# Common Racist Microagressions

Compiled from comments provided by participants in webinars, trainings, and open Zoom White Accountability Groups (WAGs), Summer/Fall 2020

*Center for Transformation and Change*

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1. Assumptions that Blacks are not as intelligent, competent and professional
2. A manager disproportionately critiques and disciplines People of Color and Indigenous employees for behaviors that white staff do as well without being held accountable.
3. If something is stolen, immediate assumptions are a Person of Color or Indigenous staff member did it.
4. A staff member from China introduces themselves and someone says, “I better put my mask on.”
5. A white manager confuses two Black employees, calling one Black staff member by the only other Black employee’s name.
6. A white manager and other white staff repeatedly mispronounce a staff of color’s name.
7. Staff who are talked over or ignored in meetings most frequently are the few Latinx and Black staff members.
8. A mixed-race employee is frequently asked, “What are you?”
9. A couple white staff make fun of how an immigrant of color pronounces some words in English.
10. A biracial staff member raises a concern about a microaggression to their supervisor. Their response, “You probably misunderstood them. They are a really good team member.”
11. White clients frequently comment to a Korean American staff member, “You speak English so well. Where are you from?” And when she answers, “L.A,” she is then asked, “No, where are you really from?”
12. An Arab American staff member was talking to some white staff about a racist situation. One of the whites said, “Why do you have to make everything about race? They were probably just having a bad day…”
13. A white colleague “compliments” an African American woman, “You’re very articulate!”
14. When a staff member of color points out the racist comment a white peer just made, their first reaction is, “I’m not racist. I was just kidding. I didn’t mean it.”
15. When topics about race come up in meetings, whites tend to look at the staff of color and expect them to speak for their racial group(s).
16. A staff member of color shares two racist incidents that happened to them over the weekend and a white colleague responds, “That happens to us too. That has nothing to do with race.”
17. A manager introduces the white presenter as Dr. \_\_\_, and the presenter of color with a doctorate as Ms. or Mr. \_\_\_\_ or by their first name.
18. As a Latinx employee is walking to work, someone yells, “Go back to your country.”
19. A client upon seeing two people in the office, a white man and a Black woman, walked up to the white man and asked, “Are you the manager?” The Black woman was the leader of the organization.
20. White staff refer to their own neighborhoods as “quiet” with “good schools.” Before a staff meeting one white team member comments, "You can tell if it's a nice apartment complex if you drive around at night and there's not a lot of basketball going on.”
21. White staff arrive late to a meeting and no one seems to notice. When People of Color and/or Indigenous staff arrive late, the manager looks at their watch.
22. A white colleague says to a Black team member, “If I turn off the light, you’ll disappear.”
23. Knowing that several white staff were given extensions on their due date for a project, a staff member of color asked the manager for an extension and was told “no” without any explanation or further conversation.
24. A white team member assigned their colleague of color a task as if they were the supervisor.
25. A white peer asks a staff member of color is they can call them by a nickname because their name is "too hard" to remember or pronounce.
26. In a group meeting, an Asian American woman disagrees with a white man and he turns and mutters, “What a B\_\_\_\_!”
27. As a manager, you overhear a white staff member saying to a Black woman, “You should straighten your hair. You’d be much more attractive.”
28. Several staff of color are talking in the hallway and the white manager walks by and comments, “What are you all, a gang?” and then laughs and walks away.
29. When Black staff bring up issues related to Black Lives Matter, several white staff shake their heads, look at each other and smile.
30. A white staff member frequently only asks the one team member of color, “Are you sure you know how to do that? Do you need some help?”
31. A few white team members often do not follow the directions or complete the assignments from their supervisor of color.
32. White staff ask a lot of questions and complain they are too busy when their manager of color asks them to do something, but rarely have any questions or resist when the white assistant manager asks them to do something.
33. Black women are told how they need to wear their hair to be professional.
34. White managers rarely give employees of color clear performance feedback throughout the year until the annual review.
35. White staff use slang and change how they talk to peers of color.
36. White staff seem to ignore the input of peers of color until a white colleague validates it or says it.
37. Expecting People of Color and Indigenous staff to lead Inclusion committees, trainings, and discussions without any additional compensation.
38. A white manager seemed surprise after a staff of color offered a suggestion, “That was a really astute idea!”
39. White staff accusing a Black colleague of being too angry and aggressive, when all they did was directly state their opinion.
40. White manager tone-policing Black, Asian American, Indigenous, and Latinx staff.
41. Leaders only talk about the need for hiring pipelines when they're talking about People of Color.
42. When a Black employee talks about *Black Lives Matter* a white manager says, “We don’t bring politics to the office.”
43. White direct reports not responding to emails and requests for information from supervisor of color.
44. White staff gossiping about a colleague of color, “All they talk about is race. When do they have time to do their job?”
45. White hiring & promotion committee members use coded racist language to talk about the very few candidates of color in the pools: “They’re not a good fit; They had a typo in their cover letter; They seemed angry; I couldn’t understand them; They won’t stay; They don’t have enough experience in the field; They won’t be able to relate to our customers; Other candidates have a far better educational background; Their research was on the margins; They weren’t very professional; They were kind of loud and aggressive; We can’t just hire them to fill a quota; We need to hire a qualified candidate; I’m not sure they’ll get along with others; Staff will feel uncomfortable around him; They are over-qualified for this position and will get bored and leave soon; Minorities don't succeed in that type of position; We can’t find any good candidates; They don’t apply because they don’t want to live here; It’s difficult to support Black people here/They'll struggle here; We already have one Black administrator; We don’t want to lower our standards; She often has an attitude, etc.”
46. White staff engage in more friendly and personal ways with lighter skin People of Color and Indigenous colleagues and clients, and appear more formal, impersonal and transactional with darker skinned staff and clients of color.
47. White staff complaining to other white people about the work style and lack of effort of People of Color and Indigenous colleagues without ever discussing this directly.
48. When a white committee member noted how the candidate pool was all white men and they needed to diversify it, the white Search Committee Chair said, “We need to hire the most qualified person.”
49. In the hallway outside the office, a white client clutches her purse as a Black male staff member walks by.
50. In staff meetings, white employees and managers most often only look at other white people when they talk, unless the topic is about race specifically.
51. The Latina female supervisor is assumed to be a secretary in the department.
52. Staff react negatively when they see a darker-skin woman wearing a veil/hijab.
53. In a training, a team member talks about their experiences as a Native American and someone says, “You don't look Indian!”
54. When a Back woman tries to give a white woman feedback about the racist impact of her comment, the white woman gets defensive and starts to cry. Other white staff quickly go to comfort her.
55. When a multiracial staff member tries to discuss a microaggression they experienced, their white manager dismisses their perspective with, “That’s just an isolated incident. Don’t over-react to that” or “It’s not that big a deal. Just let it go. Sometimes you are too sensitive.”
56. When an Asian American staff member asks the team to examine how a current practice may privileged whites and negatively impacts employees of color, several whites roll their eyes as one says, “This is a best practice in the field, as I am sure you know.”
57. White manager telling an employee of color, “If you want to be successful here you need to adapt to how we do things.”
58. A white supervisor told the few Black professionals to stop having lunch meetings together.
59. You notice the organization’s website talks about People of Color, but never mentions anything related to Native Americans or Indigenous Peoples.
60. When confronted about their behaviors, white employees and managers defensively react, “I treat everyone like that.”
61. White people stay silent when they see racist dynamics, expecting colleagues of color to take the risk to engage.
62. When confronted by a person of color about their behaviors, white employees and managers react, “I’m sorry you feel offended.”
63. A Black manager is assumed to be the custodian.
64. Light-skinned Biracial and mono-racial staff of color are often referred to as white.
65. A Latinx manager told a recent story of being assumed to be the hired gardener when he was mowing his yard. Several white staff laughed.
66. A white manager explaining racism, whitesplaining to staff of color.
67. A white manager coaching a Black employee to tone it down and not be so aggressive when they give feedback.; and just try to get along better.
68. You overhear a white colleague complaining about the diversity training, “Why do we have to label everyone? I see people as people. I am color-blind. I don’t see race.”
69. A white team member comes back from a vacation at a beach and says to a Latina colleague, “I’m now as dark as you!”
70. A white team leader talks more slowly and with a louder voice to a team member of color whose English is their 2nd language. Later, when the employee offers an idea, the leader interrupts them and changes the subject.
71. You hear a colleague say, “These Chinese and Indian names are too hard to pronounce.”
72. A middle-aged white woman seemed surprised as she said to the Black male employee, “You are so well-spoken and have a Masters!”
73. A team member suggests translating key forms and policies into the most common 1st languages of the customers, and the manager refuses to support this.
74. Someone called security to investigate a Black man who was walking through the building. He was a supervisor from another department.
75. During a break you overhear a white colleague say, “The realtor brought a Mexican family to view the house next door. I just hope my neighbor doesn't sell to them.”
76. A younger team member of color who often raises issues is not invited to lunch when the manager organizes informal gatherings among most staff.
77. A white leader visiting the project team greets several white members by name, then just nods as they greet the only person born outside the U.S. who grew up in Pakistan and doesn't use their name.
78. The trainer in a leadership workshop talked about how Columbus discovered America.
79. You overhear a couple white team members say, “She got that promotion because of her race!”
80. During a meeting about the need to hire and retain more People of Color in leadership positions, you notice a couple of white colleagues having a side conversation.
81. When someone points out the racist comment a colleague just made, their 1st reaction is, “I’m not racist. I was just kidding. I didn’t mean it.”
82. While walking past the coffee station, you overhear a few people making disparaging comments about Islam and Muslims.
83. In the break room, staff are talking about immigration issues and turn to the only Latino in the group and ask, “What do you think about what is going on?”
84. Clients who are Black or Latinx are more often asked to show 1-2 forms of ID when they check out and pay their bill, while white clients are not.
85. Comments People of Color report hearing from clients and colleagues:
    * "You’re one of the good ones."
    * "All Asians look alike."
    * “You can't tell one from the other. They all look the same.”
    * “You talk white.”
    * "You’re a good immigrant."
    * "Can I touch your hair?"
    * "You don't have an accent."
    * “You're a little bit of 'something' right?”
    * “You’re just exotic enough.”
    * “What are you?”
    * “I can tell you’re from a white family.”
    * “Is your hair real?”
    * Reference to COVID-19 as the “Chinese Flu”
    * “I don’t see color.”
    * “I’m color-blind.”
    * "Are you Chinese or Japanese?"
    * All lives matter!
    * “You don't look Latina at all.”
    * “You’re actually pretty for a Black girl.”
    * “Is that your last name? You don’t look Mexican.”
    * “How did you get into the USA?”
    * “You’re so elegant, your hair looks great when its straightened.”
    * “You are different than the other Black people I’ve encountered.”
    * “You’re so polished!”
    * “I wish other Blacks here were more like you.”
    * “I like working with you, but she’s just too much to deal with! So angry all the time!”
    * “I want to talk with a white manager.”