

# 14 Seemingly Harmless Comments That Are Actually Microaggressions



In today's increasingly diverse and interconnected world, the way we communicate with one another is more important than ever. While strides have been made towards inclusivity and respect, microaggressions—subtle, often unintentional comments or actions that can be offensive—persist in everyday conversations. These seemingly harmless remarks can undermine social harmony and perpetuate the very stereotypes and biases we seek to overcome. Here are 14 common microaggressions that, despite appearing benign, can have significant negative impacts on individuals and communities.

## 1. “You’re so articulate.”



This comment, often directed towards people of color, implies surprise at an individual’s eloquence, insinuating that it is unexpected due to their race. It reinforces harmful stereotypes and overlooks the individual’s intelligence and capabilities, reducing their accomplishments to a matter of racial exceptionalism.

## 2. “You don’t look like a [job title].”



This microaggression challenges the professional identity of individuals based on their appearance, suggesting that certain jobs are meant for specific genders, races, or ages. It undermines the person's qualifications and perpetuates outdated stereotypes about who is "fit" for particular roles.

### **3. "Where are you really from?"**



Asking someone where they are “really” from, especially after they’ve provided an answer, invalidates their identity and implies they do not belong. This question often targets people of color, suggesting their nationality or heritage makes them perpetual foreigners in their own country.

#### **4. “I don’t see color.”**



While intended to express impartiality, this comment ignores the real and lived experiences of people of color. It dismisses the significance of racial identity and the impact of racism, effectively erasing a fundamental part of an individual's identity.

## **5. “You must be good at math.”**



This stereotype, often directed at Asian individuals, reduces a person's abilities to a cliché associated with their race. It overlooks personal interests and skills, pressuring individuals to conform to narrow, predefined expectations.

## 6. "You're acting white."



Used to accuse someone of betraying their racial background by adopting certain behaviors or interests, this comment enforces harmful notions of racial purity and authenticity. It pressures individuals to conform to stereotypical behaviors and negates the diversity within racial and ethnic groups.

## **7. “You’re so exotic.”**



Labeling someone as “exotic” fetishizes and objectifies them, treating their unique features or cultural background as otherworldly. It reinforces the idea of the “standard” being white or Western, making anything else abnormal or strange.

**8. “You’re not like other [gender/ethnic group].”**





This backhanded compliment singles out an individual as an exception to negative stereotypes about their group, suggesting that the group as a whole possesses less desirable traits. It creates unnecessary divisions and reinforces harmful generalizations.

## **9. “Is that your natural hair?”**



Inquiring about the authenticity of someone's hair, particularly when directed towards Black individuals, scrutinizes their appearance in a manner that suggests their natural state is surprising or less acceptable. This invades personal boundaries and perpetuates beauty standards rooted in racism.

**10. “You’re doing well for a [specific group].”**



This microaggression implies that success is unusual among certain groups, attributing an individual's achievements to their identity rather than their hard work and talents. It diminishes their accomplishments and reinforces systemic barriers.

**11. “No, where are you really from?”**



Persisting in questioning someone's origin after they've already answered implies disbelief that a person of their background could be from their stated country. This alienates individuals and undermines their sense of belonging.

**12. “You must like [stereotypical food/music] because you’re [ethnicity].”**



Assuming someone's preferences based on their ethnicity overlooks personal individuality and reduces cultural identity to stereotypes. It disregards the rich diversity within cultures and the varied interests of individuals.

### **13. "It's just a joke."**



Dismissing offensive comments as jokes invalidates the feelings of those who are hurt by such remarks. It perpetuates a culture of insensitivity and undermines the importance of respectful communication.

## **14. “Why are you so sensitive?”**



This question blames the recipient for feeling offended by a microaggression, suggesting their reaction is unwarranted. It shifts responsibility away from the speaker and invalidates the legitimate grievances of those affected by insensitive remarks.

**Fostering Respect by Avoiding  
Comments That Are Actually  
Microaggressions**



Understanding and recognizing microaggressions is crucial in fostering respectful and inclusive environments. These seemingly benign comments can have profound effects on individuals, perpetuating stereotypes and reinforcing systemic inequalities. By being mindful of our language and its impact, we can contribute to a more understanding and equitable society, where diversity is celebrated, and all individuals feel valued and respected.