

Understanding racial microaggressions

Racial microaggressions are small comments or actions that reflect underlying biases about race.

They reinforce stereotypes and create an atmosphere of exclusion.

Not only will it upset the person receiving the comment, it can further harm mental health and in workplaces, significantly damage culture and psychological safety within the working environment.

Common racial microaggressions

Assumption of inferiority

Assuming someone is less competent or intelligent based on their race.

E.g. “You’re so articulate for someone from your background” or “Are you sure you understand?”

Exoticisation

Treating someone as exotic or different based solely on their racial or ethnic background.

E.g. “Where are you really from?” or “Your hair is so cool, can I touch it?”

Colourblindness

Dismissing or minimising the significance of race and the experiences of racism.

E.g. “I don’t see colour, I just see people” or “All lives matter!”

Tokenism

Expecting someone to represent their entire race or be the spokesperson for all people from their background.

E.g. “What do Black people think about this?” or “Can you speak on behalf of your community?”

UNDERSTANDING RACIAL MICROAGGRESSIONS

Assuming foreignness

Assuming that someone is not from your country.

E.g. “Your English is so good!” or “Where are you really from?”

Name Shortening

Shortening or altering someone’s name because it’s considered too long or difficult to pronounce.

E.g. “Your name is too hard to say, I’ll just call you ‘Sam’ instead”

Stereotyping

Making broad generalisations about a person based on their race or ethnicity.

E.g. “You must be good at maths because you’re Asian” or “You don’t sound Black”

Invalidating experience or emotions

Dismissing someone’s lived experiences or feelings when they share their encounters with racism.

E.g. “Why do you have to make everything about race?” or “Are you sure it was about race? Maybe you’re just being too sensitive.”

Minimising voices

Interrupting or dismissing someone’s contributions, reinforcing the idea that their voice is less valuable.

E.g. Interrupting or speaking over someone in a meeting.



Microaggressions are not okay and should not be tolerated in or out of the workplace. It’s essential to recognise, address and call them out to foster a more inclusive and respectful environment for everyone.