

What is a microaggression?

Microaggressions are **everyday comments, behaviors, or environmental signals** that convey negative or limiting messages about a person based on their group identity. They may be intentional or unintentional – but the impact matters more than the intent.

The term was introduced in the 1970s by Harvard psychiatrist Dr. Chester Pierce to describe subtle forms of racial bias. It has since been expanded to include gender, sexual orientation, disability, and other identities, and is now widely recognized in workplace and educational research.

Microaggressions are often:

- Brief and commonplace
- Subtle or ambiguous
- Framed as **jokes**, misunderstandings, or “**just the way things are**”
- Easy for bystanders to overlook

Unlike overt discrimination, they rarely involve explicit hostility. Instead, they accumulate over time. **And “micro” does not mean minor.**

Research shows that repeated exposure is linked to increased stress, reduced sense of belonging, lower job satisfaction, and workplace disengagement.

What makes a microaggression gendered?

A microaggression becomes gendered when it reinforces stereotypes, norms, or power hierarchies based on gender.

Gendered microaggressions operate within broader systems where certain genders have historically held more authority, credibility, and access to opportunity. In male-dominated fields, these patterns can be especially visible.

They often:

- Question **women’s competence** or technical expertise
- Reinforce traditional **gender roles** (e.g., caregiving or emotional labor)
- **Sexualize** or trivialize women’s presence
- **Exclude women** from informal networks and mentorship
- **Penalize caregiving** or parenthood differently

They are “gendered” not simply because gender is mentioned, but because **they maintain unequal norms and access to power**.

Repeated over time, these behaviors shape who is heard, who advances, and who feels they belong.