

Microaggressions are subtle, mundane exchanges that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to individuals based on group membership.^{1,2} They can be verbal, behavioural, or environmental,¹ and include staring, glaring, comments, actions, and gestures.

These actions are not always conscious, yet are constant - often daily - experiences for people of colour, women, LGBTQ+ communities, people with disabilities, and members of other under-represented groups.²⁴

Why Does This Matter for STEM Professions?

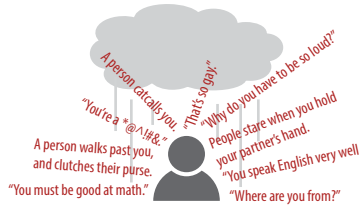
Microaggressions are prevalent across social environments; they exist in media coverage²⁵, clinical therapy²⁶, classrooms²¹, academia³, workplaces²⁷, and communities¹⁹. They are powerful because of the subtle, negative messages they often send¹, including that the person does not belong, and they deviate from the accepted norms. These messages are often unconscious and unintentional.

In order to address the lack of diversity in STEM fields, individuals and organizations must acknowledge their unconscious biases and behaviours. Microaggressions are interpersonal and institutional²⁸; they can be as simple as unintentionally excluding a person from an important conversation²⁷.

Education and reflection - individually, communally, and institutionally - are critical steps to making workplace and community environments inclusive to all people, regardless of the groups they identify with. Once identified, action is needed to correct policies and behaviours that have the potential to harm and discriminate against members of our communities.

Prevalence & Effects

College students of colour experienced an average of **291 microaggressions** over 90 days.³



Microaggressions:

Negatively impact mental health. ⁴⁻⁹	Decrease productivity & problem-solving abilities. ^{10,12,13}
Perpetuate stereotype threat. ^{10,11}	Create hostile work & institutional environments. ^{14,15}

What Can We Do?

To address microaggressions, learn to:^{2,22}

Define them
especially "invisible" ones

Recognize them
In ourselves, and others

Deconstruct their hidden meanings

Acknowledge their effects
& learn about coping strategies

Take action^{23,25}
Implement education programs

Types of Microaggressions²

Microassaults² (often conscious)

Aims to **attack the a person's group identity**, or harm them through **name-calling, avoidance, and discriminatory actions.**^{16,17}

Occurs when the perpetrator:¹⁸

has a level of anonymity

is among like-minded people

loses control

Microinsults² (often unconscious)

Conveys a **stereotype, rudeness, or insensitivity** towards a person's group identity.



Includes assumptions about the individual's:²
sexuality^{19,20} citizenship¹ language abilities²¹
belonging¹ intelligence¹ gender²² criminality¹

Microinvalidations² (often unconscious)

Denies, excludes, & negates the **experiences and feelings** of an individual in a group.



May lead individuals to **question their experience.** Their response to the negative interaction may be **perceived as a irrational overreaction.**²

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Recommended Readings

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About eng·cite

eng·cite is the working name of the Goldcorp Professorship in Women in Engineering at UBC. The Professorship – established in 2014 – is a vital aspect of the UBC Faculty of Applied Science's efforts to promote the engineering field to young women, to meet its goal to increase female enrollment in Engineering to 50% and to address a national shortage of Engineers expected by 2020.

The Goldcorp Professorship is a catalyst of change for the engineering field, with a commitment to help UBC become the national leader for gender diversity in engineering. Dr. Sheryl Staub-French, who holds the Professorship, works with teachers, counsellors, parents and high school students to promote engineering education, and provide mentorship and role models for young women who might not otherwise consider or pursue engineering education and careers.

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