

Microaggressions Awareness Guide

What are microaggressions?

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Recognising microaggressions in the workplace

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Microaggressions in the Construction Industry

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What are microaggressions?



Subtle and Unintentional

Microaggressions are often subtle, unintentional comments or actions that communicate negative messages about a person's identity.



Impacting Identity

These comments can be related to a person's race, gender, age, disability, sexual orientation, or other characteristics.



Creating Exclusion

While they might seem harmless, microaggressions can contribute to feelings of marginalization, exclusion, and diminished self-worth.

Recognizing and addressing microaggressions is crucial for building a more inclusive and equitable workplace culture.

Recognising microaggressions in the workplace

Microaggressions can be subtle, but their impacts can be significant. In the workplace, it's important to be aware of common types of microaggressions in order to create a more inclusive environment. Some examples include:



Dismissive Language

Using phrases that minimize or invalidate someone's experience, such as "that's just a woman's perspective" or "you're being too sensitive," can make people feel unheard and disrespected.



Exclusionary Behaviour

Failing to include certain individuals in meetings, social events, or other workplace activities, often along demographic lines, can create a sense of isolation and exclusion.



Assumptions based on identity

Making assumptions about an individual's abilities, interests, or background based on their gender, race, age, or other identity markers can lead to unfair judgments and missed opportunities.



Stereotypical Compliments

Praising someone for being "articulate" or "well-spoken" in a way that implies low expectations based on their race or ethnicity can be demeaning and undermine their accomplishments.

Microaggressions in the Construction Industry



Dismissive Attitudes

Women in construction may face comments that imply their skills or knowledge are inferior to their male counterparts, such as "You're doing a great job... for a woman" or "Let the men handle the heavy lifting."



Gendered Assumptions

Assumptions about a person's abilities or interests based on their gender, such as assuming a female employee is better suited for administrative tasks rather than hands-on construction work.



Tokenism

Singling out a minority employee as a representative of their entire group, such as asking the only woman on a team to speak on behalf of all women in the industry.



Insensitive Humour

Jokes or comments that rely on stereotypes or make light of marginalized identities, such as ethnic or disability-related "jokes".

The Impact of Microaggressions on Employees



Heightened Stress and Anxiety

Repeated microaggressions can create a constant sense of unease and tension, leading to heightened stress and anxiety in the workplace.



Diminished Sense of Belonging

Microaggressions can make employees feel like outsiders, diminishing their sense of belonging and connection to their colleagues.



Undermining Confidence and Self-Worth

Constant questioning or devaluing of an employee's abilities can chip away at their confidence and self-worth, hindering their professional growth.

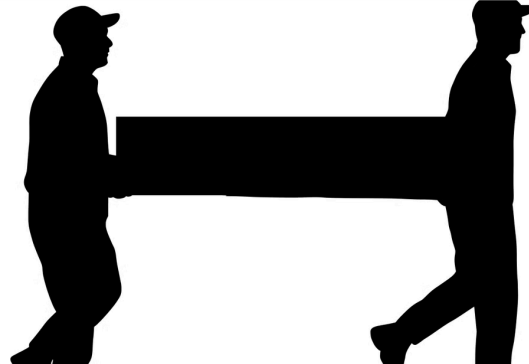
These negative impacts can affect an individual's productivity, job satisfaction, and overall well-being. For women and minorities working in male-dominated industries, the effects can be even more pronounced, leading to feelings of isolation, self-doubt, and a reluctance to participate fully in the workplace.

Subtle Forms of Gender Discrimination



Dismissing or Belittling Women's Contributions

Microaggressions can take the form of overlooking women's ideas in meetings, failing to credit them for their work, or making comments that imply their contributions are less valuable than those of their male colleagues. These subtle put-downs undermine women's confidence and reinforce the perception that construction is a male-dominated field.



Overly Paternalistic Behavior

Well-meaning but patronizing gestures, such as constantly offering to help women with physically demanding tasks or making assumptions about their capabilities, can be demeaning. These microaggressions suggest that women are weaker or less competent than their male peers, even if that is not the intent.



Inappropriate Comments About Appearance

Remarks about a woman's physical appearance, clothing, or personal life that are unrelated to her professional abilities can make her feel objectified and undervalued for her skills and expertise. This type of microaggression reinforces the idea that a woman's worth is tied to how she looks rather than what she can contribute.

Assumptions based on Race or Ethnicity



Microaggressions in Introductions

Assuming someone's name or background based on their race or ethnicity can be highly offensive. Thoughtlessly remarking "Oh, that's an interesting name!" or asking where someone is "really from" can imply they are not a natural part of the community. Instead, greet everyone with the same level of respect and interest.



Tokenizing Comments

Comments that highlight an individual's race or ethnicity as somehow unique or remarkable are problematic. Saying things like "You're so articulate!" or "I don't normally meet people like you here" singles the person out in an uncomfortable way, implying their race is remarkable. Aim to treat all colleagues as valued individuals, not novelties.



Ignoring Cultural Differences

Failing to acknowledge or accommodate cultural differences can also be a microaggression. Scheduling important meetings during religious holidays, serving only Western-style food at company events, or expecting employees to conform to a single cultural norm can marginalize those from diverse backgrounds. Be mindful and inclusive in your practices.

Microaggressions Related to Disability



Assumptions About Capabilities

Microaggressions towards people with disabilities can include making assumptions about their capabilities or limiting the opportunities available to them. Remarks like "You're so inspiring just for showing up" or excluding them from certain tasks can convey the message that they are less capable, when in reality they may simply require accommodations to perform their roles effectively.



Ignoring Assistance Needs

Overlooking or disregarding a person's need for assistive devices, service animals, or other accommodations is a common microaggression. Refusing to allow a guide dog in the workplace or failing to provide ergonomic furniture for an employee with a physical disability sends the message that their needs are not valued or important.



Dismissing Invisible Disabilities

Microaggressions can also target people with invisible disabilities, such as chronic illnesses or mental health conditions. Statements like "You don't look sick" or "I'm sure you're just having a bad day" can invalidate their experiences and make them feel their concerns are not taken seriously.

Heteronormative Comments and Assumptions

Avoid Assumptions

Heteronormative assumptions, such as presuming someone is straight or cisgender, can make LGBTQ+ employees feel alienated and disrespected.

Refrain from making assumptions about someone's sexual orientation or gender identity based on their appearance or name.

Inclusive Language

Use inclusive language that doesn't assume gender or relationship status. Instead of "husband/wife" or "boyfriend/girlfriend", say "partner" or "spouse". When introducing someone, ask for their preferred pronouns and use them consistently.

Fostering Allyship

Actively create a culture of inclusion by educating yourself and your colleagues about LGBTQ+ identities and experiences. Challenge heteronormative assumptions and microaggressions when you witness them, and be a visible ally for your LGBTQ+ coworkers.

Experiences of Migrant and Minority Employees

Language and Accent Bias

Migrant and minority employees may face microaggressions related to their language skills and accents. This can lead to feelings of exclusion and difficulty being understood.

Lack of Representation in Leadership

The lack of representation of diverse individuals in leadership positions can send the message that they are not valued or considered for advancement.

Stereotyping and Generalizations

Stereotyping and generalizations based on cultural background or ethnicity can create a hostile and discriminatory environment.

Assumptions About Cultural Norms

Assumptions about cultural norms can lead to misunderstandings and create an uncomfortable work environment for diverse employees.

Exclusion from Social Events

Being excluded from social events and gatherings can reinforce feelings of isolation and disconnect.

Microaggressions Based on Appearance

Microaggressions related to physical appearance, such as clothing or hairstyles, can lead to feelings of self-doubt and insecurity.

Addressing Microaggressions Professionally

Address it in the moment.

When you experience or witness a microaggression, politely and firmly address it right away. This helps stop the behaviour and sets the expectation that such comments are unacceptable.

Provide constructive feedback.

Explain why the comment or behaviour was hurtful and educate the person on why it constitutes a microaggression. Suggest more inclusive language or actions they could use in the future.

Document repeated incidents.

If the microaggressions continue despite your feedback, document each occurrence. This creates a paper trail that can be escalated to HR or management if needed.

Seek support from allies.

Enlist the help of colleagues, managers or HR representatives who can advocate for you and help address the microaggressive behaviour.

Foster an inclusive culture.

Work with your employer to provide microaggression awareness training and cultivate a workplace culture of mutual respect and understanding.

Responding in the Moment

1 — Pause and Reflect

When you experience or witness a microaggression, it's important to pause and take a moment to reflect before responding. This allows you to gather your thoughts and consider the most constructive way to address the situation.

2 — Address Respectfully

Approach the person who made the microaggressive comment in a calm and respectful manner. Avoid accusatory language and instead focus on how the comment made you or others feel. Use "I" statements to convey your perspective.

3 — Educate and Inform

Explain why the comment was hurtful or problematic, and provide information to help the person understand the impact of their words. This is an opportunity to raise awareness and help create a more inclusive workplace culture.



Providing Feedback to Colleagues



Speak Privately

When providing feedback to a colleague, it's important to do so in a private setting. This creates a safe and comfortable environment for an open discussion, away from potential distractions or judgment from others.



Be Constructive

Frame your feedback in a positive, constructive manner. Focus on specific behaviours or actions, and suggest ways the individual can improve or develop their skills. Avoid accusations or harsh criticism, which can put the person on the defensive.



Listen Actively

Make sure to listen attentively to your colleague's perspective and any concerns they may raise. This shows you value their input and creates an open dialogue. Be prepared to have a two-way discussion, not just deliver a one-sided message.

Escalating Repeated Incidents

If microaggressions continue to occur despite your initial efforts to address them, it may be necessary to escalate the situation through formal channels. This should be done in a professional and constructive manner, with the goal of finding a resolution that promotes a more inclusive work environment.

Speak to your manager

- 1 Document the incidents and request a meeting to discuss the ongoing issues and potential solutions.

File a formal complaint

- 2 If speaking to your manager does not resolve the problem, consider filing a formal complaint through your company's HR or diversity and inclusion channels.

Seek external support

- 3 In some cases, it may be necessary to seek the assistance of external organizations that specialize in workplace discrimination and harassment issues.

Regardless of the approach, it's important to remain professional, focused on solutions, and committed to creating a more inclusive workplace culture. By escalating repeated incidents through the appropriate channels, you can help ensure that microaggressions are taken seriously and that effective measures are put in place to prevent their recurrence.

Building an Inclusive Workplace Culture



Fostering an Inclusive Environment

Creating an inclusive workplace culture is essential for empowering all employees to thrive and reach their full potential. This requires a proactive, multi-faceted approach that goes beyond simply addressing microaggressions. It involves fostering an environment where diversity is celebrated, open communication is encouraged, and everyone feels respected, valued and heard.



Leader-Driven Change

Leaders must set the tone by modelling inclusive behaviours, challenging biases, and holding the organization accountable. This could include implementing unconscious bias training, reviewing hiring and promotion practices, and ensuring diverse representation at all levels. Actively soliciting feedback from underrepresented groups and acting on their insights will help identify and dismantle systemic barriers.



Building Empathy and Connection

Additionally, providing opportunities for cross-cultural exchange, mentorship, and allyship can help build empathy and strengthen interpersonal connections. Celebrating employee differences and creating space for people to share their unique perspectives and experiences can cultivate a sense of belonging that benefits the entire organization.

Resources for further learning

Developing awareness and understanding of microaggressions is an ongoing process. To continue your journey of learning and creating a more inclusive workplace, we recommend the following resources:

Books: "Microaggressions in Everyday Life" by Derald Wing Sue, "What If I Say the Wrong Thing?" by Verna Myers, "Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?" by Beverly Daniel Tatum.

Online courses: Diversity and inclusion trainings offered by companies like [EPIC](#), Coursera, LinkedIn Learning, and SHRM can provide valuable insights and strategies for addressing microaggressions.

Podcasts: "Code Switch" by NPR, "Intersectionality Matters!" by Kimberlé Crenshaw, and "The Bias Breakout" discuss topics related to bias, discrimination, and inclusive practices.

Toolkits and guides: Refer to [resources](#) from EPIC.

Support: EPIC provides a tailored [membership support program](#) designed specifically for women in construction.