standard or norm? <input type="checkbox"/> Does this source depend on a harmful stereotype about ability to make sense? <input type="checkbox"/> Does this source use ableist language? <input type="checkbox"/> Does this source not consider disabled points of view or ways of being? <input type="checkbox"/> Is the source accessible for people of differing abilities? <input type="checkbox"/> Does this source celebrate neurodivergence and variations in physical ability?
Social Class	Religion	Citizenship	Family/Home Life
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Does this source present middle class or upper class experiences as the standard or norm? <input type="checkbox"/> Does this source depend on stereotypical ideas of affluence in order for it to make sense? <input type="checkbox"/> Does this source present imagery that prioritizes a particular social class experience? <input type="checkbox"/> Does this source assume that people involved with the criminal justice system are at fault or guilty? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Does this source present Christianity as the standard or norm? <input type="checkbox"/> Does this source depend on a harmful stereotype about religion to make sense? <input type="checkbox"/> Does the source demonstrate positive religious/faith-based identities (for historically marginalized groups)? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Does this source present US Citizenship as the standard or norm? <input type="checkbox"/> Does this source depend on a harmful stereotype about citizenship and legality to make sense? <input type="checkbox"/> Does the source include a conversation or example of non-citizens that normalizes other forms of residency? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Does this source present two-parent, birth families as the standard or norm? <input type="checkbox"/> Does this source depend on a harmful stereotype about family/home life to make sense? <input type="checkbox"/> Does this source assume gender binary families as the standard or norm?



NC Quality Review Rubric Indicator:

Accuracy → Is the content presented in a way to identify and address any errors, bias, or outdated material that could confuse, mislead, or **[harm]*** students, **[especially when building positive cultural identities]*?**

** The NC Quality Review Rubric was created by the NC Department of Public Instruction and the Friday Institute. The above starred/bold language was added to the indicator to **directly** address the need to build students' positive cultural identities as part of Culturally Relevant/Responsive and Sustaining Teaching.*

What to do after evaluating the resource for bias:

There is no one single answer of whether to accept or reject a resource, since context matters. As you reflect on your above analysis, consider three important questions: (1) can this resource be remixed to change the harmful bias, (2) is my class capable of participating in critical analysis independently or with scaffolding, (3) is using this resource truly advancing academic achievement for my students?

If a resource has harmful bias, and it **can** be remixed/edited/modified, then consider the following options:

1. Identify the most important areas to remix/edit/modify and do so. Then, when using it with students, be encouraged to show the 'before and after' process, again as a model for them. Consider explicitly explaining to students that this source was remixed to address harmful bias.
2. Create a collection of 'before and after' sources that have been remixed/edited/modified so that students have a rich set of resources. We invite you to consider modeling your thinking process for them.

If a resource has harmful bias, but it **cannot** be remixed/edited/modified, then consider the following steps:

1. If the bias it contains is harmful and would require too much work to unpack in order to use it critically, reject the source.
2. If the bias is harmful, but can be easily unpacked and the source does carry other valuable content, then introduce it through a critical lens activity with students. This includes inviting them to notice and then critique the bias as part of its use by locating with/for them the locations of bias.
3. If the bias is harmful, but can be unpacked with teacher guidance, use an excerpt of the source and communicate with students directly why you are only using an excerpt/portion. Use this decision to model for students that noticing bias in sources is a good thing.

