

# Microaggressions in the Workplace and Locs

Ever been complimented with statements like “Wow, you are so lucky to be here”, “You look very educated”, “You are so articulate” and a lot more other examples.

These might well seem like innocent comments with good intentions. Heck, the person saying it might even be a friend or a colleague at work, and they actually might be genuinely good and even the nicest of people.

However, as long as these comments make stereotypic connections, either intentional or not to a certain group of historically marginalized people, then it is a microaggression.

So how then do we properly define microaggression? How do we know when a compliment either in words or in action tilts towards microaggression and how do we address situations like this?

## Definition of microaggression

Microaggressions are defined as everyday, somewhat subtle, intentional or unintentional interactions or behaviours that communicate a certain form of bias towards historically marginalized groups of people. Marginalized by either race, sexual identity or gender.

Microaggressions are different from outright discrimination in certain ways, and one of them is the fact that the persons committing them are often unaware.

## Microaggressions in the workplace

Microaggressions can occur in the workplace, especially from people who are of a different race or background.

Studies have shown that about 64% of women go through some form of microaggression in the workplace.

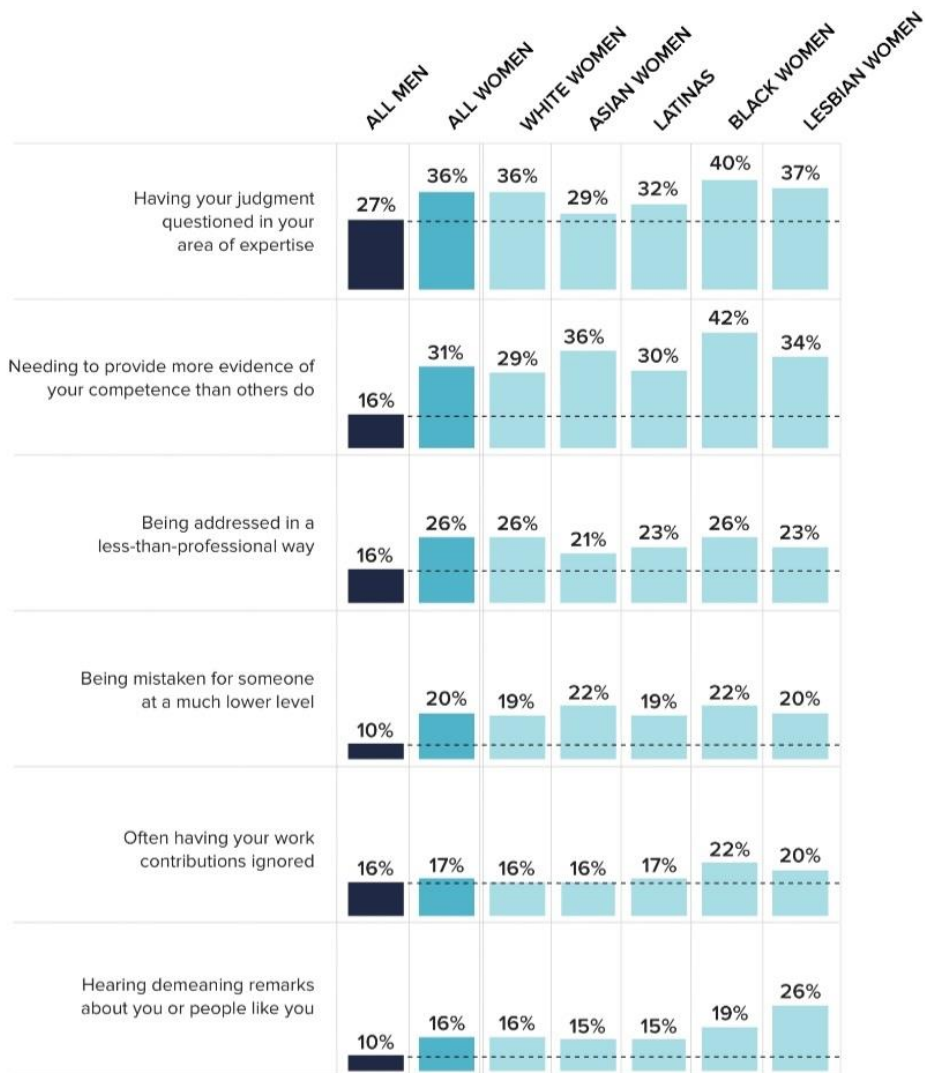
Women have generally had to work twice, sometimes thrice as hard as their male counterparts have to, just to prove their competence.

Women are twice as likely, to be mistaken for someone in a lower or junior position.

In all of these, black women have the lion's share of this discrimination. They tend to experience workplace microaggressions in a greater percentage than any other group of historically marginalized people.

% OF EMPLOYEES WHO'VE EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING DURING THE NORMAL COURSE OF BUSINESS

MEN WOMEN



Via LeanIn

## Categories of Microaggressions

1. **Microinsults:** These are discriminatory, unintentional, and mostly unconscious behaviours and comments.
2. **Microassaults:** Overt and conscious discriminatory behaviours, without any offensive intent.
3. **Microinvalidations:** Verbal statements that deny, diminish and undermine the experiences of a marginalized group.

## Examples of microaggressions in the workplace

Admittedly, microaggressions occur in our everyday lives, and part of this everyday life includes work and school.

### 1. Verbal Microaggressions :

- a. Mispronouncing someone's name because "it is too difficult to say"
- b. Complimenting a non-white co-worker's grammar.
- c. Asking a lesbian co-worker, "who is the man in your relationship"

### 2. Behavioural Microaggressions

- a. Assuming a Latino colleague for a service worker.
- b. Excluding a co-worker with a disability from an after-work event or gathering.
- c. Giving a female employee only personality-based feedback such as "you should smile more" during a performance review.

### 3. Environmental microaggressions

- a. Not offering access to a facility to a group of people.
- b. Excluding people of colour from executive positions.

## Workplace Microaggressions faced by Black Women

As stated earlier, black women experience microaggressions of all the marginalized groups. Here are some examples of microaggressions black women go through at work.

1. Comments that invalidate a person's expression such as "why are you getting so angry".
2. Wanting to touch a person's hair or a statement such as "wow, your hair is so plenty, can I touch it?"
3. Intentionally mispronouncing a person's name or asking if they mind being called something else, or calling the person another name entirely.
4. Comments that express surprise at a person's intellectual abilities "Wow, you are so articulate, you speak so well" or "you are so composed"
5. "I support you, I have friends like you" or " I have a black friend"
6. This might just be the most common microaggression black people face. Asking if someone knows a person, simply because he or she is of the same race or colour.

## Locs and Microaggression

Over the years, people have concocted various stereotypes about people who do locs, these stereotypes have been either intentional or passive, and have ultimately led to microaggressions on people who have locs. Some examples of these include:

- Someone making a 'compliment' like "You look so neat" – this statement refers to a certain stereotype that people who have locs tend to be rough and unkempt.
- Someone wanting to touch your hanging locs. Generally, touching or asking to touch a person's hair is a microaggression, and the same goes for asking or touching someone's locs.
- Asking someone with locs, if they are Jamaican. Stems from a certain preconceived notion that only Jamaicans have locs, especially long locs.

## How to Deal with Microaggressions at Work

1. First, as an individual, you should try taking note of yourself in terms of biases and racism and intentionally confront those beliefs.
2. Call out microaggressions, when you see or experience them. Because of how subtle or intending microaggressions are, even the person doing it or saying it might not be aware.
3. Educate employees, co-workers, and supervisors about microaggressions. Let them know about the types, and examples, just as we are doing in this blog post. So then, you can share this blog post with your co-workers and colleagues.
4. Now that you know about microaggressions, if you still feel the need to make a compliment find better ways to construct the statement, but if it is not very necessary. It would be a whole lot better for everyone involved if you did not take the compliment at all.

At Kouturelocs, we are taking steps to educate people about microaggression wherever it may occur and how to deal with it. Because of how subtle they are, you might not immediately recognize it, and it bothers you, which can lead to other complications such as mental health complications like depression etc.

## References

[Forbes](#), [HBR](#), [Madamenoire](#), [Insider](#), [EngagedHR](#)

