

# MICRO-MESSAGING IN THE WORKPLACE: DEFINITIONS + STRATEGIES



*Have you ever walked away from a conversation or staff meeting feeling somewhat uncomfortable, perhaps marginalized? You couldn't put your finger on it. In fact, no one said anything offensive to you or criticized you in any way. But somehow, you feel unmistakably devalued. There seemed to be a "message in there somewhere." In this resource guide, we put a name on this feeling and discuss an inclusive path forward.*

There are many ways these messages and subtle acts of exclusion may manifest:

## MICRO MESSAGES

Small, subtle, and often unintentional messages we send and receive verbally and non-verbally. We subconsciously communicate values and expectations that can be supportive (micro-affirmations) or negative (micro-inequities).

## MICRO BEHAVIORS

Small, semiconscious messages we send and receive when we interact with others. They can be positive or negative and are conveyed through facial expressions, tones of voice, hand gestures, choice of words, and eye contact.

## MICRO AGGRESSIONS

Brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative prejudicial slights and insults toward any group, particularly culturally marginalized groups.

## MICRO INEQUITIES

Ways in which individuals are either singled out, overlooked, ignored, or otherwise discounted based on an unchangeable characteristic such as race or gender.

## MICRO AFFIRMATIONS

Subtle or apparently small acknowledgements of a person's value and accomplishments. They may take the shape of public recognition of the person, referring positively to the work of a person, or commending someone on the spot.

## MICRO INCLUSIONS

A small, symbolic action to include someone who has been excluded or othered

## FACTS

Across various identities, backgrounds, and experiences, micro-aggressions and microinequities manifest in ways that disproportionately affect underrepresented communities. These micro-behaviors can often result in a lower sense of belonging and feelings of exclusion. But more than just a "feeling", these experiences have been empirically evaluated and validated. According to [research](#), Men, on average, interrupt Women **2.1 times** when in conversation while Men only interrupt other Men **1.8 times**. In addition, nearly [60% of Asian, Black, Latinx, and multiracial professionals report](#) they feel they must be on guard to protect against racial and gender bias, and over [83% of LGBT workers](#) report they cover aspects of their identity at work. According to a [2013 Carnegie Mellon study](#), Muslim candidates received a **13% lower callback rate** as compared to their Christian counterparts and a 2010 report found that [over a quarter \(26%\) of employed people with disabilities have experienced discomfort](#) or a negative reaction from a supervisor, co-worker or customer in their current job.



2.1X

Men will interrupt women in a conversation

60%

of URMs feel on guard against bias

83%

LGB workers report they cover aspects of their identity

13%

Muslim candidates receive a lower callback rate when compared to Christian

26%

Of employees with disabilities have experienced discomfort at work

## Are these messages really micro?

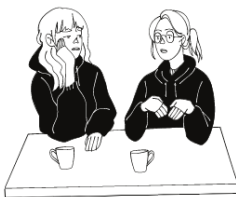
Some view the term microaggression to be a microaggression in and of itself. Why? Because using the terminology “micro” implies that the effects or impacts of these actions are small. For many, having their name being made fun of, or having someone walk on the other side of the street when a person sees them approaching is not small. But even more than this, micro-behaviors have macro-effects – resulting in the disproportionate incarceration rates of minorities, gender discrimination in the workplace, xenophobia, and religious bias, to name a few. When it comes to the workplace, micro-behaviors result in a missed opportunity for mutually beneficial interaction, and can have negative effects. Indeed, people who frequently receive microaggressions [experience ongoing psychological distress](#), and the [effort to resolve the resulting emotions](#) can lead to [negative results](#) for the recipient groups. Some advocates suggest using the terminology “subtle acts of exclusion” instead.

### Strategies

See below for a few ways you can check to ensure you’re not sending negative micro-messages in The workplace:

#### NOTICE YOUR REACTIONS

- When am I listening?
- When am I shutting people out?
- Who am I including and excluding?
- Who am I encouraging and praising?
- Whose contributions am I taking for granted?
- Who do I consistently overlook?



#### BE AWARE

- Multitasking when interacting with others
- Ignoring, dismissing, interrupting, or talking over others
- Critiquing with nonverbal behavior (rolling eyes, sighing, shaking your head)
- Becoming defensive when accused of a microinequity; ask questions. Try to look through the eyes of the receiver and ask:
  - What did I observe?
  - Was that the first time you noticed this?
  - How do I act differently toward you?
  - Why haven’t you told me about this before?

#### CHECK YOUR INFORMATION FILTERS

- We tend to see what we believe and expect to see. We unconsciously filter from a set of facts those that fit our expectations and beliefs. We see certain elements and let others pass through.
- Check stereotypical assumptions about people who are different
- Connect on a personal level



#### PRACTICE MICROINCLUSIONS

- Take time to listen with full attention and respect
- Seek input from others and acknowledge their contribution
- Share the floor with inclusive meeting procedures
- Credit ideas



## Resources

Micro-behavior becomes micro-inequities when it evolves into collective patterns of subtle, semi-conscious devaluing messages directed at you and not others. When unaddressed, persistent micro-inequities impacts an employee's ability to meaningfully contribute. Here are a few resources that provide more in-depth information on micro-inequities in the workplace.

### BOOK



[Micro Messaging: Why Great Leadership is Beyond Words](#)

### PODCAST



[Managing Micro-Inequities for a Better Workplace](#)

### ARTICLE



[The SAGE Encyclopedia of Psychology and Gender – Gender Micro- inequities](#)