

# 6 Micro Aggressions You Might Not Know

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# MICRO AGGRESSION

We can all agree that discrimination has no place at work, but not all forms of prejudice are so easy to identify. Microaggressions, which are indirect, covert, and very often unintentional expressions of racism, sexism, ageism, or homophobia, are the most common forms of discrimination found in every day life, including in the workplace.

Because they are not overt expressions of prejudice, they are easily ignored or explained away as well-intentioned. However, they can still detract from your company's culture and could be detrimental to your progress in improving that culture.

You can start fighting microaggressions by removing these phrases from your lexicon and communicate to your employees why they should be avoided and what to say instead.



1

**“All Lives Matter!”**

Saying Black Lives Matter does not imply that other lives don't matter. It's actually quite the opposite, in that it recognizes that everyone's life has value while also acknowledging that the Black and POC community are often treated unfairly.

To use an analogy, if there are two houses on fire, would you turn the fire hose on the house that isn't currently burning and say “All houses matter”? Acknowledging a societal problem does not negate the inherent value of those not currently experiencing the same issue.

2

**“Really? You don't seem \_\_\_\_.”**

Where the blank can represent anything from race, to ability, to sexual orientation, this phrase can make someone feel like they need to adhere to a stereotype or behave in a certain way (often caricatured in media) in order to feel valid. When it comes to race, it can make a person feel they aren't behaving within a narrowly accepted way for someone of their race to act.

For LGBTQA+, it can make someone feel like passing for straight is the “norm” and should be expected, and it's only those that are more open about their sexuality that are outside of that norm. Everyone is different, and applying preconceived notions of how a group should appear, dress, act, etc. can make others feel uncomfortable.

3

**“Smile!”**

You may have heard of “RBF” (resting b— face), which is problematic on its own, and telling a person to smile is often uttered as a way to make people aware and rectify it. This might seem innocuous enough, but to women especially, this phrase can cause significant anxiety and discomfort.

Telling someone to smile is ultimately asking someone to change their default behavior or appearance to be more aesthetically pleasing, not taking their comfort into account. In male-dominated industries, it can also be seen as coming from a place of power, causing women to feel unwelcome and not having ownership of their own bodies, lest they seem too “aggressive”.

4

**“I don't see color.”**

No one likes to think they're racist, but unfortunately, unconscious bias does happen, and racism still continues to be a problem in today's world. To say this phrase is showing a conscious choice to not acknowledge issues that are unfortunately very real to BIPOC.



# 5

## **“Guys and girls.”**

The word “girl” refers specifically to a female child, so to call an adult woman a girl, especially in the workplace can cause female employees to feel infantilized and taken less seriously than their male colleagues. In most settings, men are called “guys” or “fellas” but rarely ever are they called “boys”.

Other more inclusive alternatives to address your team are “everyone”, “folks”, or even the much maligned “y’all”.



# 6

## **“I don’t care if you’re black, brown, white, purple, or blue.”**

Invoking the idea of fantastical, non-existent purple people not only dilutes the issues impacting actual people of color face, it’s also close to ignoring the existence of color, reiterating the points made for “I don’t see color.”



# FOCUS ON BUILDING BRIDGES

It can seem at first like there are a lot of limitations despite good intentions, and there are times people will unknowingly make mistakes.

The important thing is to grow, learn, and above all, listen to the feelings of those impacted by such language.

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