

# Dignity at Work and Study Guidance Note

## Microaggressions and Gaslighting

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A microaggression is an everyday behaviour which communicates insults, hostility, prejudice or discrimination towards marginalised individuals or communities. It can be intentional or unintentional.

There are degrees of intensity of this behaviour and they can be split as follows:

- Micro-invalidations – subtle denial of a person’s feelings, experiences or thoughts
- Micro-insults – verbal comments or non-verbal actions, such as eye rolling, which demean or discredit
- Micro-assaults – deliberate and intentional slights such as avoidant behaviour or purposefully discriminatory actions, such as moving a purse or bag when you are around certain people.

Microaggressions can be difficult to confront and address. The seemingly innocent intent can lead to the perpetrator being perceived as being unjustly victimised. Often people are told they are overreacting or being too sensitive.

Gaslighting is a form of emotional abuse, used to manipulate a person by psychological means into doubting their own sanity, their perception of reality and eroding their self-esteem, in order to maintain power and control.

Gaslighting is not an easy thing to notice, confront or address, however it can be extremely damaging to someone if this form of abuse is prolonged. If you feel like you are experiencing gaslighting, it can be helpful to talk to someone outside of the situation to get an external perspective on the issue.

Examples of this type of behaviour may include:

- Taking credit for someone else’s ideas or work, or attributing that work to someone else
- Invalidating, minimising or being dismissive of someone’s feelings
- Denying things, even when there is definitive proof
- Twisting and reframing what has been said in another person’s favour
- Persistent refusal to pronounce a ‘foreign’ name
- Repeatedly asking someone where they are ‘really’ from
- Using phrases such as “I don’t see colour – everyone is human!”

Differences of attitude or culture and mis-interpretation of social signals can mean that what is perceived as bullying or harassment by one person may not seem so to another. Behaviour shall be regarded as bullying or harassing if, having looked at all the circumstances, including the perception of the person who is being harassed, it can reasonably have been expected to have that effect.

If you feel that you may have experienced behaviour which can be classified as microaggressions or gaslighting it is recommended that you speak to one of the University’s sources of support to discuss the options available to you. You can find these in the following Guidance Notes:

- Guidance Note for staff – Informal approach to dealing with unacceptable behaviour
- Guidance Note for students – Informal approach to dealing with unacceptable behaviour
- Guidance Note – Staff Networks and Student Forums