

Hello everyone—welcome.

My name is Dr. Cana Uluak Itchuaqiyaq, and I am an assistant professor of professional and technical writing at Virginia Tech.

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Quyanaqpak

- Alaska Native nations
- Iñupiat of NW Alaska
- Tutelo/Monacan Nation in Virginia



Before we begin, I want to take the time to acknowledge Alaska Native nations upon whose ancestral lands the University of Alaska campuses reside. I do this in recognition that it takes tangible action rather than just mere acknowledgement to undo the harms of colonization.

In particular, I'd like to recognize the people of NW Alaska, my people, the Inupiat, for our continual stewardship of the lands and waters where I received some of my first college education—the UAF Chukchi campus in Kotzebue, Alaska—the place of my birth, the place where I gave birth, the place where my people have fished and hunted and lived and celebrated for millennia. Quyanaqpak for your survival and for your joy.

I would also like to acknowledge the Tutelo/Monacan Peoples of Virginia, the traditional stewards of the land that is now Virginia Tech for allowing me, an Inupiaq from Alaska, to live, work, and grow here on your beautiful homelands.

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My real name is Uluak. I was born in the month of January in Kotzebue, where my ancestors lived long ago. My mother is Gladys I'yiiqpak Pungowiyi from Noorvik, a small village near Kotzebue on the Kobuk River. I am also the daughter of the late Caleb Lumen Pungowiyi, a Siberian Yupik from the Qiwaaghmii clan of Savoonga, a small village located on St. Lawrence Island in the Bering Sea.

This is a photo I took a number of years ago crossing the Kotzebue Sound after caribou hunting with my brother Qaluraq. In it, the water and the sky are both deep blues and the sun, like a peach-colored dusting, is just about to dip below the horizon.

It acts as a reminder for me to be peaceful, breathe, and remember who I am and where I am from because there is strength in that. You'll see this image throughout my presentation.

When I pause and breathe, I invite you to join me.

There have been many people who have contributed to my growing understanding of the world, and I am grateful to all of them. I'll introduce a few to you here today so you have a sense of me as a person rather than just as a scholar.





In these two photos you can see my ancestors from whom I get my name and my values. I'm so grateful to my ancestors—their survival required kinship with the lands, waters, plants, and animals of the Arctic. It also required a strong community and strong spirit.

The black and white picture on the left is from around 1950 near Noorvik, Alaska. In it you can see my namesake and grandmother Uluak in the center of the photo. Uluak is holding my auntie Kuiŋñaq. Next to her, in the right-hand corner of the photo, is my mom I'yiiqpak, smiling and looking really cute. I love this picture.

The sepia photo on the right was taken around 1925 in Kotzebue, Alaska. In it you can see my great grandmother Iñuuraaq and great grandfather Itchuaqiyaq along with my grandfather, Qaagruk, as a young child. My last name Itchuaqiyaq comes from my great grandfather whose name was changed to Frank Wells by Quaker missionaries.



In these photos you can see my parents. I’m so grateful that I had loving parents who accepted me and nurtured my inquisitive spirit.

I’m pictured here with my mom I’yiiqpak in front of the Kotzebue Sound a couple of years ago. And here’s a photo of my dad, Lumen, who passed away about 10 years ago.

In the photo on the right, you can see me as a little girl all decked out and smiling innocently in my parky and maqlaqs that my mom made for me.

By the time this picture of me as a child was taken, I had already experienced trauma and I had already experienced joy. By the time this picture of me as a child was taken, I had already lost close family members to suicide and other violence. By the time this picture of me as a child was taken, I had already learned so many things that I’ve since worked hard to unlearn.



[BREATHE]

Identity and Community Affect Perspective

Understanding is Relational

- My Iñupiaq identity affects how I make sense of the world and interpret it for others.
- My community helps me to (re)consider and adapt that sense making and interpretation to include multiple perspectives and truths.



[CLICK IMAGE]

All this to say that identity and community affect one's perspective because understanding is relational.

My Iñupiaq identity and my experience in an Iñupiaq family and community affect how I make sense of the world and interpret it for others.

Listening to and valuing my family and community helps me to (re)consider and adapt my sense making and interpretation to include multiple perspectives and multiple truths.

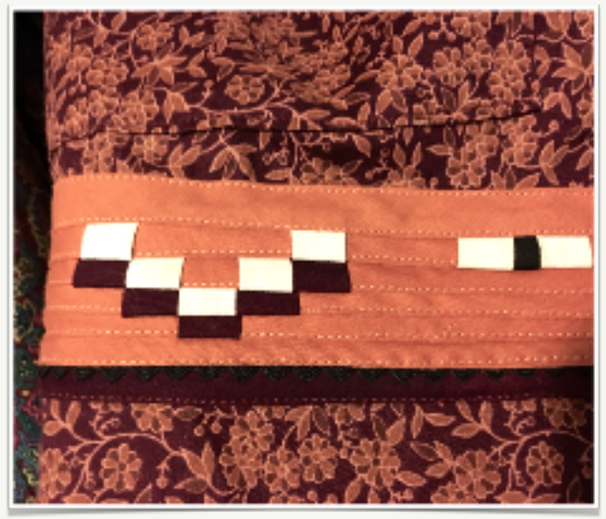
As a scholar, I am driven to use my work to benefit those who have been left out of academia's self portrait and create space for these important voices.

My work strives to recognize, reveal, and reject oppression and injustice in academic and societal practice. I aim to inspire and equip others to better recognize their power and their ability to replace oppression and injustice with equity.

Urriqsuutriłiq
Direction

In today's presentation, I will:

- Offer critiques of current modes of antiracism initiatives
- Present the Iñupiat Iḷitqusiat as a method to understand antiracism from a Inuit cultural perspective
- Offer takeaways and suggestions for future directions



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So here we go.

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Last year, I was asked to participate in a panel on antiracism and give a 5-minute statement on my antiracist advocacy and research at a national conference for communication design.

I was a graduate student on this virtual panel. My “outspoken” nature on Twitter about academia and society and my scholarly activism such as creating and maintaining a listing of self-identified multiply marginalized and underrepresented scholars in our field had gained the attention of some of the senior scholars in my field. Plus, this panel was primarily made up of scholars who identify as multiply marginalized or underrepresented in terms of race and ethnicity. I was the Indigenous panelist.

This is not a new type of occurrence. I get asked to give my two cents a lot, especially when it comes to the experiences of underrepresented scholars. In my field, I’m one of the few known Indigenous scholars and my racialized last name—Itchuaqiyaq—is a bit noticeable in academia.

Today, I’d like to revisit and expand on my remarks from that panel as a way to illustrate what I mean by “mainstream antiracism initiatives center whiteness.”

BIPOC scholars are asked to publicly recount their personal experience with the pain of racism and bias in academia in order
to prove it exists.

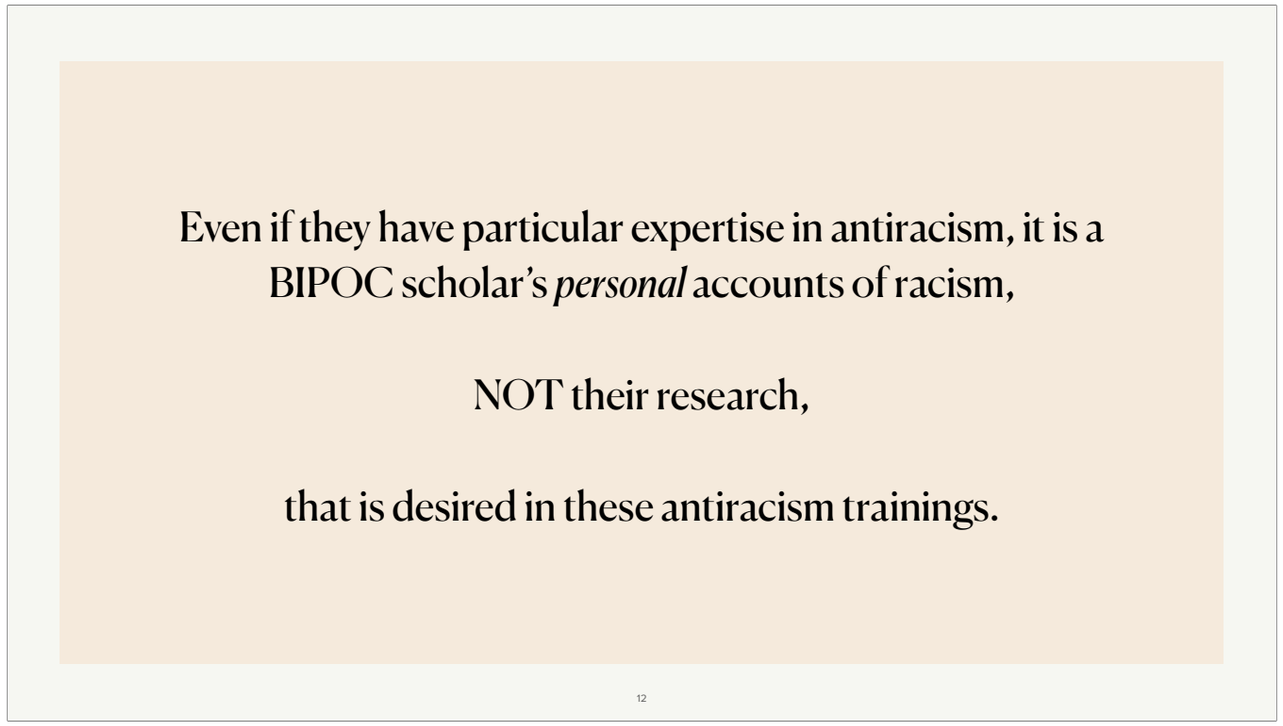
During my PhD, I was asked to co-facilitate some implicit bias trainings at my university, which is now commonly conflated with antiracism training, for an audience of our college deans and administrators—much like many other BIPOC scholars have experienced.

This labor was, of course, unpaid and exhausting both mentally and emotionally. And while I inserted concepts from my academic research into this training, my primary purpose as a participant wasn't professional.

Instead, it was personal.

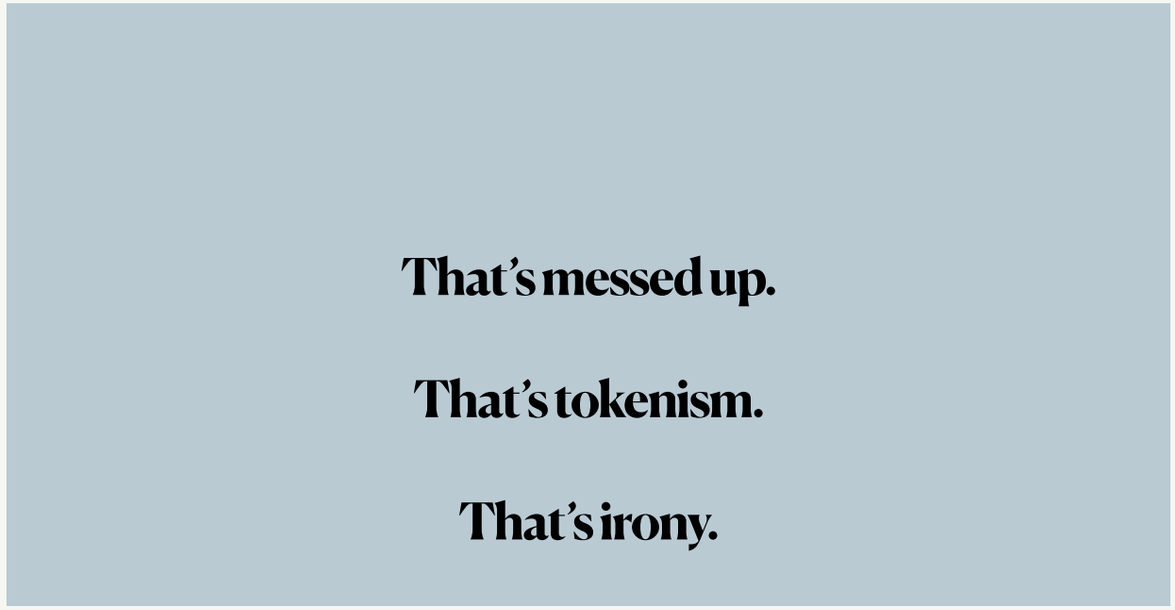
My job was to tell white people in power about the pain I've experienced as an Inuit scholar coming up through the ranks of academia. Unfortunately, BIPOC scholars are too often asked to publicly recount their personal experience with the pain of racism and bias in academia in order to prove it exists.

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Even if a BIPOC scholar has particular expertise in antiracism research, such as I do, it is their personal accounts of experiences with racism, NOT their research, that is desired in these antiracism trainings.

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That’s messed up.
That’s tokenism.
And that’s irony.

BIPOC scholars’ work is ignored and their racialized body is scrutinized in this model of antiracism training.

Our experience with racisms is real. We do not need to bleed for you—to entertain you with our pain—in order for that to matter.

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This spring I finished my PhD and posted a video of me hearing the news I passed and of hearing my new title—Dr. Itchuaqiyaq—on Twitter.

As a newly minted PhD, I am one of maybe 100 Alaska Natives—Alaska Natives, a large category representing all the Indigenous peoples in ALASKA, a state that has a HUGE population of Indigenous folx—I am one of maybe 100 Alaska Natives to EVER earn a PhD.

As an Iñupiaq, I am one of a much fewer number of PhDs.
As an Iñupiaq from the NANA region of NW Alaska, an area the size of Indiana, I'm one of even fewer still.

This fact startles me not because I'm one of the first. It startles me because I am one of the many.

Let me explain what I mean.

My intelligence and drive are not exceptional when it comes to my people. We have so many incredibly driven and incredibly intelligent people in our tribe who have not had the privilege nor the opportunities I've had to access and thrive in—well, let's face it—an exploitative and dehumanizing educational system.

If you want to see my pain point, here it is. You all will give me credit for my perseverance and academic accomplishments and even my "unique" perspective or take on things because I now have those three letters after my name: P-H-D. My expertise—born and borrowed from the lived experiences of myself, my family, and my people—is now valid.

P-H-D. I got those letters because I was willing to change myself enough to fit into your educational system. I acquiesced and I assimilated and I was accepted.

And, now that I've gotten what I need from you—P-H-D and a tenure track job at a great university— I say NO. STOP. ENOUGH.

I say this so that others do not have to erase the most precious parts of themselves—their culture, their way of speaking, their way of thinking, understanding, and problem solving, their *expertise*—in order to fit in and be heard.

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[BREATHE]



I’ve noticed that one thing that is often missing from discussions about the design of antiracism training and initiatives is pushing back against the assumption that the audience for this type of training is white.

In other words, a bitter irony exists in a lot of antiracism training: these trainings *still* privilege, and center, whiteness.

Who here is tired of convincing people that privilege actually exists? [PAUSE]

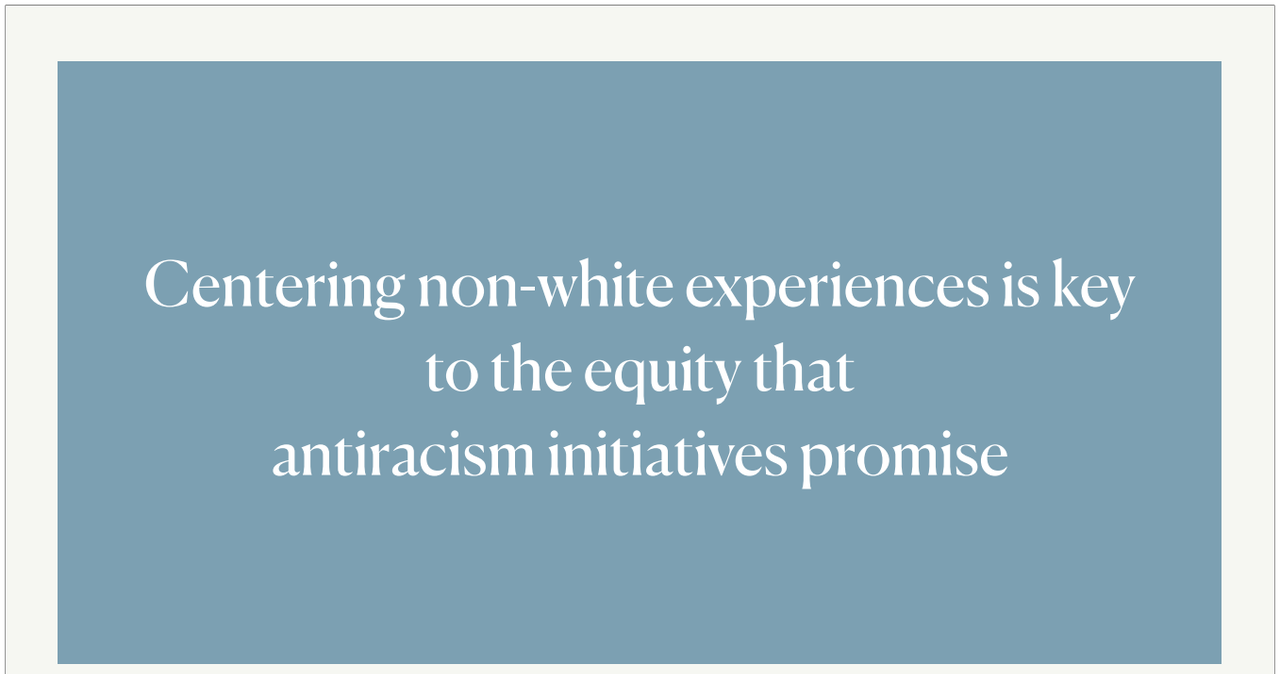
Who here is tired of watching department chairs, deans, provosts, and college presidents nod with concern and clap enthusiastically at talks like mine that describe how oppression functions at colleges and universities, BUT then defang and minimize any tangible action to address it? [PAUSE]

I’m exhausted from being nice and pleasant as I ask to be equal. I’m exhausted from being the one—a minoritized junior scholar—who is asked to say the hard truths because my more-privileged colleagues are too afraid to do so themselves.

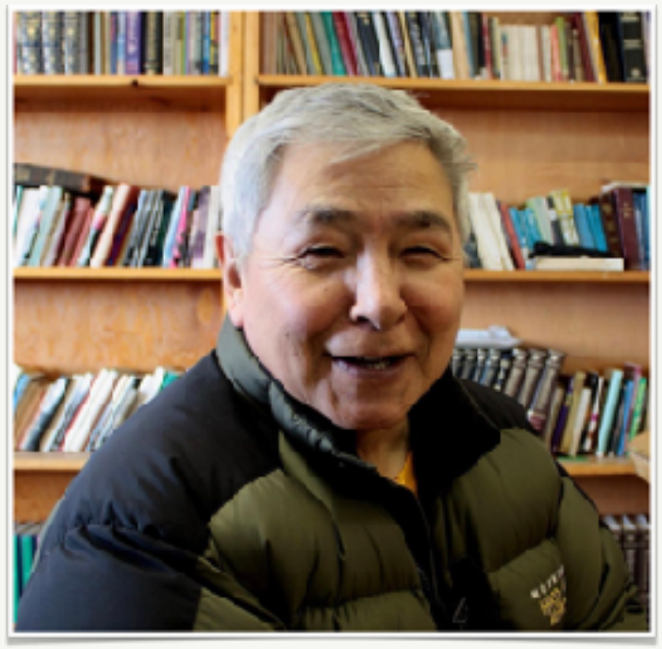
How about you?



[BREATHE]



I argue that centering non-white experiences is key to the equity that antiracism initiatives promise.





Empowered Alaska Native scholars: Leading the way to thriving ecosystems through ancestral knowledge and stewardship.

Let’s take a moment and talk about my pops, the late Caleb Lumen Pungowiyi.

His life’s work in Inuit conservation advocacy was honored through the creation of the Caleb Scholars Program, an Inuit-led conservation advocacy development program that assists emerging Inuit leaders with reaching their academic potential while still remaining true to their Inuk-ness and their community.

I’ve had the privilege of serving on the Caleb Scholars Steering Committee for a couple of years and using my developing expertise in antiracist and abolitionist education to help the program with its vision: Empowered Alaska Native scholars leading the way to thriving ecosystems through ancestral knowledge and stewardship.

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The Caleb Scholars Program's antiracism training is purposefully different than mainstream training.

It was designed for people
who experience racisms themselves.

The murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor and so many other Black and marginalized people at the hands of an unjust, corrupted system mobilized many organizations to incorporate antiracism into their training requirements.

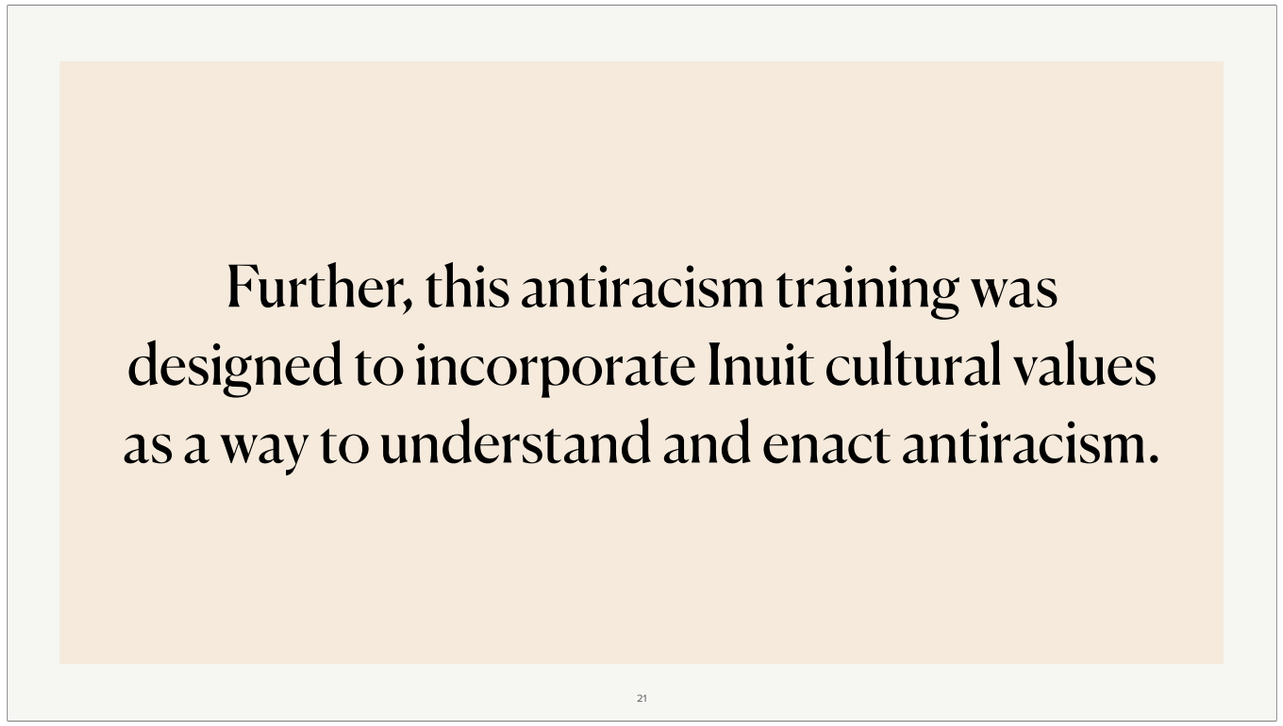
The Caleb Scholars Program joined this movement but did so in a way that was purposefully different from my experiences bleeding in front of college officials in those implicit bias trainings I described earlier.

Because of this assumption of whiteness built into the mainstream antiracism training models I've researched, in designing an antiracism curriculum for Alaskan Inuit, I had to reconceptualize antiracism training design to be *actually useful* for those of us who *experience* racisms *and* who still may embody, and need to challenge, racist ideologies.

One big difference: while the antiracism training I designed for Caleb Scholars covers important issues like privilege, it does not have to convince its audience that inequities related to privilege exist.

Why? They *already know.*

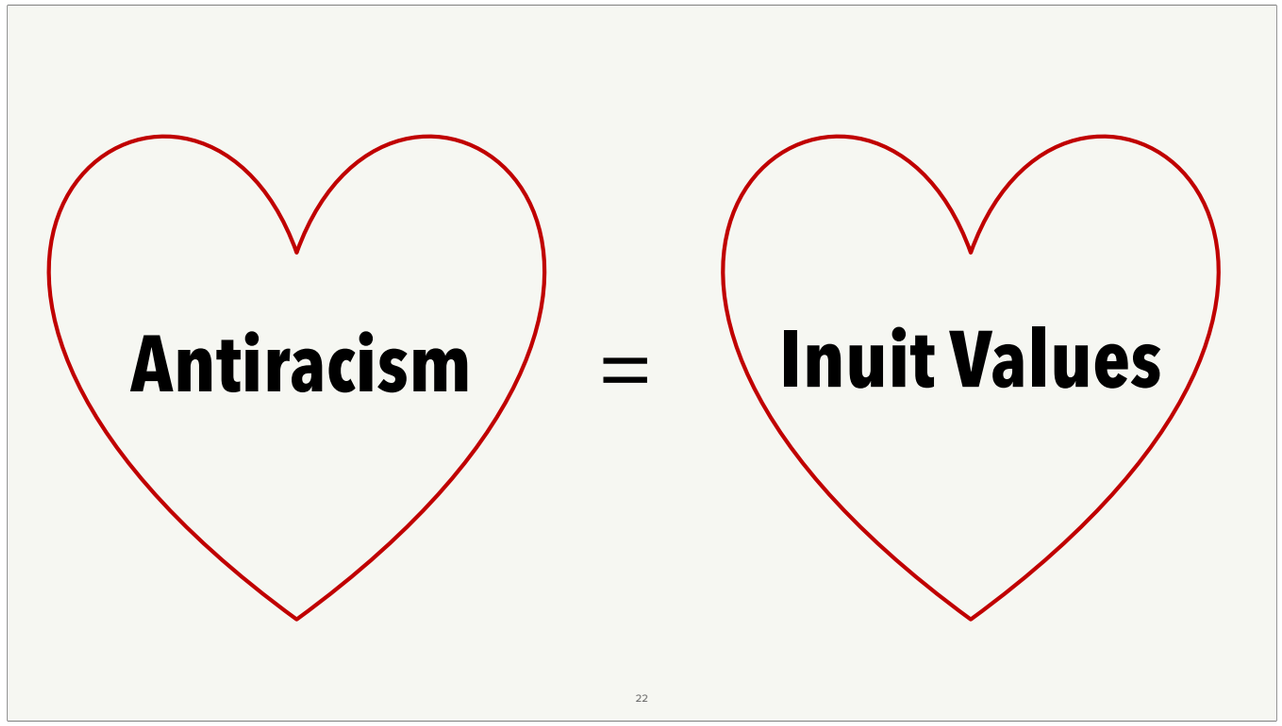
In the research for my design, I found that antiracism training and implicit bias training often have participants map out or discover all their vectors of privilege. In other words, participants are guided to recognize their unearned and unfair advantages from being born an "insider" to the dominant culture all while somehow gaining some empathy for those of us with less.



In contrast, the training I designed for Alaskan Inuit helps participants recognize their *own* social capital and to design strategies towards its development.

Further, this antiracism training was designed to incorporate Inuit cultural values as a way to understand and enact antiracism.

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For example, this image is from the Caleb Scholars Program antiracism learning module.

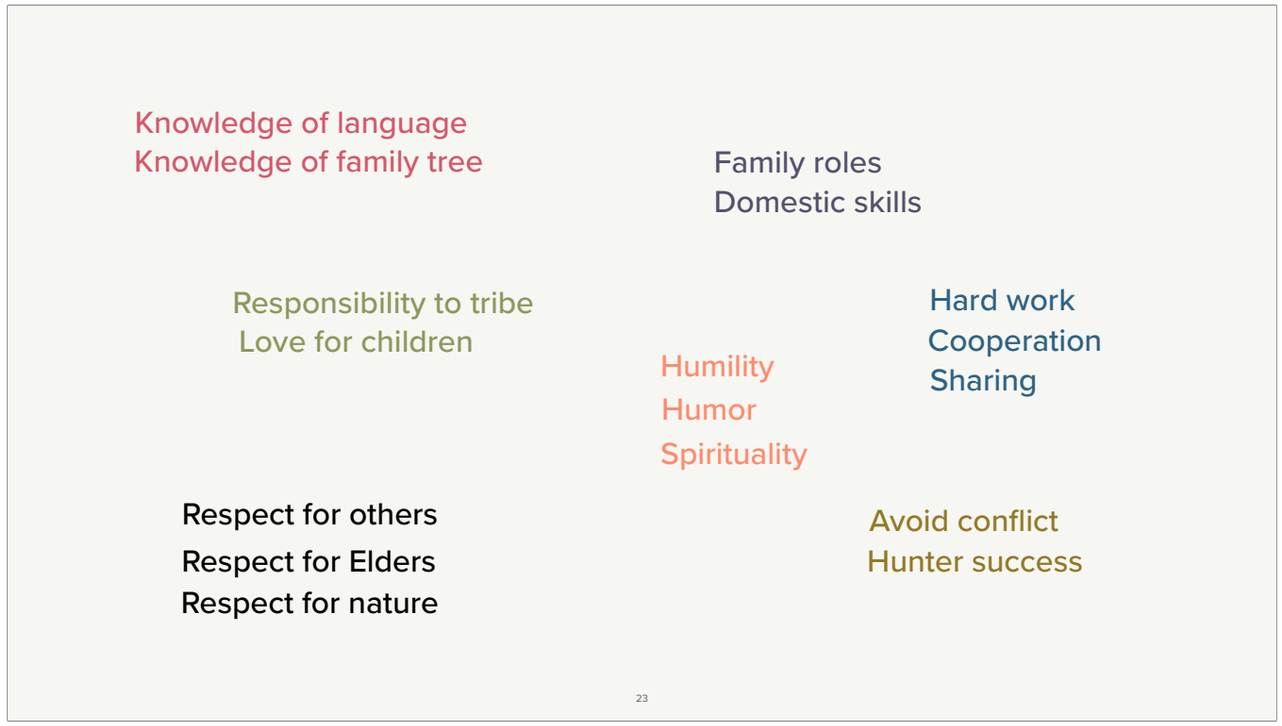
It shows two hearts as equal to one another, one says antiracism in it and the other says Inuit Values.

One goal of this training is to help our scholars recognize their own value despite the mixed messaging that they may have received societally.

I’d like take a few minutes to unpack how antiracism and our Inuit Values, or what we in the NANA Region call the Inupiat Ilitqusiat, are linked.

As I discuss the Inupiat Ilitqusiat, I am addressing my own people. I am talking to Inupiat about antiracism. The point is to demonstrate how we can apply our values to issues that we need to work on as a community.

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The values that make up the Inupiat Ilitqusiat are powerful tools from which to make sense of the world. Our ancestors practiced these values to live together in some of the toughest conditions on earth.

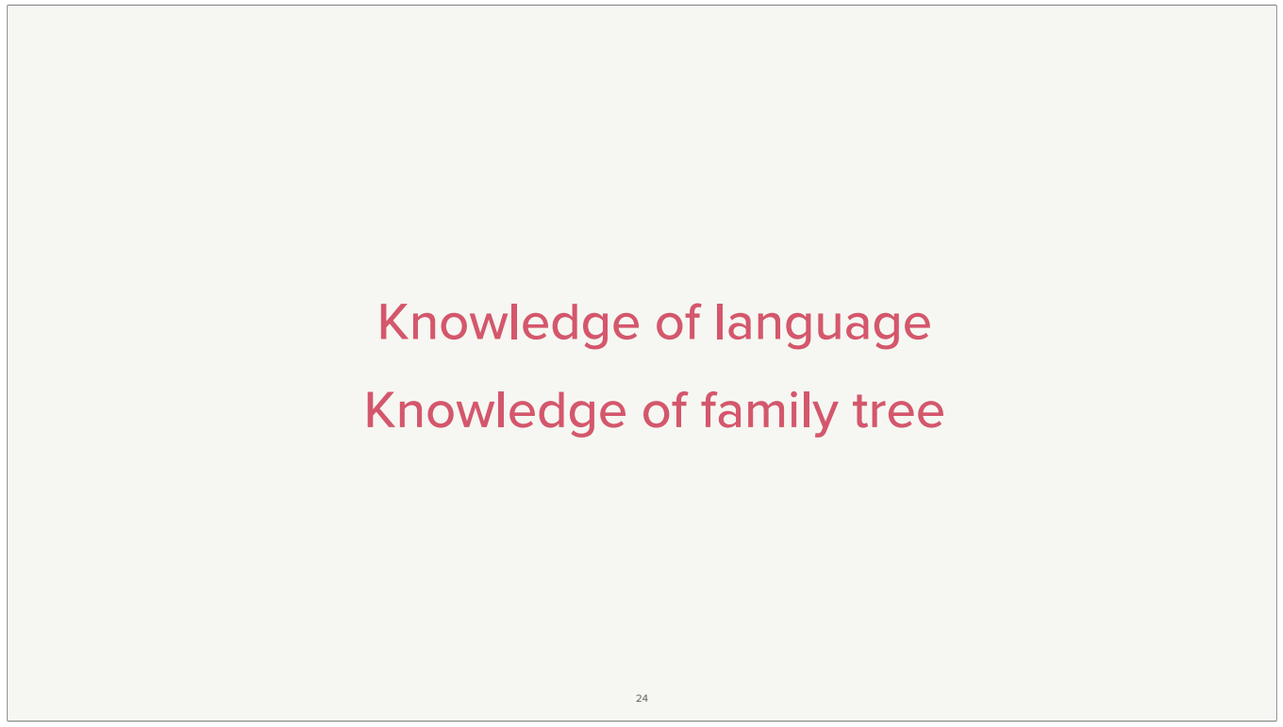
Today I'm going to highlight these values to illustrate, sometimes in a round about way, how I've thought about their relationship to antiracism.

I think about this quote from Benny Shendo often:
Don't teach me about my culture, use my culture to teach me.

This quote inspires me to incorporate the Inupiat Ilitqusiat in all my problem solving and learning. These values may not always be a perfect fit for every situation, and that's ok.

Through using them in my own learning process, I am able to filter this western education I've gotten through my own cultural lens. Through using the Inupiat Ilitqusiat in how I approach my scholarly work, I keep myself centered in my own cultural values instead of replacing them with academia's values.

That's empowering.



The first set of values I want to talk about are Knowledge of Language and Knowledge of Family Tree.

Our language—Inupiatun—is beautiful, rich, and descriptive. It’s a language that still exists in our Elders in our homes and in our schools.

As we learn our language, we realize that our ancestors came up with some incredible phrases to describe complex things that have no easy English equivalent. Those phrases are powerful and useful in our writing and our speaking.

If academia demands that you learn words and concepts like epistemology, ontology, cosmology, and axiology--demand that academia learn our words and concepts, such as sila, and adaq.

Our language is just as valuable, and just as correct, as English.

Similarly, our families are incredible sources of valuable education that you cannot get from books.

My parents were my first teachers. My aunties taught me about community service. My cousins taught me about loyalty. My sisters taught me about humility… and boxing.

My point is, you already know so much. Use your "informal" education will help you with your "formal" one. Your family’s lived experiences are valuable, important, and interesting.

Hard work
Cooperation
Sharing

Hard Work, Cooperation, and Sharing.

Our people find joy in getting things done, especially when it comes to our traditional foods. When I go home, my mom and sisters will put together a niqipiaq feast made up of seal oil, black meat, dried caribou, dried whitefish eggs and meat, and baked sii fish.

That meal represents the labor of many people working together and sharing our resources.

Hunters need to travel out to the seals to harvest them and haul them home. People need to work together on the seals, skinning them and cutting the blubber for rendering into seal oil and then butchering the seal meat to hang and dry for black meat. Hunters had to travel upriver to hunt for caribou and haul and butcher those animals. Fishing had to happen, which in the case of sii fish, required augering a hole in the thick ice and standing outside waiting patiently for a bite. White fish for paniqtuq has to be caught and cut and dried carefully—which requires patiently tending to the fish, turning it over, looking for tiny fly eggs for multiple days as they dry.

All this took time. All this took skill. All this took community.

The point is, we can’t do all of this work alone. When we work hard together towards a shared goal and share the bounty, we all have plenty. And sharing allows us to enjoy more things and have variety. We are stronger together.

Family roles
Domestic skills

Family Roles and Domestic Skills.

Everyone has something meaningful to contribute and deserves to have a safe place for nourishment and rest.

Don’t let my brevity deceive you into thinking these are less related to antiracism than my other examples. They are central to that work.

Let me say it again:
Everyone has something meaningful to contribute and deserves to have a safe place for nourishment and rest.

There is no such thing as partial equity. Equity means everyone.

Respect for others

Respect for nature

Respect for Elders

Respect for Others, Respect for Nature, and Respect for Elders are key factors in how I think about antiracism.

Respect includes calling others in when they do harm so that they have a chance to recognize how their actions affect others and to change and grow.

Respect includes recognizing that this earth is the ONLY home for people, plants, animals, itty bitty organisms, and other nonliving things. We are guests, not owners.

We have no right to contaminate our lands, waters, and our air for the sake of profit and convenience. Our people know from our own experience with climate change that ecojustice is related to racial justice. Just because ecological devastation is not happening in your “backyard” does not mean it isn’t affecting the homes and lives of others.

Respect includes recognizing the lived experiences of others as knowledge and even wisdom. And who has more lived experiences than our Elders?

Being an Elder—with a capital E—is a recognized and earned position of respect and responsibility in our communities. Our Elders guide us with their experience from a lifetime of successes and failures.

They teach us about long-term vision and patience. They know how change for the better or worse can happen in a flash or can happen with excruciating slowness.

Humility

Humor

Spirituality

Humility, Humor, and Spirituality.

We all have a right to get to know who we are. My dad used to say, “Know who you are.” When you know who you are you get to value who you are.

I believe that a lot of racism is rooted in people scrambling for power so they can feel important. It doesn’t have to be like that.

When you know and value who you are, that’s empowerment. That’s also humility. I remember at my dad’s funeral someone said that “Caleb was recognizably Caleb no matter who he was with.” My dad was himself and that was good enough for him. I want to be more like that.

I believe that the key to this being okay with being yourself is to have a good sense of humor and not take yourself too seriously. It helps with avoiding conflict and with making friends.

Likewise, spirituality, however you define that for yourself, is also important. Taking care of your spirit and turning to your community for compassion, care, and direction helps keep that scrambling at bay.

Avoid conflict
Hunter success

Avoid Conflict and Hunter Success.

Avoiding conflict, to me, means accepting people, including yourself, for who they are and holding yourself and others accountable for actions.

Remember acceptance does not equal approval. Acceptance is what makes all the difference between feelings like guilt and shame. Guilt means something like “I did wrong.” While shame means something like “I am wrong.”

People are going to mess up. I’ve messed up. We need to have compassion when we hold one another accountable for actions. All of us grew up in a society that has been corrupted by racism. We are all on different trajectories and timelines in reckoning with that.

Hunter success, for me as someone who doesn’t really hunt much, means perseverance. It means patience. It means planning and preparation. It means being willing to try to do something to the best of my ability even if I might fail or fall short. It means pushing through the pain of those failures and trying again.

Remember, antiracism work is hard and humbling. For those of us who experience racism and oppression in our academic pursuits, it takes a lot of courage to keep moving forward towards our ambitions and goals. It takes strength to resist racism’s attempts to steal your joy and your dignity.

In those times, remember our feasts and how when we work together and share, that we are all nourished.

Responsibility to tribe

Love for children

Responsibility to Tribe and Love for Children.

Our people need us and our children need us to help make the world safe to live, and breathe, and play without fear.

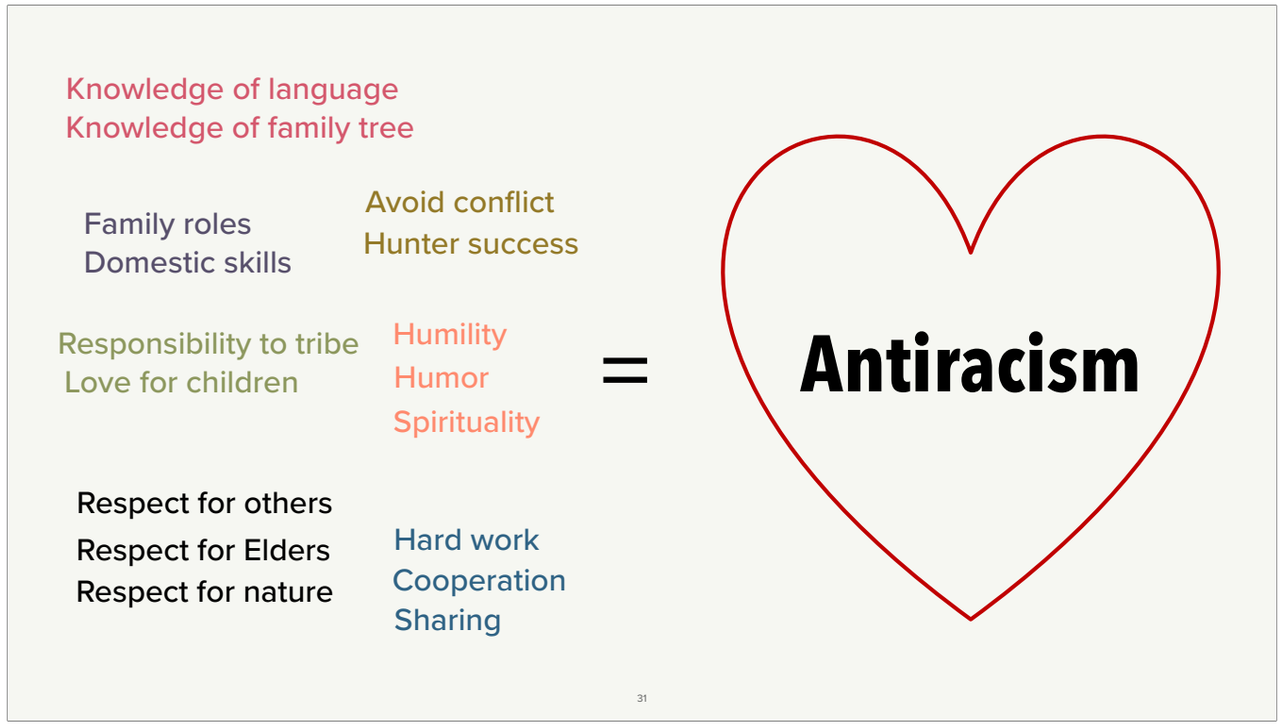
The aspirations and needs of our community is linked to the aspirations and needs of other communities, especially when it comes to justice and equity.

I believe it is our responsibility to our tribe to confront how racist ideology has crept into our thinking and actions. Anti-Black racism is especially harmful in our communities because so many of our tribal members are Black and Native and their participation and contribution in our communities are important.

Our communities are not free of racism. Not only do we enact racism against others, we enact racism against ourselves. Negative messages about who we are and what we can achieve might live rent-free in our heads causing damage.

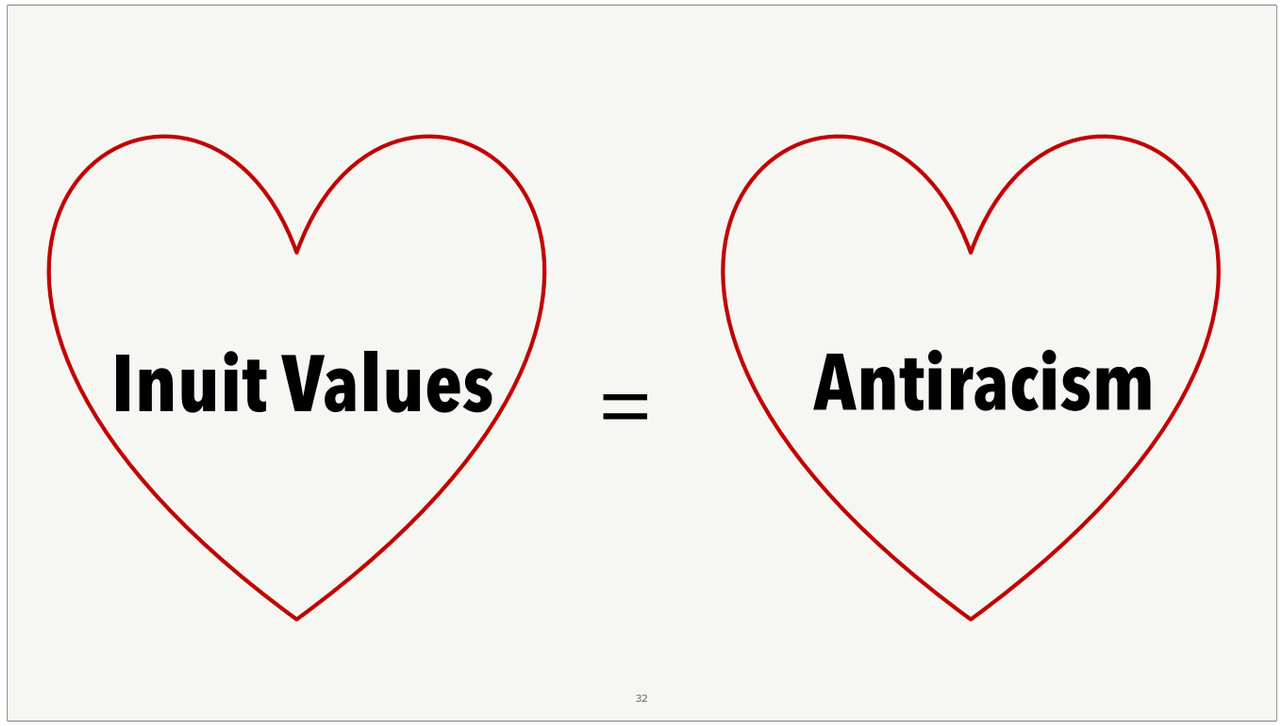
I know I am still working on this and it’s not easy to recognize and repair how I’ve harmed myself and how I've harmed others.

However, I have choices today and I am committed to choosing liberation and justice.



As I mentioned earlier, I am learning about antiracism through the Inupiat Ilitqusiat. Each one of these values, I argue, is useful in thinking about how racism might play out in our society—and they also provide some tools for resistance.

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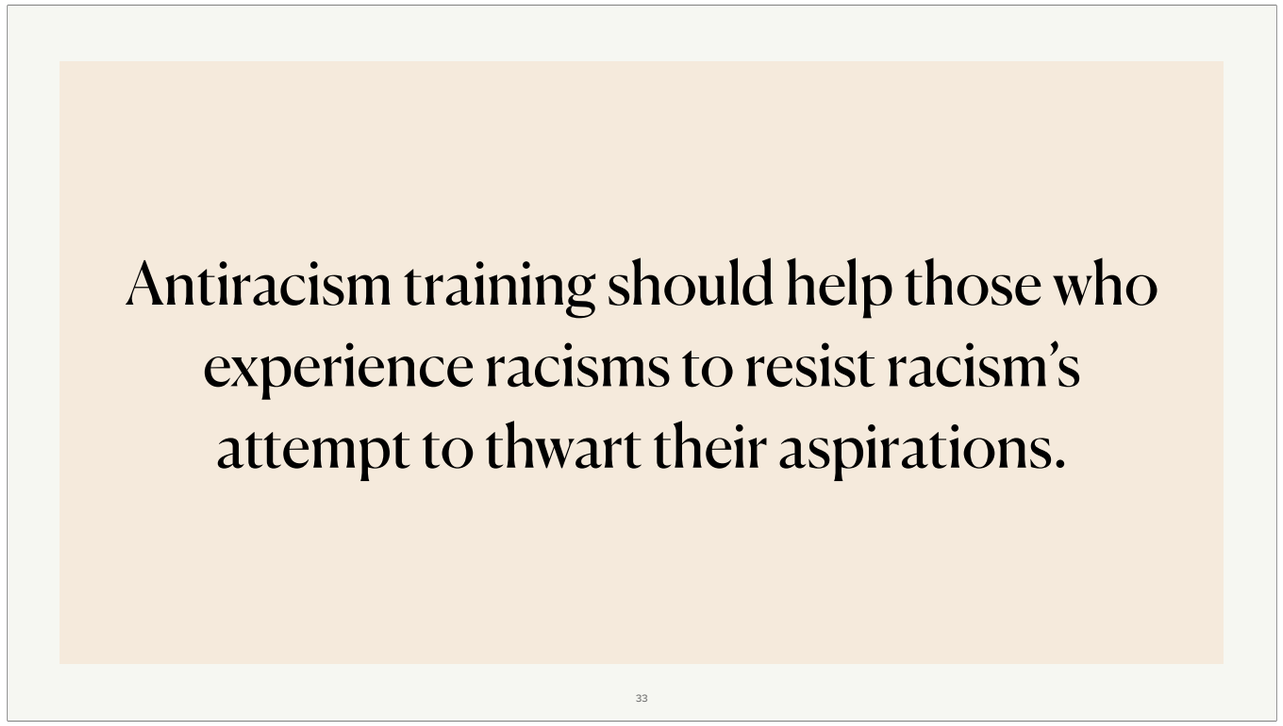


So, doing all the math, antiracism and Inuit values are deeply connected.

Just like learning about and incorporating our Inuit values into our modern lives takes work and practice, so does incorporating antiracism work.

Both are worth it.

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Antiracism training should help those who experience racisms to resist racism’s attempt to thwart their aspirations.

In my work with the Caleb Scholars program, I wanted our antiracism training to center the needs of Inuit, my people, in navigating an inequitable academic system as their whole selves, *as well as* confronting the tendrils of racism that exist in our community, especially when it comes to important issues like anti-Indigeneity and anti-Blackness.

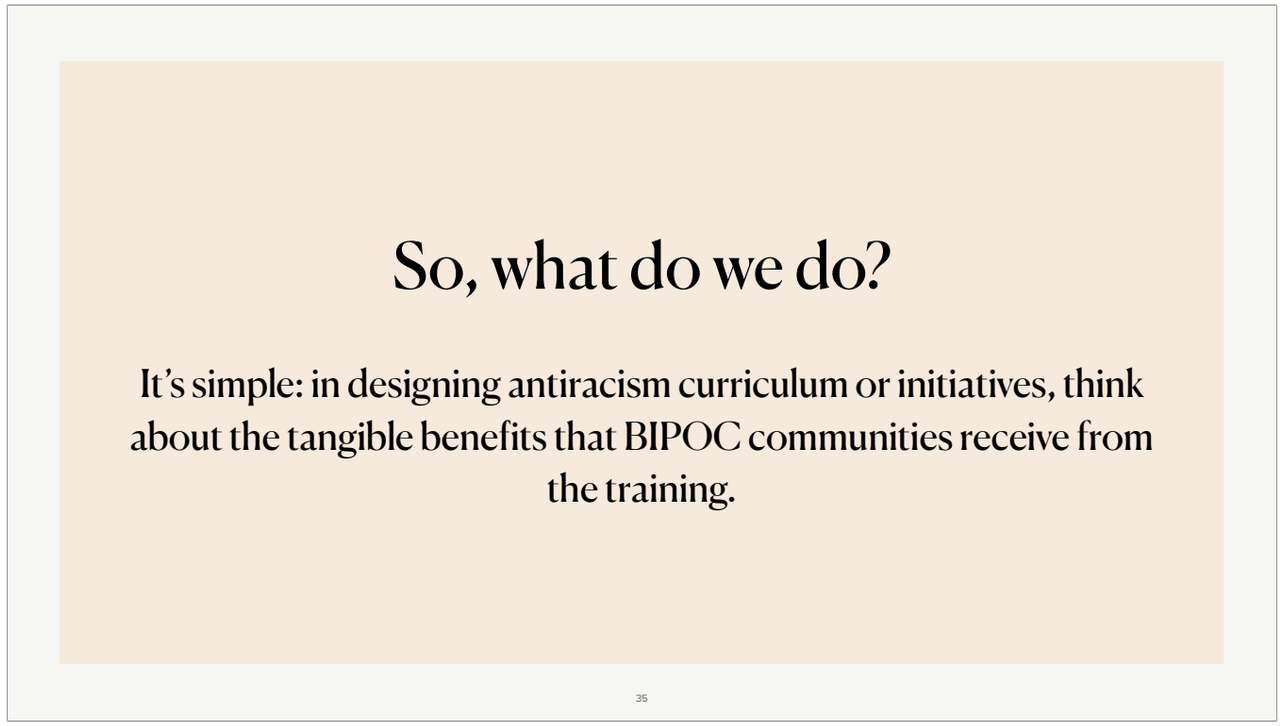
All this work that I’m doing is really just trying to challenge the defaults in who we think about when we design antiracism initiatives and getting people to think about who *really* benefits from current modes of antiracism training.

Because, from where I view things, antiracism initiatives, in general, *still* primarily benefit white aspirations.

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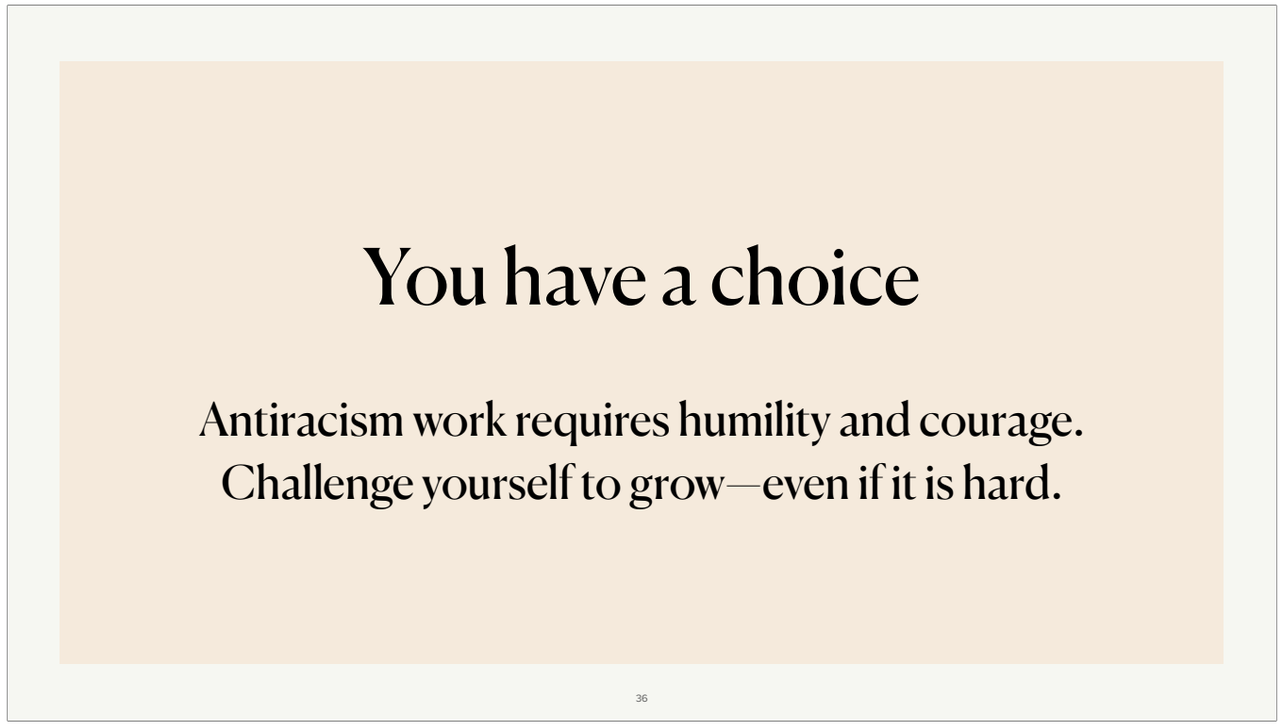


So, what do we do?

It’s simple: in designing your antiracism curriculum or initiatives, think about the tangible benefits that BIPOC communities receive from the training.

If it is merely along the lines of “increased awareness about the issues BIPOC scholars face,” or “increasing the understanding of allyship,” or “diversifying readings in courses,” then that is simply not enough.

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In closing, I would like you to remember that you have a choice.

There isn't much in this world that any of us control of beyond our own actions, reactions, and attitudes.

I've given you a lot of suggestions and things to think about regarding antiracism today, but it is your choice in how you want to move forward with them, if at all. A one-hour workshop will not solve for racism. If education was the key, then universities would already be equitable spaces, which they are not.
What is needed is for people to do the work to recognize how racist ideologies are playing out in their lives and work. And then we need to be humble enough to face those realizations and then change them.

We also have to be humble enough to realize that we may be clumsy in how we work towards antiracist goals. We may overly center ourselves. We may say the wrong things. We may make people angry with us.

What matters most is not waiting until we can do this work perfectly. If we are trying to get this down perfectly first, we may never act. Have the courage to act and the humility to be corrected.

Challenge yourself to grow—moment by moment—even if it is hard.

Like my dad says, "Know who you are." There is strength in that.

calebscholars.org

If you’d like to learn more about the Caleb Scholars Program, including links to our YouTube channel which houses portions of our antiracism, anti-discrimination and anti-violence trainings, check out calebscholars.org.



Quyanaqpak for listening. Thank you so much to UAF for inviting me to give this talk today. It was an honor to give a talk like this ”in” my home state. Tara.