

What is a Microaggression?

A **microaggression** is a statement, action, or incident regarded as indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination against members of a marginalized group. In the queer community, there are a variety of phrases and popular sayings that can be considered unintentionally offensive or discriminatory. These phrases can invalidate a queer person's identity and promote **erasure**. What makes them *micro* is that they don't seem to sound like something that would be offensive, as they're subtle remarks, that are usually not supposed to be offensive. They're usually quite brief and commonplace, and it's difficult to challenge them because sometimes, it's hard to figure out why they're offensive to begin with. .

Microaggressions could be described as a way for homophobia and transphobia manifest in acceptable, everyday language. Here are some examples of microaggressions that we hear a lot, and don't appreciate, as well as an idea of what to say instead, especially if you didn't mean to be offensive.

So here's what not to say...

When did you turn gay/queer/bi?"

A queer person does not turn queer; they've always been queer. It's more accurate to refer to the time before they were openly queer as before they "came out." Say this instead:

"When did you come out as gay/queer/bi?"

(Keep in mind that not everyone wants to answer this question).

"I always knew you were queer/gay/trans (etc)."

This can sometimes make the person who's coming out to you feel uncomfortable, or upset that you knew all along and didn't try to talk to them, or encourage them to be themselves. Say this instead:

"I'm so happy that you're being your authentic self."

Sorry I messed up your pronouns! It's just really hard to get used to!"

Making up excuses for why you didn't use someone's proper pronouns does not foster trust; this can often make someone feel guilty, or invalid in their identity. Say this instead:

"Sorry, [insert correct pronoun]. (optional: it won't happen again)."

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Microaggressions

**HOW TO SPOT THEM AND HOW
TO STOP THEM!**

"You can be my gay best friend!"

This can implicitly suggest that a queer person is automatically a source of entertainment for you; it also gives into certain stereotypes surrounding queer people, that not everyone subscribes to.

Say this instead:

"You're such a cool person to hang out with/you've become such a good friend to me!"

"There are just way too many labels nowadays; it's getting out of hand."

This invalidates the importance of a label or identity to a queer or trans person, who has probably taken quite some time to come to terms with their identity. Self-identifying and using a label is not for anyone else to police but the person using the label. Say this instead:

"It's so nice to see that there are more opportunities for youth and adults to find identities that suit them."

"You're bi? That's hot!"

This statement, while it may be a joke, sexualizes a bisexual person when they may not want to be sexualized; furthermore, it perpetuates the stereotype that all bisexual people are sexually promiscuous (and that this is a bad thing). Say this instead:

"You're bi? Cool!"

"You'd look so much prettier in a dress."

For queer and trans folks who do not subscribe to traditional gender expression, this statement suggests that they'd be better off subscribing to these norms, and not expressing themselves in the way that suits them. Say this instead:

"I'm so glad that you're dressing as your authentic self. You look awesome."

"But won't I get hit on at a gay bar?"

I mean, maybe, but you have an equal chance of getting hit on in a straight bar. More importantly, this is an implicitly homophobic comment; it assumes that all gay folks are predatory and it further sexualizes queer people in a way that is not necessary. Say this instead:

"Let's go to a gay bar!"

"Back in my day there weren't any non-binary or trans people."

This implies that trans and non binary identities were just created over the last few years. The truth is, folks have identified outside the gender binary in many indigenous cultures for centuries. Implying that these identities are new and never existed before erases and invalidates indigenous communities and folks with trans lived experiences. Say this instead:

"I'm glad we're learning to accept different identities that weren't as accepted before."

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