

How to recognise Gender related Microaggressions



We've collected some real life examples of verbal Gender related Microaggressions, with an explanation of why these comments or questions can be offensive, insulting or insensitive.

"You should be more ladylike - smile more and not raise your voice"

These gendered expectations put extra demands on women to behave in a certain way which under-cuts a woman's experience, skills and abilities.

"When you're introduced to a male who, after briefly acknowledging you, they carry on talking to the male who did the initial introduction"

signaling that the woman is not worth speaking to or engaging with.

"Why don't you want children? You'll regret it later!"

assuming all women want children and being judged for not wanting to have children and prioritising other things such as your career.

"Are you going to have children or likely to have children?"

making an assumption of traditional gender roles and a women's primary role is to have children. If this is asked in an interview it could be used to discriminate against the candidate being offered the job. It can also be an insensitive question to ask if people are struggling to get pregnant.

"She's so bossy and too confident - she's not very nice"

putting women down by signaling that a woman who is taking the lead or confident in her role that is problematic.

"If you're reading a book 'Oh are you reading 50 Shades of Grey?'"

an attempt to try to embarrass or belittle you in front of other colleagues.

"Can I speak to the male pharmacist or the man over there"

assuming the male colleague is the pharmacist and you're a junior member of staff.

"How does your husband cope with you earning more than him?"

assuming traditional gender roles as a man should be the bread winner and a woman earning more than their partner is a negative thing as a woman should be cared for.

"If you have health issues that mean you're not able to cover wards, then you're not suitable for the role"

responding to a request for flexible working patterns particularly for women's health conditions such as painful periods, endometriosis and menopause. Such a response and a refusal to adopt appropriate working arrangements will result in barriers to working in a supportive environment.

"If you're working then who is cooking for your husband and children?"

assuming traditional gender roles, that women have to take on a caring role for their families. Also, this is sometimes said without ascertaining if the woman is in fact married or has children as there is an assumption that all women of a certain age are married and have children.

"Your skirt is too short/dress is body hugging" or "Will you be wearing a headscarf?"

policing what women are wearing and commenting on what they look like and their clothing choices is inappropriate.

"In case you need more understanding it would be better if you ask your male colleague to help you" (even though you have been working on the project for longer)

Assuming a woman needs a man to explain things to her. An example of "mansplaining".

"You need to demonstrate your experience and skills, you don't have the same experience as your male counterpart. Get more involved in a project like them (even though they may have been qualified less time than you)"

being compared to your male colleagues and having to prove yourself more than them. Signaling that you must validate and demonstrate your capability and knowledge more than your male counterpart.

"She talks a lot"

said in a negative way; signaling a woman who talks a lot is being distracting and unproductive.

"As the woman, you can take on a more pastoral role in the workplace"

women tend to be given more pastoral roles in the workplace, presumably under the impression that they are more caring. These are typically roles that do not facilitate career progression.

"Whoever sits in that chair always get pregnant"

crass comment, that assumes that all women want to have children and undermines a women's control of her reproductive system.

"As the woman you can take notes for the meeting"

devaluing the role of a woman in the meeting by giving her an administrative task.

"Haven't you just had a child? How come you have returned to work?"

signaling women can't be good mothers and be successful at work at the same time.

"Please be sure you don't get pregnant before that inspection or end of the project"

trying to control a woman's body and asking her to prioritise work first.

"You shouldn't be so hard on yourself for not achieving your objectives and key performance indicators (KPIs) as a female manager"

signaling that women have to work harder to compete with their male peers and it's ok if they don't perform as well.

"As a male I struggle with having a female line manager"

signaling they're unable to take a female line manager seriously, thinking they're incompetent and less knowledgeable than male line managers.

"If you identify as a woman or a non-binary person, why don't you act/dress/sound more like a man/woman/non-binary person?"

Enforces strict gender stereotypes onto people and conflates gender expression with their gender identity.

"You're just overreacting"

brushing off a woman's experience with a view as it not being valid as women are more emotional.

"Why aren't you married? Are you a lesbian?"

an assumption that as a woman of a particular age you need to be in a heterosexual relationship. This is also a very heteronormative view of relationships.

"If you're not able to be bare below the elbows you won't be able to work in a hospital"

this is very important for Muslim women and creates a barrier to working in particular sectors. There are now disposable forearm sleeves available which should be used.

"She's really stand-offish or so rude"

if a woman is focused on their role and establishes and maintain boundaries with her work colleagues it's considered a negative personality trait.

"This activity would be more suitable for a man not a woman"

making an assumption on a woman's capability and believing she won't be able to undertake the role.

"You need to be quiet" and physically having a hand being put up to indicate to be quiet.

signaling as a woman your contributions are not validate and you can be openly shut down in a humiliating way.

"She must be on her period or having a hot flush!" or "Feeling hormonal, are we??"

making light of a woman disagreeing or raising an issue with something and it being down to her being moody and difficult because she is menstruating or going through the menopause. Not taking women's health seriously.

"You're too passionate and caring because you're too emotional"

as a woman if you care about your role then you're too emotional rather than seeing that passion as a positive trait and being dedicated to do a good job.

"The uniform doesn't look how it should on you - can you please lose some weight?"

making inappropriate comments on a person's figure and assuming they need to conform to a particular shape and size rather than giving them a uniform that fits them.

"You're getting on a bit - why aren't you married yet?"

making assumptions about a woman's marital status due to her age and assuming they should be married.

"You're power hungry"

if you indicate your desire to go for a senior role as a woman it's seen as a negative thing, but if you're a man it would be considered driven.