

Microaggressions Toolkit

**National Ambulance
BME Forum**

Working to improve the experience of
Black and Minority Ethnic Staff and
communities

Pam Brown
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Welcome!

Pam Brown BA (Hons) MA and disruptive thinker here!

My journey in the diversity & inclusion space has led me to believe that it is only when we think the unthinkable; challenge the impossible and voice the unspeakable that we can begin to effect a little change.

At a recent Association of Ambulance Chief Executives (AACE) conference I challenged the audience to show their commitment to Diversity and Inclusion with supporting a Project D (Diversity) across the sector. They did and Project D was born.

Our collective challenge will now be to ensure it is not a repetition of old strategies but an innovative and disruptive vision for the future.

I hope this resource and the accompanying guidance notes will help you take this learning back into your organisations.



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Pam Brown (above) is a committee member of the National Ambulance BME Forum.



Introduction

Microaggressions are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioural and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group.

The term was initially coined by Professor Chester M. Pierce in 1970 to describe the regular insults and dismissals which he witnessed from non-black Americans towards African-Americans.

In 2007, Microaggressions were described by a group of social scientists as "the new face of racism". They said that the nature of racism has shifted over time from overt expressions of racial hatred and hate crime, toward expressions of aversive racism such as microaggressions, that are more subtle, ambiguous, and often unintentional. As a result many people feel that racism is often no longer an issue.



The kinks in the hosepipe stop the water from flowing. Like the water, the kinks prevent us from growing and truly thriving. Every kink represents an aggression whether that be systemic or unintentional which needs dismantling.



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A very public challenge



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On a British Airways flight from Johannesburg, a middle-aged, well-off white South African lady has found herself sitting next to a black man. She called the cabin crew attendant over to complain about her seating.

“What seems to be the problem Madam?” asked the attendant.

“Can’t you see?” she said ” You’ve sat me next to a kaffir. I can’t possibly sit next to this disgusting human. Find me another seat!”

“Please calm down Madam.” the stewardess replied. “The flight is very full today, but I’ll tell you what I’ll do-I’ll go and check to see if we have any seats available in club or first class.”

The woman cocks a snooty look at the outraged black man beside her (not to mention many of the surrounding passengers).

A few minutes later the stewardess returns with the good news, which she delivers to the lady, who cannot help but look at the people around her with a smug and self satisfied grin.





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“Madam, unfortunately, as I suspected, economy is full. I’ve spoken to the cabin services director, and club is also full. However, we do have one seat in first class.”

Before the lady has a chance to answer, the stewardess continues ... “It is most extraordinary to make this kind of upgrade, however, and I have had to get special permission from the Captain. But, given the circumstances, the Captain felt that it was outrageous that someone be forced to sit next to such an obnoxious person.”

With which, she turned to the black man sitting next to the woman, and said: “So if you’d like to get your things, Sir, I have your seat ready for you...”

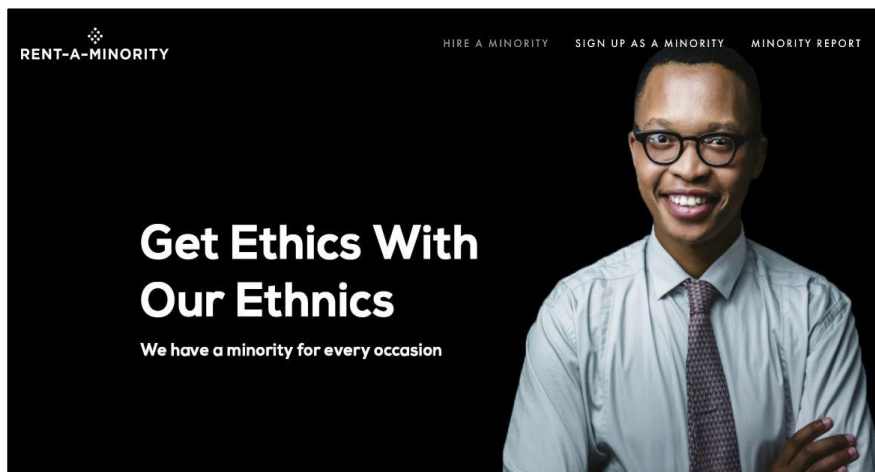
*You may forget
what people have
said or done, but
you never forget
how someone has
made you feel.*



True or False....



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We employed a black person last year



White pupils at Bath school 'tied up and whipped black student for mock slave auction'





Barak Obama



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- * When Senator John McCain was running in a presidential campaign against Obama, a White female said to him
- * “I don’t trust Obama. He’s an Arab.”
- * McCain said “ No ma’am. He is a decent family man, a citizen that I just happen to have disagreements with. He’s not”

Was he defending Obama?

Can’t Middle Eastern men be good and decent family men too?

Would a better response have been

“ No ma’am, he’s not an Arab. But would it be wrong if he were?”





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Microaggressions bingo!

How many have you experienced / used / heard?

- * 'I treat everyone the same, I don't see colour'

I am trying not to look at your colour or consider it is part of you otherwise I would have to acknowledge your history

- * 'What does your community think about knife crime'

You can speak for everyone in your racial group and are all the same

- * 'Where do you come from?'
Where do you come from?'

- * 'I've got some black friends'
I feel uncomfortable being with you

- * 'I'm married to an Asian woman'
I'm okay I've got race credentials

- * 'You could pass for a white person'
White will always be superior

- * 'I believe everyone should get the job on merit.'

BME people get extra help because of their colour

- * 'You don't sound black?'
You don't 'fit' my stereotype

- * 'Surely all lives matter not just black lives'
I am invalidating your fight/experience



Microaggressions – Staff Experience



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- * During our first conference in 2018, we asked delegates to share the experiences of micro aggressions.
- * “I was encouraged in PDR’s to “smile more,” and “be more friendly.””
- * Sub text: *BME people are frightening to us white people*
- * ‘I was asked to explain why Asian people eat with their fingers’
- * Sub text: *You are not civilised*
- * ‘Do you wear your headscarf in bed? Or in the shower?’
- * Sub text: *I really am Islamophobic*
- * ‘We had a senior BME manager a while ago’
- * Sub text: *I am trying not to show you my racism / my tokenistic approach to tackling racism*
- * ‘I bet your family were disappointed you weren’t a doctor and became a paramedic?’
- * Sub text: Stereotyping of some racial groups
- * ‘People clutch their bag more closely when I pass them’
- * Sub text: *You are a criminal*
- * ‘Assuming I am the Technician not the Paramedic’
- * Sub text: *BME people are not as intelligent as white people*



#56BlackMen



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It is important to challenge and understand microaggressions as much as the macroaggressions (the more overt forms of discriminatory behaviour). They are not examples of unconscious bias which excuses people for their behaviour but a reflection of what people still think and believe in White mainstream society.

The #56BlackMen campaign is a good example of this. Taking the cliched image of a black man wearing a hoody, the campaign aims to challenge the media demonisation that often sees blackness through a singular lens, and the project use this photo series to tell the real story of the black male experience.

It's a simple concept but asks you;

- How does the hoody change the way in which you see someone?
- How successfully have the garment been used to legitimise demonisation?
- Who are the men inside them?



56 BLACK MEN
I AM NOT MY STEREOTYPE

#56BLACKMEN
FOUNDER | CEPHAS WILLIAMS



Language matters



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However, microaggressions are not just limited to Race

By the early 21st century, use of the term was applied to the casual degradation of any socially marginalised group, including women, LGBT people, those with disabilities, religious minorities, and so on.

The [Microaggression Project](#) was launched in 2010 to provide a platform for those who have experienced these negative behaviours. At last count, there have been over 15,000 online submissions, each chronicling a different microaggression.

Two gay men hold hands in public and are told not to flaunt their sexuality.

(Hidden message: Same-sex displays of affection are abnormal and offensive. Keep it private and to yourselves)

An assertive female manager is labelled as a "bitch," while her male counterpart is described as "a forceful leader"

(Hidden message: Women should be passive and allow men to be the decision makers.)

A man with visual impairment reports that people often raise their voices when speaking to him.

(Hidden message: A person with a disability is defined as lesser in all aspects of physical and mental functioning).

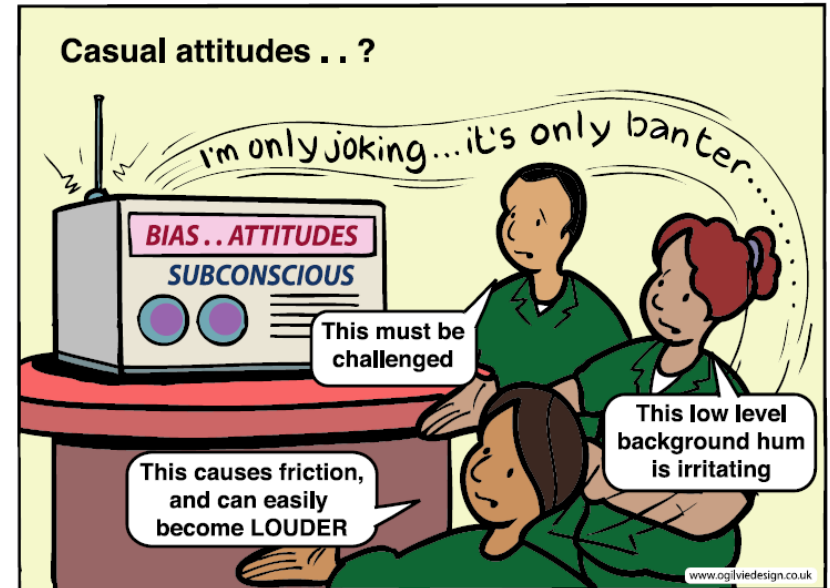


The human impact



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- * The first time you experience a microaggression, you may not even pick up on it. So often, they are framed as a compliment but yet you still feel vaguely insulted. However, once the realisation seeps in it can be deeply hurtful, and like all subtle behaviours, these are compounded over time and with repetition.
- * What kind of toll does this have on our identity or psyche as BME people? For some, it can mean ‘toning down’ cultural preferences or affect our ability to be our authentic selves at work, in an effort to conform to organisational majority or norms which make others feel more “comfortable” with us.



- * Subtle discrimination compounds over time and can lead to stress and anxiety at best or drug or alcohol addictions at worst.



Take action

To fight microaggressions in daily life, bystanders in non-marginalised groups are encouraged to acknowledge them, call them out and offer support.

- * **If you witness a microaggression,** acknowledge what has happened. Asking the recipient if they are ok can go a long way towards their wellbeing and reduce the sense of isolation they may be feeling in that moment.
- * **If you are on the receiving end,** try a subtle comeback that educates the individual at the same time. For example, “You speak really good English” can be responded to with “I was born here.”

**Show
Racism
the Red
Card**

- * **If you are called out on** microaggressive behavior or comment, don't get emotional or defensive. Listen to what they have to say with patience. Ask what you said or did so that you can better understand what the person is saying.



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