

Micro- & Macro-Aggressions During Interviews

Microaggressions are statements or actions that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to candidates based on their membership in marginalized group. In the university setting, these statements and actions are rarely intended to hurt or demean the candidate. Rather, “aggressors” often have no idea how their actions and statement might be affecting their unintended candidate. **In fact, you may read some of these statements and say to yourself “That is a microaggression? That is a compliment!” And that is the point.** Whether these comments are deemed offensive does depend on the individual and the context. However, if there is a reasonable chance your comment will be taken amiss by someone with a different perspective, why not make the statement in a different way or just talk about something else entirely?

The first step in avoiding accidental micro/macroaggressions is to be able to recognize them. The next step is practicing using alternative statements and behaviors such as those suggested below. Finally, becoming comfortable intervening when you witness a micro/macroaggression taking place (becoming an Upstander rather than a Bystander) will be essential in order to create a campus culture where everyone feels welcomed and where bias is avoided during decision making.

If you find statements below that you could see yourself saying or that you may have actually said at one point or another, it does not mean that you are a bad person or racist/sexist. Being unwilling to recognize racist or sexist behaviors and correct your unintentional aggressions WOULD be a problem, but we all make mistakes and acknowledging this provides an opportunity to learn and grow.

While there are categories below for organization purposes, it is important to recognize that some of these micro/macroaggressions are intersectional, affecting people negatively in more than one way.

This reference document was prepared by Dr. Aimee Edinger, Equity Advisor in Biological Sciences. Comments, suggestions, and additions to this document are welcomed: aedinger@uci.edu.

Making the Candidate Feel Alien, Different, or Out of Place

Sample Microaggressions	Messages Communicated
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Where are you from? or Where were you born?” • “What nationality are you/is your family?” • “Are you a US citizen?” • Asking someone to share words in their native language • Assuming someone likes or does not like (nationality/ethnicity) food/practices • “You are (ethnicity)? I went on a vacation to (assumed country of origin) and loved it!” • Mispronouncing candidate’s name after you have been corrected (often more than once) • Developing a nickname or sharing a mnemonic that you use to remember their name • “Your name is so unique – I love it!” 	<p>You are not American. You are a foreigner even if the US is your own country.</p> <p>Your racial/ethnic identity makes you weird, exotic, and/or different.</p> <p>You are different. You don’t really belong.</p> <p>People who are different are outsiders.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acting as though the candidate’s name is difficult to remember • “Students might find you hard to understand given your accent – have you thought about trying to do something about that?” • “I am impressed that you hardly have an accent” • Telling racist or sexist stories or jokes during meals or private meetings, even to someone apparently of the same race/gender as yourself. 	
Alternative Approaches	Upstander Interventions
<p>Make small talk around subjects that would be appropriate if the individual was from the majority group and had a very common name.</p> <p>The Search Chair should ask EVERY candidate how to pronounce their name and share this (in writing) with everyone who will contact the candidate so that they do not have to continually tell everyone they meet how to pronounce their name.</p> <p>If you develop a mnemonic to help you remember how to pronounce a name, make it respectful & keep it to yourself</p> <p>Probably best to avoid commenting on someone’s name, dress, or looks in any way during an interview, <i>even if you think what you are saying is a compliment.</i></p> <p><u>A general rule</u> - Keep casual conversation focused on topics that you would discuss with someone that could be of ANY ethnicity/national origin/gender/sexual orientation</p> <p>Introduce your guest as you would a speaker with a “standard” background. Allow them to bring up their nationality/gender/sexual identity if they wish – it is their story to tell.</p>	<p>If you witness any of this in real time, you could clarify for the speaker privately how their comment might be perceived and call out their behavior as inappropriate – when this is done politely, most people are very receptive and want to avoid offending others</p> <p>If you know how to pronounce the candidate’s name correctly, you can correct the speaker.</p> <p>You could interrupt the interaction with the speaker by engaging in a normal conversation with the candidate that is free from microaggressions and makes them feel welcome (change the subject). You could also approach the candidate after the speaker leaves and engage in a friendly and welcoming conversation.</p>

Tokenism and Triggering Imposter Syndrome

Sample Microaggressions	Messages Communicated
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “We are really interested in recruiting more URM faculty, we really hope that you will apply to our ad.” • “UCI is really interested in diversifying our faculty, I am so excited that we are interviewing you!” • “We have just recruited 3 Black faculty.” 	<p>You are only of interest due to your race/gender/nationality</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “We were able to hire a lot of UC Presidential Postdoctoral Fellows because they are ‘free’ for 5 years.” • “You would have a cohort of URM Asst profs here to interact with.” • “Your name doesn’t sound like you are a URM – make sure you make it clear that you are one.” • “There is a great program at UCI to hire two faculty for one if we make offers to URMs.” • “Your DEI activities give you a really good chance to be hired here – emphasize them whenever you have the chance!” • “Since you are Black/Hispanic, you will definitely get tenure here!” • “Unfortunately, being Asian or gay doesn’t count for diversity hiring here at UCI.” • Any statements focusing on race/ethnicity/gender rather than science during recruitment or interviews • “You are so lucky to have access to minority fellowship opportunities!” • “Dr. XX (advisor) is such an outstanding scientist; it must have been so amazing to work in their lab.” • “I have known Dr. XX (advisor) for a long time, they are an outstanding scientist.” • “Who developed your project?” • Describing someone as “an outstanding Black/Hispanic/female scientist” 	<p>You are not really qualified for this position based on your accomplishments</p> <p>You are valued for your skin color, not your scientific accomplishments</p> <p>You are in a different category than other assistant professors we hire</p> <p>We would not hire you except that we are incentivized to do so</p> <p>Implying that their success could only have come as a gift from a powerful advocate or ally suggests that low achievement is the expectation</p>
<p>Alternative Approaches</p>	<p>Upstander Interventions</p>
<p>Statements around DEI that may be better received:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Service related to DEI is recognized and rewarded in our School.” • Review the statement here and use phrases that align with your beliefs: https://equity.bio.uci.edu/home/ • “BioSci has both an Associate Dean for DEI and an Equity Advisor committed to removing bias from evaluations at every level so everyone will be able to thrive at UCI.” • “We have recently hired a really strong cohort of Asst professors – I would be happy to get you their names if you would like to speak with any of them.” <p>During the interview, focus on the individual’s science and opportunities for them to excel at UCI.</p> <p>Focus on the collegial and collaborative environment at UCI, highlight that the School administration is</p>	<p>If you witness tokenism:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • you could approach the speaker later to politely explain how their comments might have affected the candidate • You might engage the candidate in a conversation about their science to make it clear that you value their scientific accomplishments • you could highlight potential collaborations and resources on campus that help them see themselves “fitting in” here at UCI

<p>supportive and transparent (if you agree with this statement).</p> <p>Show that you understand and value their work - highlight collaborations that might be possible for them with UCI faculty, take the time to arrange meetings with faculty who are potential collaborators.</p> <p>Make sure that ALL individuals invited to interview speak with faculty representative of the diversity in the School.</p> <p>Show that you understand and value their work – be familiar with campus resources that can help them succeed.</p> <p>If the candidate brings up DEI issues/resources, continue the conversation. Feel free to offer to set up a meeting with the Assoc Dean or Equity Advisor for clarifications or more in depth discussions.</p>	
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Claiming Color-Blindness, Myth of Meritocracy

Sample Microaggressions	Messages Communicated
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I have never seen any evidence of racism at UCI.” • “I took an Implicit Bias test and I am not biased against (fill in the blank).” • “I am not racist, I have several Black/Hispanic collaborators.” • “As a woman, I understand what you are going through as a racial minority.” • “There is only one race, the human race.” • “All lives matter.” • “As a scientist, I judge individuals based solely on their science/merit.” • “Grants and awards and publishing in high-impact journals is based on the quality of the science, not who you are.” • “Expectations for male, female and transgender faculty are equivalent.” • “Sexual preference is something no one cares about here – we even have transgender bathrooms.” • “Hiring here is totally equitable – we just hired a bunch of Black and URM faculty.” • “Everyone here gets promoted based on their merit – with our strong focus on DEI, reviews are very fair and there is no ‘diversity tax.’” 	<p>Failing to acknowledge abundant evidence that systemic racism/sexism and other forms of bias exist denies the individual’s lived experiences</p> <p>Failing to recognize someone’s racial, ethnic, or gender identity cancels part of who they are</p> <p>Failing to recognize that everyone is biased in some way will make it difficult to correct inequities in opportunities, allowing racism/sexism to continue</p> <p>It is not really clear who is most qualified, bias certainly contributes to decision making.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “California is very diverse; racism is not a problem here.” • “The only reason we don’t have a more diverse faculty is that URMs don’t apply/there are fewer qualified URM candidates.” • “I believe the most qualified person should get the job.” 	
Alternative Approaches	Upstander Interventions
<p>Information you could share:</p> <p>Highlight that BioSci has an Associate Dean of DEI, and Associate Dean of Faculty Development, and an Equity Advisor who help to ensure that the impact of bias on the review process is limited</p> <p>Our School is in the process of developing a Code of Conduct that directly addresses biased behavior.</p> <p>Faculty search committees participate in implicit bias training.</p> <p>Workshops and Town Halls addressing racism, sexism, and other forms of bias have been well attended by members of our School.</p>	<p>If you hear someone say these things, you could clarify to the candidate, ideally in the presence of the speaker, that you do not agree – while we strive for inclusion and fairness at UCI, there are inevitably times when we fall short. At the same time, you have been impressed with the sincere commitment of our faculty to promoting inclusive excellence/DEI.</p> <p>Overall UCI is a collegial campus, however there are a number of groups working to better support and promote the interests of minoritized populations. If you are involved in any, you could share that you are a member.</p> <p>The School is actively engaged in efforts to promote inclusive excellence and engage in fair and unbiased review practices. Share the information in the column to the left.</p>

Assumption of Criminal or Low-Status

Sample Microaggressions	Messages Communicated
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scientists of color frequently report being taken for support staff (janitors, cleaning staff, office staff) rather than academics • Not sitting next to someone in a seminar because of their skin color • Picking up your phone/purse/wallet to move them farther away from a person of color • “Wow! I would have never guessed that you were a scientist!” 	<p>You are a criminal; You are dangerous.</p> <p>You do not belong in science.</p>
Alternative Approaches	Upstander Interventions
<p>Make sure everyone (faculty, staff, and students) is aware that a candidate will be visiting campus on that day (expect a guest)</p> <p>Add a photo of the speaker to fliers so that the individual will be recognized – do this for ALL speakers</p>	<p>Step in to interrupt any negative interaction you witness, introduce the applicant to the “aggressor” using their academic credentials</p>

Pathologizing Cultural Values or Communication Styles

Sample Microaggressions	Messages Communicated
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “You should be more out-going to make a good impression on this interview.” • “Don’t be so loud, you sound angry and may scare some people off.” • “Your word choice/speech patterns might make people think that you are not as accomplished – you should try to speak more like a scientist.” • “You are too polite – you need to fight more forcefully for your ideas or you won’t make it as a scientist.” • “You really should think about not wearing your hijab/changing your hairstyle when you interview - it might put some people off.” • “Bringing up race/culture in a professional setting is simply inappropriate. Just focus on your science” 	<p>You should assimilate to the dominant culture; leave your values at the door.</p> <p>There is no room for difference.</p> <p>My way is the best way.</p> <p>There is no place for discussing racism/sexism bias in a scientific setting.</p>
Alternative Approaches	Upstander Interventions
<p>Focus on substance, not style.</p> <p>Students have diverse learning styles and may benefit from diverse approaches in the classroom/lab.</p> <p>Students will be better able to envision themselves as scientists if they see professors that “look like them” and “act like them.”</p> <p>Who will talk about this if we do not? Content and context are important, of course.</p>	<p>If you see this happen, you could validate the candidate’s style and effectiveness with a supportive comment (“I found your seminar very clear and informative.”) A private comment to the “aggressor” later may be helpful.</p> <p>You could state that you do <u>not</u> believe the candidate needs to conform to fit in to the “standard” faculty mold, perhaps highlighting the diversity of our student body.</p> <p>“I appreciated your comments and insight regarding [issue].”</p>

Perpetuating Gender or Racial Stereotypes/Roles/Expectations

Sample Microaggressions	Messages Communicated
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “You are so articulate; you speak so well!” • “How much of the work you presented was your own?” • “How dependent is your work on your collaborators?” • “Do you think that it will be hard to function independently once you leave your advisors’ lab?” 	<p>My expectations for you were low based on your race/gender</p> <p>I don’t believe that you are talented enough to have made these accomplishments without help from someone from the privileged group</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “You would totally get along with/you should absolutely meet Prof XX (name of faculty member who is the same race/ethnicity/gender).” • Assuming that someone of a particular race/ethnicity/gender will be interested in a particular sport or hobby. • Glancing at a female candidate’s finger to see if they are wearing a wedding ring. • Assuming that a female candidate will have a spouse that needs a position (career partner). • Assuming a female candidate will be interested in childcare or schools or that a man will not. Assuming that a female candidate will plan to have children/want to stop the clock. 	<p>Your peers are people “like you,” as opposed to scientists who work in your area or who are at your career stage</p> <p>I don’t think of you as a unique individual but a representative of your race or racial stereotype.</p> <p>Women should be married by a certain age, and to a man</p> <p>Women want to have children, a woman’s place is having kids</p>
Alternative Approaches	Upstander Interventions
<p>Focus on the content/substance, not the “packaging”</p> <p>When praising their seminar or preparedness, being more specific and acknowledging their expertise may mitigate concerns – “When Dr. Smith asked you about XYZ, I was really intrigued by your answer. Can you tell me more about XYZ? It sounds like you have really thought a lot about that problem.”</p> <p>“Have you discussed whether with your advisor whether they will continue to work on that topic? How will you compete with their established lab?”</p> <p>Ensure that all candidates meet with faculty that reflect our diversity.</p> <p>Talk about yourself and the resources you have taken advantage of on campus and in Irvine. Allow the candidate to ask questions if they choose once you have broached the subject.</p>	<p>If you see this happen, you could validate the candidate’s style and effectiveness with a supportive comment (“I found your seminar very clear and informative.”) A private comment to the “aggressor” later may be helpful.</p> <p>You could state that you do <u>not</u> believe the candidate needs to conform to fit in to the “standard” faculty mold, perhaps highlighting the diversity of our student body.</p> <p>“I appreciated your comments and insight regarding [issue].”</p>

Sexual or Gender Harassment or Bullying

Sample Microaggressions	Messages Communicated
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I was surprised to learn that you are a lesbian, you are so pretty/act so feminine!” • “That is a pretty dress/ blouse.” • Repeated looking at a candidate’s chest. • “You are so beautiful/pretty!” • Otherwise commenting on a candidate’s appearance • “XYZ is really hot.” • Making sexist jokes, telling sexist stories 	<p>You may think this stuff is obvious, but these things actually happen</p> <p>Issue explicit statements to all individuals who will have contact with the applicant indicating that gender harassment and bullying are unacceptable, including during interviews and talks. One can challenge a job</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing photos of partially or suggestively dressed men or women. • Interrupting and/or belittling candidates during meetings, seminars, or social events in a way that is disrespectful or demeaning. • Discussing the candidate and/or their research in a faculty meeting in a way that is disrespectful or belittling. 	<p>candidate to defend their ideas without resorting to ridicule.</p>
<p>Alternative Approaches</p>	<p>Upstander Interventions</p>
<p>While <u>you</u> may think compliments will always be appreciated, they are not. Avoid discussing someone’s appearance in a professional setting.</p> <p>The Dept or Search committee chair should intervene when harassment occurs in a public setting, but any faculty member should feel absolutely justified to step in.</p>	<p>If you see this happen and do not feel threatened yourself, you could state, “That was completely inappropriate.” Interrupting the “aggressor” sends a very clear message that behavior like this is not tolerated here.</p> <p>Making the search Chair aware of what happened may be appropriate, depending on the severity of the event.</p>

Additional Resources

- [Language Matters: Considering Microaggressions in Science](#)
- [Racial dialogues: Challenges faculty of color face in the classroom](#)