

Spinning Straw into Gold

Microaggressions as Teachable Moments & Responding to Microaggressions

Think Again Training with Levitt Foundation, Fall 2024

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Defining Microaggressions

Microaggressions can be described as “*brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative ... slights and insults*” towards people based on their targeted social group membership within a system of oppression. (adapted from Sue et. al., 2007, “Racial microaggressions in everyday life”).

In other words, a microaggression occurs when someone says or does something that implicitly supports a system of oppression, which they may not realize is oppressive and often don’t mean that way, and which is sometimes “subtle” or rationalize-able enough that even the recipient may have doubts about whether or not it is oppressive.

The “micro” in “microaggressions” does not mean the impact is small. It refers to the scale at which the action occurs - among individuals, rather than at the scale of institutions or whole societies. Not all examples of inequity are microaggressions.

Microaggressions create work for the target. They can compel the person on the receiving end of the comment or action to contend with their internalized oppression – for example, to consider, “Was that *really* racist/classist/sexist/etc., or am I just being oversensitive?” And the person on the receiving end may feel obligated to respond supportively, by educating the person who has just harmed them, prioritizing that person’s needs over their own.

Microaggressions occur in a context of systemic oppression. Some common microaggressions are difficult to spot because *hypothetically*, in the absence of systemic oppression, they would not be problematic. What makes them microaggressions is that they contain one or more “hidden messages” - *not necessarily deliberate* - that refer to a broader pattern, structure, stereotype, etc. that is harmful.

The impact of microaggressions build up over time. Like a mosquito bite or a bee sting, one may be a minor inconvenience, but one a day, or ten a day, for years on end, have a cumulative impact. (See “How microaggressions are like mosquito bites” at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hDd3bzA7450>).

Some important considerations about microaggressions

- **Intention vs impact** - Something can land as a microaggression even though the person who said or did the microaggression didn’t mean it that way. What defines a microaggression is how it impacts people, not how someone meant it. We do not need to have agreement on whether something is “technically” a microaggression in order to address how it impacts someone.
- **It’s not always about individual bias** - Sometimes a comment or action can land as a microaggression because of how it relates to larger patterns in society that disadvantages a particular group, *even if* the person who did the microaggression does

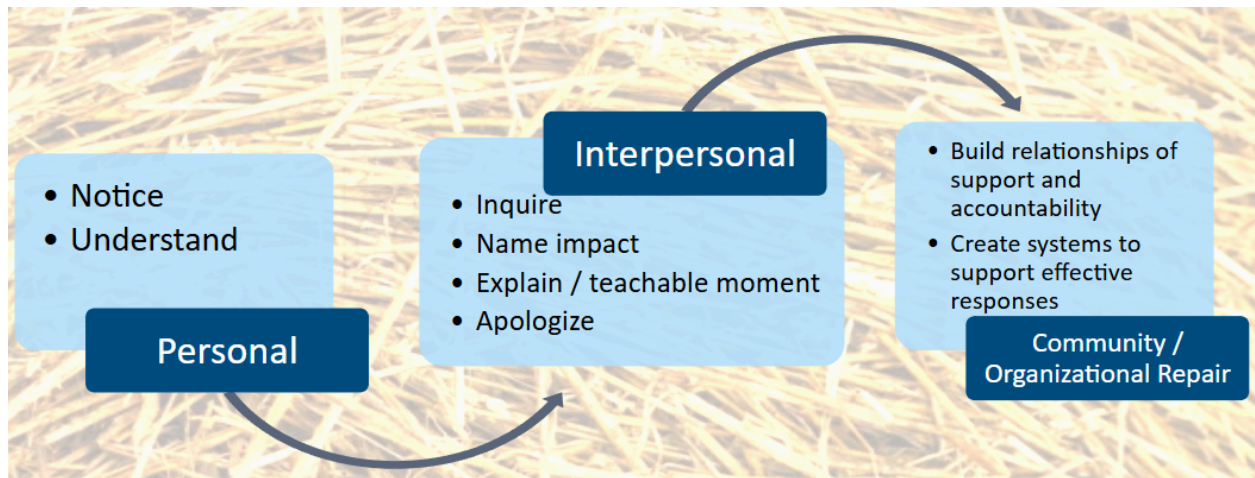
not hold bias against that group. This is why understanding how oppressive systems work in a society is one way we can learn to avoid microaggressions.

- **Some microaggressions that seem “subtle”** to some people are not subtle to others, and can even feel really traumatizing or egregious. How subtle or obvious a microaggression seems to us depends on how familiar we are with the relevant groups and the societal patterns. The examples provided below may seem more or less subtle, obvious, or predictable depending on your own experiences. It’s especially important to consider how you will prevent and address microaggressions that seem so subtle to you that you might unintentionally do them without even realizing it.
- **A microaggression is not always something that was said** - Sometimes it’s something that was NOT said or done; behavior that ignores or dismisses people from a certain group can be a microaggression.
- **A lot depends on the quality of your relationships** - If you have a foundation of mutual understanding and trust with another person, words and actions come across differently than if you don’t have that foundation. Trust is built over time. *Wanting to have* a positive relationship with understanding and trust doesn’t mean that you necessarily have it. The track record of the relationship is more important than your intention. Assuming that you already have a high degree of understanding and trust can be a mistake. Often, someone with relative privilege may assume they have more trust or a closer relationship with someone who has less privilege than is actually the case.
- **Professional relationships are human relationships** - If we imagine that professional interactions are completely different or entirely separate from social interactions, we will miss a lot of potential harm as well as a lot of potential benefits. We bring not only our skills, but also our communication habits, assumptions, norms, and biases from our social lives into our professional lives and vice versa. Cultivating respect for each other as “whole people” - not just walking resumes - can have enormous benefits for team cohesion, workplace satisfaction, and productivity, not to mention making it possible to address and repair the inevitable missteps that occur. This matters whether online or in person. Likewise, gaining skills to prevent and address workplace microaggressions can positively impact non-work relationships as well, since many of the same microaggressions can occur at work, on the subway, in your neighborhood, and among friends and family.
- **Microaggressions tend to become more frequent following an increase in organizational diversity.** Identity matters to how we relate to each other. As an organization’s diversity increases (in terms of gender, race, culture, class, religion, disability, and other forms of identity) some communication norms become outdated. To not only recruit but also *retain* a diverse team requires attention to inclusive practices. Team members who are accustomed to being in the majority, in an environment where all the norms are designed by and for people “like” themselves, often have to adjust their communication style to work well for a broader range of people.

- **Microaggressions impact employee retention; retention impacts the effectiveness of teams as well as future recruitment, reputation, and the organization's effectiveness.** The impact of employee dissatisfaction and turnover on morale and the bottom line requires that managers and leadership take the impact of microaggressions as a serious concern to the health of an organization. All team members can and should take responsibility for their role in maintaining an inclusive and welcoming environment, which includes preventing and addressing microaggressions.
- **Addressing microaggressions requires replacing denials or defensive responses with curiosity.** The success of any effort to reduce or eliminate microaggressions relies on people reporting and/or addressing microaggressions and being believed. Microaggressions do happen, even though they are not necessarily apparent to people with relative privilege. When someone receives feedback about a microaggression they did, it is important to practice curiosity rather than reacting out of defensiveness. Reports of microaggressions offer crucial insight into how to engage with each other more effectively.
- **Spaces for practice responding to microaggressions make addressing them easier.** Practicing in a low-risk environment, without any fear of punishment, helps reduce the stigma around doing or receiving microaggressions.

Spinning Straw into Gold

Microaggressions as Opportunities for Learning and Connection



Microaggressions, especially when they are unintentional, don't have to be an emergency or a crisis. Handled gracefully, they can be valuable opportunities for learning, repair, and (re)connection. The obligation to respond as part of maintaining an inclusive culture and the options for *how* to respond are different depending on someone's role (e.g., as a manager or not) and on whether they did the microaggression, received it, or observed it.

The first step in responding is to **notice** that something happened. When you observe a microaggression, you may notice it immediately because you **understand** what makes it a microaggression – how it's connected with broader systems of power and categorization like race, gender, class, and so on. Or, you may only notice based on others' reactions. In that case, it's important to seek understanding through conversation, reflection, and/or self-education.

When you observe someone else do a microaggression, it is often helpful to **inquire** about their intentions so that you can acknowledge good intentions and clear up any simple misunderstandings. **Naming** the impact (including emotional impact) and how it differs from the intentions is a crucial next step in intervening. Sometimes, but not always, you might also **explain** what makes it a microaggression.

Long-term follow-up to prevent and address microaggressions should include **building relationships** to rebuild trust and comfort that may have been damaged, be more effective allies and colleagues to each other moving forward, and when appropriate, support each other's learning processes.

In any given instance, you might not be able to do all the steps outlined here, and that can be okay. The goal is to build a culture where all these steps can and do happen regularly.

Considerations for responding (as a bystander / witness):

<p>What are your goals?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - stop the person from continuing the behavior - educate the aggressor - protect colleagues' safety / emotional boundaries / mental health / well-being / collegial work environment - support colleague - social pressure on aggressor to avoid behavior again / reassert inclusive work culture 	<p>What are the risks for you?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - physical safety (less risk) - job safety / being fired or written up - loss of relationship(s) / social capital / access <p>What are the risks for others?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - all of the risks of being target - retaliation by aggressor - have to engage with situation / manage aftermath
<p>What resources are available to you?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - organizational policies or systems to address microaggressions - supervisor or another person - language from this training - HR - your own clarity, values, mindfulness - ability to exit the situation - time (to prepare; gather your ideas, etc.) 	<p>What are the power dynamics and relationships in play? (consider self, aggressor, & target)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - relative positions in organizational hierarchy - additional social identities (positionality) - culture of retaliation vs culture of supportive problem-solving / restorative practice - likelihood of being taken seriously / believed - existing relationship dynamics - larger contexts (event/comm./country/world)

Considerations for responding (as the target):

<p>What are your goals?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - stop the person from continuing the behavior - educate the aggressor - protect your emotional boundaries / mental health / collegial work environment - preserve a relationship 	<p>What are the risks for you?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - physical safety - job safety / being fired or written up - loss of relationship(s) / social capital / access - perception as "difficult" / "not a team player" / "not a culture fit"
<p>What resources are available to you?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - organizational policies or systems to address microaggressions - supervisor or another person - language from this training - HR - your own clarity, values, mindfulness - ability to exit the situation - time (to prepare; gather your ideas, etc.) 	<p>What are the power dynamics and relationships in play?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - relative positions in organizational hierarchy - additional social identities (positionality) - culture of retaliation vs culture of supportive problem-solving / restorative practice - likelihood of being taken seriously / being believed - existing relationship dynamics - larger context (what's going on in the event / community / country / world)

There are many ways to respond to microaggressions as a bystander:

- **SAY STOP**
 - “Just stop. It’s not funny.”
 - “Come on. Cut it out.”
- **ASK FOR CLARIFICATION OR MORE INFORMATION**
 - “Could you say more about what you mean by that?”
 - “When you say ___ did you mean it to sound like ___?”
- **SHARE YOUR OWN PROCESS**
 - “I noticed that you _____ (comment/behavior). I used to do/say that too, but then I learned...”
- **SEPARATE INTENT FROM IMPACT**
 - “You probably didn’t realize this, but when you (comment/behavior), it was hurtful/offensive because _____.”
 - “I don’t think that landed how you meant it to.”
- **EXPRESS YOUR FEELINGS (naming an impact)**
 - “I feel uncomfortable with that comment.”
- **CORRECT/CHALLENGE THE STEREOTYPE**
 - “In my experience _____.”
 - “I think that’s a stereotype. I’ve learned that _____.”
 - “Another way to look at it _____.”
- **PROMOTE EMPATHY**
 - “I know you don’t like the stereotypes about _____ (their group), how do you think he feels when he hears those things about his group?”
- **PRETEND YOU DON’T UNDERSTAND**
 - “I don’t get it.....”
 - “Why is that funny?”
- **USE HUMOR**
 - “She plays like a girl?” You mean she plays like Serena Williams?”
- **TELL THEM THEY’RE TOO SMART OR TOO GOOD TO SAY THINGS LIKE THAT**
 - “Come on. You’re too smart to say something so ignorant/offensive.”
- **REMAND THEM OF THE RULES OR POLICIES, OR ORGANIZATIONAL VALUES**
 - “That behavior is against our code of conduct and could really get you in trouble.”
- **EXPRESS YOUR FEELINGS (naming an impact)**
 - “When you _____ (comment/behavior), I felt _____ (feeling).”
- **MIRROR**
 - “Where are YOU really from?”
 - “Can I touch YOUR hair?”

When you received the microaggression...

What considerations are important? What are your options for responding?

- **In the moment - many of the same options discussed for witnesses**
 - “That’s not funny”
 - “I’m not comfortable with that”
 - “When you say ___ I feel ___”
 - “Instead of that, I want you to ___”
 - Turn it around, e.g. “Where are *you* really from?”
- **Later - many of the same options, plus**
 - “I didn’t say something at the time because ___, but ___”
 - “After thinking about it ...” or “After discussing it with ...”
- **With support**
 - From a trusted peer
 - From a supervisor
 - From HR

When you find out you *did* a microaggression ...

C	Center - breathe
L	Listen
A	Acknowledge / Apologize
(I)	<i>Invite</i> more information
M	Moving Forward - Repair

<http://lukayo.com>, used with permission

Scenarios

The following scenarios describe common microaggressions that happen in many office workplaces. Each scenario is paired with some reflection questions to help you think through the situation, and some action questions to start considering how you would like to respond.

Note: These are similar to, but contextually different from some of the scenarios presented during the workshops, which are more tailored versions of the ones below. We wanted to offer them as additional opportunities for practice.

Scenario A

In a team with 4 men and 1 woman, the woman notices that the men all seem attentive to each other, but certain men seem to stop paying attention and/or start multitasking every time it's her turn to speak.

Reflection Questions:

- What (if any) stereotypes or widely held beliefs does the scenario remind you of? (Tip: Stereotypes about gender are especially relevant to this scenario, although they may not be the only relevant beliefs.)
- What "hidden message" might these men be sending, even unintentionally, with this behavior?
- What might be the impact on the one woman in the team? On other team members?
- If you were on this team, how would you *usually* respond (even if it's not the "right" way or not how you would like to respond)?

Action Questions:

- Ideally how would you want to respond, if you were:
 - The woman on the team, receiving the microaggression?
 - Another person on the team, witnessing the situation?
 - One of the people who did the microaggression, after someone pointed out the pattern and how it reinforces sexism?

Scenario B

At the beginning of the team meeting, people are looking around to count whether everyone has arrived. The manager says, "Well, so-and-so is out sick *again*, so I guess we're all here."

Reflection Questions:

- What (if any) stereotypes or widely held beliefs does the scenario remind you of? (Tip: Stereotypes about disability and chronic illness are especially relevant to this scenario, although they may not be the only relevant beliefs.)

- What “hidden message” might the manager be sending, even unintentionally, with this statement?
- What might be the impact on the other team members in the room? On the team member who’s out sick?
- If you were on this team, how would you *usually* respond (even if it’s not the “right” way or not how you would like to respond)?

Action Questions:

- Ideally how would you want to respond, if you were:
 - The person who was out sick, if you heard about this comment?
 - Another person on the team, witnessing the situation?
 - The manager who did the microaggression, after someone pointed out that it was ableist and possibly violating the person’s privacy?

Scenario C

A new team member gets hired to work remotely and is introduced to her supervisor via zoom. For the next few months, at each of their check-in meetings, he calls her by a name that is not hers (e.g. Sue instead of Su-Yeong), and she corrects him, kindly. Eventually she tries to get help from HR, but is told “that’s how he is” and not to make a big deal out of it.

Reflection Questions:

- What (if any) stereotypes or widely held beliefs does the scenario remind you of? (Tip: Stereotypes about race, culture, language and possibly gender are especially relevant to this scenario, although they may not be the only relevant beliefs.)
- What “hidden message” might the manager be sending, even unintentionally, with this behavior? What about the HR rep?
- What might be the impact on this new team member? On other team members?
- If you witnessed this situation, how would you *usually* respond (even if it’s not the “right” way or not how you would like to respond)?

Action Questions:

- Ideally how would you want to respond, if you were:
 - The person receiving the microaggression?
 - Another person on the team, witnessing or hearing about the situation?
 - The supervisor who did the microaggression, after someone pointed out to you that it was disrespectful and potentially sexist and/or racist?

Scenario D

A woman goes to her department manager and explains that she feels her supervisor doesn't take her seriously and doesn't respect her expertise. She gets the feeling it's because of her gender. The manager responds, "Well maybe you aren't coming across confident enough."

Reflection Questions:

- What (if any) stereotypes or widely held beliefs does the scenario remind you of? (Tip: Stereotypes about gender are especially relevant to this scenario, although they may not be the only relevant beliefs.)
- What "hidden message" might the manager be sending, even unintentionally, with this statement?
- What might be the impact on the woman?
- If you witnessed or heard about this situation, how would you *usually* respond (even if it's not the "right" way or not how you would like to respond)?

Action Questions:

- Ideally how would you want to respond, if you were:
 - The person receiving the microaggression?
 - Another person on the team, witnessing or hearing about the situation?
 - The manager, after someone pointed out that your response minimized the person's experience of sexism?

Scenario E

Some team members "jokingly" imitate another team member's accent.

Reflection Questions:

- What (if any) stereotypes or widely held beliefs does the scenario remind you of? (Tip: Stereotypes about language, culture, and possibly race are especially relevant to this scenario, although they may not be the only relevant beliefs.)
- What "hidden message" might the team members be sending, even unintentionally, with this behavior?
- What might be the impact on the team member they're imitating?
- If you witnessed this situation, how would you *usually* respond (even if it's not the "right" way or not how you would like to respond)?

Action Questions:

- Ideally how would you want to respond, if you were:
 - The person being imitated

- Another person on the team, witnessing or hearing about the situation
- One of the people making the joke, after someone pointed out that it was hurtful, stereotyping and potentially racist?

Scenario F

Bill is a new employee and is the only Latino on his team. During team meetings and check-ins, Bill's manager often asks if Bill is familiar with terminology, tools, and techniques that Bill has deep expertise in and that are very basic to Bill's job.

Reflection Questions:

- What (if any) stereotypes or widely held beliefs does the scenario remind you of? (Tip: Stereotypes about race, ethnicity and possibly socioeconomic class are especially relevant to this scenario, although they may not be the only relevant beliefs.)
- What "hidden message" might the manager be sending, even unintentionally, with this behavior?
- What might be on Bill? On the other team members?
- If you witnessed this situation, how would you *usually* respond (even if it's not the "right" way or not how you would like to respond)?

Action Questions:

- Ideally how would you want to respond, if you were:
 - Bill?
 - Another person on the team, witnessing or hearing about the situation?
 - Bill's manager, after someone has pointed out that these interactions are underestimating Bill's expertise and may come across as racist?

Common Types of Microaggressions

When you know what some common microaggressions are, it becomes easier to notice them in the moment. This list covers a range of verbal and non-verbal examples, but is not meant to be exhaustive.

If you are someone who is often on the receiving end of microaggressions, it may be upsetting to read the list. Please use your judgment to decide whether/when/how to explore this section.

We've categorized these microaggressions according to their structure and the kind of "hidden message" they contain, but many could fall into more than one category. The categories are:

- 1. Outdated, overly generalized or inaccurate language about groups**
- 2. Microinvalidations: Comments that minimize or deny the impact of inequity**
 - a. Subcategory: Victim-blaming**
- 3. "Compliments" that could be seen as positive on the surface but have a hidden message**
- 4. Comments and actions that devalue a group**
- 5. Relying on stereotypes**
 - a. Subcategory: Pathologization**
 - b. Subcategory: Judging different groups by different standards**
- 6. Inappropriately focusing on a single identity rather than a whole person**
- 7. Centering the needs and norms of the dominant group**
- 8. Erasure or neglect**
- 9. Tokenizing**
 - a. Subcategory: Expressions of entitlement to another person's energy, attention, or regard**

As you read the examples, consider these questions:

- Which of these have you witnessed or heard of?
- Which of these have you yourself thought, said, or done?
- What is the "hidden message" of each?
- What would you add to the list?

Outdated, Overly Generalized, or Inaccurate Language About a Group

- “Oriental,” “Eastern” vs “Western,” and other orientalist generalizations
- “Handicapped”; “Differently abled,” “Special,” and other euphemistic terms for disability; SPED (from “special ed”); “Retarded,” “idiot,” “moron,” and other outdated diagnostic terms
- “Struggles with,” “suffers from” when referring to a disability or illness (rather than “has” or “lives with”); similarly, saying someone “struggles with” gender or sexual orientation rather than saying that they are trans or LGBTQ
- Conflating sexual orientation with gender identity or gender expression, e.g. asking a trans person “why can’t you just be gay” or saying to a lesbian who dates butch women “why don’t you just date men”
- “Miss,” “girls” (referring to adult women), “ladies” and other antiquated and/or diminutive terminology for women
- Saying “Islamicist” or “Islamist” when you mean “Muslim” (Islam is a religion; Muslim means a person who practices Islam; Islamicism is a political ideology that seeks to justify itself through Islam, Islamist is an advocate for this political ideology)

Microinvalidations: Comments that minimize or deny the impact of inequity

- “I don’t see color,” or “I don’t see you as Black,” etc.
- “It’s not that bad,” “It’s not like that here,” “You could just try harder,” “He didn’t mean it that way”
- “Antisemitism isn’t a thing anymore”
- Statements that assume everyone present has a common experience of privilege, including many fundraising pitches, e.g. “I know all of us here can pitch in \$50,” or “I know all of us here know someone who could donate \$500 if we asked”
- Avoiding mention of a person’s identity (race, disability, etc.) even when it’s relevant and important
- Saying or implying that you understand all about one group’s experience of oppression, because you are part of a different marginalized group (for example, saying that you understand Black people’s experience of racism because you have experienced homophobia)
- Non-verbal example: Staring or judging someone using food stamps to buy soda (or any food you think of as unhealthy and/or exorbitant)

Subcategory: Victim Blaming

- “Everyone can get ahead if they work hard enough”
- “If he planned better, he wouldn’t be broke”
- “*You* were born this way, but *she* became disabled as a result of her own behavior”
- “If you tried harder to pass, you wouldn’t get harassed so much”; “If you didn’t flaunt your sexuality, you wouldn’t get harassed”

“Compliments” that could be seen as positive on the surface but have a hidden message

- Patronizing praise, e.g. “You speak English really well,” “You’re really brave for ... (doing some totally ordinary or necessary activity)” “I never would have known you were _____”
- “You look really good for a _____”; “You’re really good at that, for a _____”
- “You’re looking great, have you lost weight?” or “You’re looking great, are you doing something different?”
- “I bet you were really hot as a [gender you were seen as before transitioning].”

Comments and actions that devalue a group

- Calling someone’s outfit unprofessional merely because it is feminine, or merely because it reflects the person’s ethnic background or a subculture they belong to
- “Brown is an ugly color”
- Using “Christian” as a synonym for “good,” “moral,” “kind,” or “generous”
- Calling a woman or a person of color by their first name in a situation where that’s not the norm, e.g. if they are your doctor, professor, a famous author, etc.
- Being rude to service workers
- Telling or laughing at rape jokes
- Commenting on a woman’s body parts individually
- Non-Verbal Example: Displaying uncomfortable body language merely due to the presence of someone of a particular group

Relying on stereotypes

- Referring to a neighborhood as “bad” or “ghetto”
- Disparaging comments about the low intelligence of southerners, midwesterners, rural people, Christians or Americans generally (these are often coded insults against poor and working-class people), for example, by faking a southern accent to indicate stupidity or bias

- Assuming that someone does or doesn't have or want to have children, based on their gender, sexuality, disability, or other identities
- Assuming that two queer people who live together (or who hang out together) must be sleeping together
- Making blanket assumptions about religious groups, like assuming that a Muslim person must be Arab, or that an Arab person must be Muslim; assuming that a Jewish person must have grown up with wealth; assuming that a Catholic person must be homophobic
- Asking of a same-sex couple which one is the "wife" or which one does the housework
- Non-verbal example: Crossing the street to avoid passing close to someone; Checking your purse or pockets when passing close to someone

Subcategory: Pathologization

- Always focusing on treatment/cure rather than access/accommodation
- Assuming all people with disabilities dislike their bodies
- Assuming a person with a disability isn't partnered, can't or doesn't have romantic relationships, or can't or doesn't have children
- Uninvited medical advice (and other uninvited body advice, including advice about diet, exercise, attire, makeup, hair, etc.)
- Using "gender identity disorder" or "gender dysphoria" to mean "being trans"
- Non-verbal example: Speaking more slowly to a person of color than you would to a white person; Speaking more slowly to people perceived as poor than to those perceived as having class privilege; speaking more slowly to someone with an apparent disability

Subcategory: Judging different groups by different standards

- Taking skills for granted based on a stereotype, e.g., expecting Asian employees to be great at math and not appreciating or rewarding that skill the way you would for other employees
- Over-rewarding men for skills or tasks that all women are expected to do without reward, e.g., parenting or cooking, or saying "babysitting" to refer to a man caring for his own child
- Assuming that mothers will be less effective employees due to childcare responsibilities; not assuming the same of fathers
- Describing a woman as bitchy or pushy, when a man exhibiting the same behavior might be called assertive
- Commenting on a woman's appearance, rather than her professional or personal traits; Commenting on female politicians' outfits and male politicians' platforms

Inappropriately focusing on a single identity rather than a whole person

- “What are you?”
- Calling someone by someone else’s name, especially if they are among the few people of their race and/or ethnicity in your group/organization/circles
- Mistaking a person of color for a service worker when they are a boss, customer, or client
- Attributing someone’s feelings, behavior, or criticism of you to their “hormones” or “time of the month”
- Looking for a woman’s wedding ring to decide how to act toward her
- Non-verbal example: Staring at someone’s hair, skin, body, access tools, cultural attire, etc. rather than looking at their face

Centering the needs and norms of the dominant group

- Scheduling an important meeting on a major religious holiday
- Pressuring someone to participate in a “secret Santa” or other holiday celebration that is specific to a single religious or cultural group, but that all are expected to know about
- Ordering company logo apparel in a limited range of sizes, and/or in different versions for men and women
- “Where did you go to college?” (assuming everyone did); “What are you doing for vacation?” (assuming everyone can afford one)
- Referring to a variety of cost-saving behaviors as being only for very young adults, e.g., having housemates, sharing a car, keeping the heat low in the winter, etc.
- Talking about how parents “should” contribute to their adult children’s expenses, pay for college, or provide extracurricular activities for younger children
- Requiring someone to make eye contact even if their neurodivergence makes that especially difficult or unpleasant for them
- Seeing someone as less professional because they wear their hair in braids or locs

Erasure or neglect

- Saying “men and women” when you mean “everyone”
- Saying “Black and white” when you mean “everyone”
- Saying “Christians, Muslims, and Jews” when you mean “everyone”
- Calling someone the wrong pronoun or refusing to use nonbinary pronouns

- “I’ll always think of you as [an identity you’re not],” e.g., previous name or gender, the “closest” binary gender category, gay or lesbian when someone is bi or queer, etc.
- Ignoring a woman’s good idea, until a man says the same thing
- Avoiding eye contact due to someone’s identity
- Failing to include someone in the conversation due to their identity

Tokenizing

- Including someone in a meeting, committee, team, etc. because of their identity and not because of their skills (and then, often, having low expectations of them, or not respecting their contributions)
- Expecting someone to speak as an expert on, or on behalf of, all people of their group
- Relying on a friend or colleague of a certain identity to answer all your questions about that identity / group
- Always bringing up disability-related media or politics with your one disabled friend; Always bringing up trans-related media or politics with the one trans person you know; Always bringing up US foreign policy in Israel/Palestine with the few Jews and/or Muslims you know; etc.

Expressions of entitlement to another person’s energy, attention, or regard

- Touching someone’s hair, clothes, or body
- Asking overly personal questions, including questions about a person’s romantic life, body, medical situation, previous name, family relationships, political ideology, etc. While some of these questions are generally inappropriate for work, others might be appropriate depending on the context and relationship - but without a very trusting relationship, they can land as microaggressions because they are usually directed to some groups and not others, often based on stereotypes.
- Commenting on how someone is or isn’t your “type,” especially if the person wasn’t asking you out
- Asking someone if they’re sure they’re in the right restroom
- Giving your opinion about someone else’s body and/or gender expression