


Interrupting Common LGBTQ+ Microaggressions

When someone makes a comment or takes an action that causes exclusion toward another person or group of people, there's a deeper message communicated.

Review the instances of the LGBTQ+ microaggressions presented in this lesson and featured below. Then consider the four-step approach available to help disrupt.

A Four-Step Approach

Intervention	Description
Assess your safety.	Physical and emotional safety ≠ Comfort.
Make the invisible visible.	Raise consciousness of commenter.
Educate the person commenting.	Intent ≠ Impact.
Have patience and expect progress.	Redirect and educate about harm.



Then fill out the questions that follow each scenario and practice the new skills you are gaining to be prepared to disrupt these and other subtle acts of exclusion.

Directions: As you consider each scenario, describe how you would interrupt it by answering the questions below the scenario.

1. Pronouns. During a Zoom meeting, your nonbinary colleague shares their name and **pronouns**, “they/them.” They are met by another colleague’s unmuted response, “You realize your **pronouns are grammatically incorrect.**” How would you interrupt this microaggression?

- *Are you safe from physical or emotional harm?* Remember safety from harm is different from being *uncomfortable*. Provided you are safe, embrace the tension of discomfort and move forward with this approach.



- *How could you make the invisible visible?* Oftentimes, the commenter is unaware that they have caused harm. You will have to make the invisible visible. You could ask a question like, “Did you know using our correct pronouns is a sign of basic dignity and respect.” Then say, “Thank you for sharing your pronouns” (and share your pronouns as an act of solidarity).
- *Can you provide some education as to why the comment was harmful?* You could then offer, “Did you know that major grammar authorities recognize the singular ‘they’ as a pronoun? These authorities include the APA’s *Publication Manual* and Merriam-Webster.com to name a few.”
- *How can you have patience while expecting progress?* If the conversation doesn’t go as smoothly as you’d like, remember your only goal is to steer the conversation away from the problematic remark or action. By doing so, you’ll be modeling good behavior to others present.

2. Derogatory Language. You and a LGBTQ+ colleague **overhear a coworker using the homophobic “f-slur”** in describing one of her friends from outside of work. How would you interrupt this microaggression?

- *Are you safe from physical or emotional harm?* Remember safety from harm is different from being uncomfortable. Provided you are safe, embrace the tension of discomfort and move forward with this approach.
- *How could you make the invisible visible?* Oftentimes, the commenter is unaware that they have caused harm. You will have to make the invisible visible. You could ask, “Why are you describing your friend using such a harmful word?”
- *Can you provide some education as to why the comment was harmful?* “Did you know that using homophobic and transphobic slurs creates an unsafe work environment for our LGBTQ+ colleagues? Please stop using that word in the office.”
- *How can you have patience while expecting progress?* If the conversation doesn’t go as smoothly as you’d like, remember your only goal is to steer the conversation away from the problematic remark or action. By doing so, you’ll be modeling good behavior to others present.

3. Family Erasure. You overhear a colleague tersely request that his LGBTQ+ direct report **remove his marriage photo** from his desk stating that “the team is uncomfortable seeing two men holding hands in the photo” after he spends 20 minutes raving about his own family. How would you interrupt this microaggression?

- *Are you safe from physical or emotional harm?* Remember safety from harm is different from being *uncomfortable*. Provided you are safe, embrace the tension of discomfort and move forward with this approach.
- *How could you make the invisible visible?* Oftentimes, the commenter is unaware that they have caused harm. You might say to your colleague, “Did you just ask your staff to remove his marriage photo after you spent 20 minutes talking about your kids and wife?”
- *Can you provide some education as to why the comment was harmful?* You could say, “Our company is actively working to welcome our LGBTQ+ colleagues. Part of that means that we don’t create double standards, or an environment that is unsafe for our LGBTQ+ colleagues to bring their full selves to work.”
- *How can you have patience while expecting progress?* If the conversation doesn’t go as smoothly as you’d like, remember your only goal is to steer the conversation away from the problematic remark or action. By doing so, you’ll be modeling good behavior to others present.

4. Social Exclusion. Your entire team is planning to go out to a happy hour, and when you ask why Kate wasn’t invited, a coworker says, “Ah, we **assumed she probably wanted to go to a lesbian bar** instead.” How would you interrupt this microaggression?

- *Are you safe from physical or emotional harm?* Remember safety from harm is different from being *uncomfortable*. Provided you are safe, embrace the tension of discomfort and move forward with this approach.
- *How could you make the invisible visible?* Oftentimes, the commenter is unaware that they have caused harm. You might say to your colleague, “Are you making that assumption just because she’s a lesbian?”
- *Can you provide some education as to why the comment was harmful?* You could say, “Excluding Kate from team social gatherings sends a harmful signal. Please invite her to tonight’s gathering, and future team outings. We want to build trust with one another, and that includes Kate.”
- *How can you have patience while expecting progress?* If the conversation doesn’t go as smoothly as possible, remember your only goal is to steer the conversation away from the problematic remark or action. By doing so, you’ll be modeling good behavior to others present.



Resources

- ResearchGate, “Experiences of LGBT Microaggressions in the Workplace”: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/301623779_Experiences_of_LGBT_Microaggressions_in_the_Workplace_Implications_for_Policy.
- APA Style, “Welcome, singular ‘they’”: <https://apastyle.apa.org/blog/singular-they>.
- Merriam-Webster.com, singular “they”: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/they>.
- Rhodes Perry Consulting, “5 Ways to Disrupt Digital Microaggressions”: <https://www.rhodsperry.com/blog/digitalmicroaggressions>.
- Tiffany Jana and Michael Baran, *Subtle Acts of Exclusion*: <https://www.amazon.com/Subtle-Acts-Exclusion-Understand-Microaggressions/dp/1523087056>.