# Microaggressions and Structural Barriers in Recruiting and Hiring Processes, a Beginning List

I am deeply grateful for the input from alums of the Social Justice Institute and workshop participants. **Compiled by Kathy Obear** [**www.drkathyobear.com**](http://www.drkathyobear.com)

1. 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 students/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;
* They’re coming from an urban environment. I wonder if they will be comfortable or happy in this small town, rural area;
* 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;
* I am just not sure people will be able to learn to pronounce their name;
* They are very active in their Black fraternity, do you think they would connect with our Latinx students? Other students?
* You have an interesting name; where are you from?
* I couldn't pronounce their name….
* Not attempting to say a unique name. "I'm not even going to try saying that", "I'm going to butcher this...”
* Not using honorable titles such as "Dr." for People of Color and Indigenous Peoples during the interview;
* Commenting on accents of candidates who do not have English as a native language;
* Considering a candidate’s accent or command of the English language in hiring decisions
* Speaking slower to a Person of Color, or a person who we assume that English is their second language. Then acting overly impressed when that person uses perfect grammar;
* Engaging with darker skinned candidates in a more transactional way;
* Bias against a diverse candidates of color’s work history, but not towards a white candidate with a similar history;
* Assuming a Person of Color is pushy, over confident, or rude simply because they directly share their opinion and it doesn't mesh with yours.
* Candidates who come from a culture of modesty, not bragging/boasting about themselves may struggle to speak in full about their knowledge or experiences to satisfy the committee they have what it takes to do the job well. It would be easy to say, "They are not ready for this role" or "They don't have the experience we are looking for."
* Verbally and non-verbally respond with "shock" at a Person of Color's response to an interview question with "Great answer!" (as if it were a surprise they had intelligent things to say)
* A committee member was concerned about the "attitude" of a candidate of color when all they did was directly state their opinion.
* We can't lower our standards.  We have to hire the most qualified, not just because they are People of Color.
* You overhear a white colleague complaining about the Equity strategic focus, “Why do we have to label everyone? I see people as people. I am color-blind. I don’t see race.”
* When a suggestion is made by a Person of Color on the hiring team, nothing is said, but rather, at least two others on the team look at the person of color with a blank stare, then begin a sidebar conversation which is a catalyst for a change in the direction of the interview.

1. **Coded sexist comments** in hiring and promotion discussions:

* Sometimes she has a tone;
* She doesn't get along well with a lot of people;
* She is too involved in the women’s employee resource group;
* She may not be a good fit for that team;
* She has a lot of outside responsibilities;
* There is a lot of travel in this role;
* People feel uncomfortable around her;
* We need someone who can get along with students/customers;
* She uses a lot of personal time;
* We need a strong leader for that team;
* She seems angry all the time;
* People are put off by her a lot;
* We really need her to stay on the team where she is;
* She’s too valuable where she is;
* "Who knows who long she'd stay before starting a family;"
* Being in an interview where one interviewer makes sexually inappropriate remarks to the interviewee or another member of the team.
* Men looking at their phone or having side conversations when women speak.
* Calling women aggressive, intimidating, pushy, or bossy if they are direct or persistent
* Commenting on the "directness" of a female as a concern, but viewing it from a male as a strength.
* Bias against women that are seen as "too touchy-feely." Not tough enough to hold people accountable;
* Only asking Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color, women, LGBTQIA+, and disabled applicants to repeat themselves or clarify their responses for details.
* The use of impersonal, transactional tones with Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color, women, LGBTQ+, and disabled applicants creates the sense of being unwelcome and not being seen / heard in meaningful ways.
* Talking “down” to women (or anyone) with a patronizing, condescending, and/or sarcastic tone.

1. Comments about perceived **age**, based on graduation on resume

* We need someone who is seasoned in this position
* I wonder if the more experienced staff can relate to them
* Can they supervise people their parents’ ages?
* I think this might be this candidate's retirement job

1. Comments about **caregiver status**

* They mentioned they have child-care responsibilities…
* They mentioned something about elder care responsibilities…
* If the candidate has children and then assuming that the candidate won't be able to balance work/home.

1. Judgments on **gaps or shifts in career**, possibly especially for candidates perceived to be men (women are assumed to be raising children):

* I notice they have a very long gap in their work experience …
* We need someone who can hit the ground running and be up-to-date on current work issues and technology…
* When was their last real job?
* How long have they been unemployed?
* This would be a significant pivot from what they did before
* Basing so many questions only on one’s most recent job experience when the most recent job might not be the best/highest/most relevant one
* Bias against someone who is currently unemployed or has been for a significant amount of time

1. Comments related to **Formal schooling**

* So where was there bachelor’s degree from?
* They don’t have any additional education, am I right?
* Ignoring applicants who "only" have a bachelor's degree even though the minimum qualifications are bachelor’s degree
* Well, they went to Yale, so they must know how to write. But I am less sure of this candidate who went to...
* It is hard to know what their degree from this college in [country in the Global South] really means.
* They have an online degree…
* We need them to teach mostly online. I don’t think they have the experience to do this.
* Criticizing someone’s education rather than looking at what they have done and what they can bring to the team.

1. Comments related to **Accessibility**

* How will this candidate with mobility issues do their own photocopying?
* I know they use a wheelchair so I am not sure how they would get around to all the meetings.
* People who have an ADA anxiety disorder being judged as less competent or able to perform job duties. If this includes social anxiety, team members judge this person as 'unfriendly' or 'anti-social' if they don't participate in team social activities.

1. Comments related to **geography, location**

* Oh, did you see their address? That is a long commute.

1. Comments related to **veteran status**

* I am not sure if a veteran is the right feel for this position.

1. Comments related to **religion/spirituality**

* They do a lot with Christian organizations/churches, I am not sure they would be open to those we serve who are LGBTQIA+ folks; the Jewish or Muslim members…

1. Comments related to **“fit”**

* My gut says to go with this candidate….
* This one will be the best fit for that department.
* Favoring candidates of similar interests because the conversation flowed smoothly and we “hit it off.”
* Using standards for quality communication that are driven by dominant culture to evaluate one's ability to express themselves effectively (i.e., eye contact, hand gestures, volume, word choice, etc.)

1. Comments related to **appearance**

* Allowing attire to create bias regarding a person’s ability or professionalism.
* They didn't seem very professional
* I loved their hair!
* What an outfit she wore!
* After the interview, asking the other committee members something like this, "Just how many tattoos did that candidate have?!"
* Hiring committee is not willing to consider someone that has traditional ethnic fashions like dreadlocks

1. Comments related to **personality**

* They were so nice
* They seemed abrupt
* Maybe too direct?
* They were so articulate, eloquent, well-spoken

1. Comments related to **socio-economic class, access to money**

* Generally, candidates need to be more expensively dressed for an interview than for daily dress on the same job
* I’m not sure they can afford to live close enough to the workplace given their work history…
* Hiring committee screens someone out of the pool based upon their address (low income neighborhood or inner city)

1. Comments related to **assumed politics**

* They’re coming from a pretty blue state….
* They’ve only worked in red states…
* I’m not sure our employees will relate to them given some of their activities and associations
* Hiring committee is concerned by the candidate's involvement in community organizations like We All Rise or other advocacy, social justice oriented organizations

1. **In-person interviewing**: Consider ~

* Access to internet
* Reasonable breaks and time in-between interviews
* Shaking hands as the norm
* Expecting candidate to have meals outside of “business” hours
* Expecting candidates in eat with potential reviewers over meals
* Assuming/expecting candidates to know how to easily navigate parking and finding the interview spaces, pay for parking, be able to travel quickly to the next interview location, etc.

1. **Virtual interviewing**

* Expectation that candidates have access to and familiarity with tech needed to interview remotely (e.g. understand how to use/present in MSTeams or any institutional platform)
* Judging candidates who may be interrupted by a child

1. **Structural barriers to reconsider**

* Over-relying on cover letters; privileging those who can write in ways committee members prefer
* When I was hired, I asked my HR liaison if she had recommendations for places to live – I was informed where not to look based on the apartment communities being “Section 8” housing and the “diversity” of the location.
* Needing a home address to apply
* Doing initial interviews at conferences
  + Cost to attend is high for many
  + Conferences not having transparent processes for unemployed persons to renew memberships to secure membership pricing
* Lack of clarity about salaries in job postings
* Lack of clarity about visa sponsorship in job postings
* US-centric form fields (trying to enter other country codes, zip codes, not having a state, etc.)
* Assuming someone’s pronouns; no easy way to name their pronouns
* Search committees using rubrics to check boxes making outside of the box candidates unlikely to succeed
* Mandatory drug screenings
* Do external, and possibly internal, candidates have equitable access to institutional knowledge: acronyms, data, jargon, etc.
* Reviewing resumes to screen out people who work to live versus live to work
* “All other duties as assigned” – vagueness is job responsibilities
* Unscripted interviews that allow interviewers to ask inappropriate questions (often introducing microaggressions, such as interrupting, dominating the airtime, etc.)
* Which employees have the privilege/resources to “serve” on search committees?
* On your website, can candidates across group identities easily find information about the local community that may meet their needs for: housing, schooling, socializing, religion/spirituality, hair care, health care, etc.
* Not proactively providing asking about dietary restrictions when beginning to plan candidates' interview schedules.
* Not proactively providing the names of restaurants where candidates will have their meals (so candidates can look at the menus ahead of time and assess what options are available that meet their dietary needs in order to better plan their entire day; e.g., if they are only going to be able to have a salad for lunch, they can be proactive about making sure to squeeze in a morning/afternoon snack).
* Not proactively asking about access needs when beginning to plan candidates' on-site interview schedules.
* Not providing frequent enough breaks to ensure candidates' bio needs are met (restroom breaks, time to take meds, time to check blood sugar/eat a snack, etc.).
* Not proactively providing the location (building name and an accompanying map) for all interview meetings that will be part of candidates' itineraries (so they can assess distance between meetings and if they have access needs to request as a result).
* During virtual interviews: not also pasting the interview questions into the chat to make the interview process more accessible. (Note: if search committees are conducting semi-finalist interviews via phone or in person, they can email a copy of the questions to applicants before the call or provide them a printed copy at the beginning of the in-person meeting.)
* If search committees are conducting semi-finalist interviews at national conferences/meetings, working to reduce the disparate impact on applicants based on socioeconomics (i.e., proactively structuring semi-finalist interviews to be offered both at the conference and via Zoom/phone; best practice would be to move away from the in-person conference model since many applicants will feel they are expected to attend and interview at the conference and may end up spending resources they cannot afford in order to do so).
* Not considering that finalists who are preparing for on-site interviews at institutions across the northern states might not own appropriate winter gear for the time of year they will be there and might not have the resources to purchase gear for a one/two/three-day interview. (Many of our departments proactively let candidates know what the weather conditions will be and that appropriate gear will be available--e.g., winter parka, heavy gloves--if needed.)
* Not considering the impact that on-site winter weather conditions (e.g., icy sidewalks) might have on candidates who use mobility devices.