

Examples of Exclusion

Where do these examples come from?

This list draws on examples from interviewees, stakeholder groups, workshop participants and published research. If something is not on this list, that does not mean it is not an act of exclusion.

It does not matter where these examples originated – the reality is that unintentional acts of exclusion happen every day, in every organisation. It's not helpful to pretend that isn't the case. By talking more openly about these things, we take a collective step towards reducing the impact that unintentional exclusion has.

How is this resource organised?

This list is organised by the eight taxonomy categories introduced in the EDI in STEM Hub 'From Unintentional Exclusion to Intentional Inclusion'. Where an act communicates more than one message, the additional message is noted in the Message Communicated column.

Section 9 lists examples of intentional acts of exclusion, highlighted in red, to reinforce the distinction between these and unintentional acts. Intentional acts require a different response involving your line manager, HR and your organisation's policies.

1. You Are Invisible

The Act	Message Communicated	Explanation	What to Say or Do Instead
A woman makes a point in a meeting. Minutes later, a male colleague repeats the same point and receives credit for it.	You are invisible: your contribution is not recognised as yours. Also: you are inadequate.	Ideas and voices are filtered through assumptions about credibility and authority. Women, junior staff and those from marginalised groups are more likely to have their contributions overlooked or absorbed by others. This is one of the most commonly reported acts of exclusion in STEM environments.	Attribute ideas directly: 'As [name] said earlier...' or 'I'd like to come back to [name]'s point.' If you are chairing, actively credit speakers by name.
A colleague is excluded from the minutes of a meeting they attended and contributed to, or is missed off an authorship list while on maternity leave.	You are invisible: your presence and contribution are not acknowledged. Also: you are a burden.	Omissions from formal records can feel deliberate even when accidental. Being absent from the record implies your contribution did not happen. Research shows that scientists on maternity leave are particularly vulnerable to being missed off authorship lists through out of sight, out of mind thinking.	Check minutes against attendance and contributions before circulating. Actively maintain records of contributions from people on leave. Check authorship lists against contribution records before submission.

The Act	Message Communicated	Explanation	What to Say or Do Instead
A female lecturer waiting at the front of the lecture theatre is assumed to be a student.	You are invisible as the person in authority. Also: you are inadequate.	Visual assumptions about who holds expertise are shaped by years of exposure to who typically occupies those roles. A young woman at the front of a room is not automatically read as the lecturer.	If you're not sure who someone is, introduce yourself and ask them to do the same rather than making an assumption. If you witness this happening to a colleague, step in to introduce them with their title and role.
Eye contact is maintained with a sign language interpreter rather than the Deaf person they are interpreting for.	You are invisible: I am talking to your interpreter, not to you.	Directing attention away from the person communicates that they are not a full participant in the interaction.	Direct your verbal and non-verbal communication at the Deaf person, not the interpreter. The interpreter is a communication tool, not the interlocutor.
A person using a wheelchair is spoken to via their companion rather than directly, or a seating host asks the wife whether a blind husband would like a menu in braille.	You are invisible: I assume you cannot communicate your own needs.	Talking around a person who is present and capable of communicating communicates that you do not see them as a full agent.	Address the person directly. If they need assistance communicating, they or their companion will tell you.
Avoiding eye contact with people in wheelchairs, or talking about them to their colleagues when they are present.	You are invisible: I cannot or will not engage with you directly.	Excluding someone from a conversation about them communicates that their presence and perspective do not matter.	Include the person in the conversation directly. Look at them, address them, and listen to their responses.
A colleague from another country is repeatedly left out of discussions about work in that country, even when they express interest, and is pulled in only at the last minute.	You are invisible until you are convenient.	Overlooking people with relevant lived expertise signals that their knowledge is not valued on its own terms.	When planning work relating to a particular context, actively consider who in your team has relevant lived knowledge and include them from the start.
Practising colour-blindness: 'When I look at you, I don't see colour' or 'There is only one race, the human race.'	You are invisible: I need to pretend your identity does not exist to include you. Also: you do not belong.	Colour-blindness denies the reality of someone's racial identity and the experiences that come with it. It communicates that belonging is conditional on making your identity invisible.	Acknowledge people's identities rather than erasing them. Seeing someone's race is not the problem. Discriminating because of it is.
Someone drops rubbish on the floor in front of a cleaner.	You are invisible: your role means you are here to clean up after me.	Treating cleaning and facilities staff as invisible or purely functional communicates that they are not full members of the working community.	Treat everyone in the building with the same respect regardless of their role. Pick up your own rubbish.
A husband points to his wife and says 'No, but she is' when asked if he is a doctor, but the question was never directed at her.	You are invisible: the default assumption is that professional expertise belongs to the man.	Directing professional questions at the male partner communicates that women are not the default holder of expertise or authority.	Ask everyone about their professional backgrounds – not just men.
A poster in a workplace says: 'Your mother doesn't work here, clean up after yourself.'	You are invisible if you are a mother: your domestic role is used as a shorthand for low-status work.	Using maternal domestic labour as a casual reference communicates that cleaning up is women's work and that this is an appropriate thing to invoke in a professional setting.	Review the language in workplace communications for assumptions about gender and domestic roles.

The Act	Message Communicated	Explanation	What to Say or Do Instead
Only calling on older or more senior people in the room for Q&A after a seminar, ignoring younger or more junior attendees.	You are invisible: your career stage means your questions are not worth inviting. Also: you are inadequate.	Disproportionately inviting questions from senior people communicates that junior voices are less valuable and that younger colleagues are not expected to contribute to intellectual discussion.	Actively invite questions from all levels. Consider specifically calling on junior or early career attendees.

2. You Are Inadequate

The Act	Message Communicated	Explanation	What to Say or Do Instead
A colleague is told they are 'so articulate' as a compliment, or told 'you are a credit to your race.'	You are inadequate: it is surprising that someone from your background is articulate.	The compliment implies that articulacy is unexpected for a person of that identity. It praises the individual while simultaneously insulting the group they belong to.	Comment on what was actually said: 'That was a great point' or 'That was really clearly explained.'
A woman is asked to take notes in a meeting far more than her male colleagues, or is the only person asked to do so. Women are expected to clean up after office parties or serve coffee.	You are inadequate for more senior contributions: your role here is administrative.	Women are disproportionately expected to do additional social and administrative labour in a workplace. Assigning administrative and domestic tasks disproportionately to women reinforces the idea that their primary function is support rather than leadership or expertise.	Rotate note-taking and clearing up responsibilities. If you are chairing, actively consider who you are asking to do what and why.
A junior researcher's contribution is interrupted, talked over, or dismissed as 'not quite the point' in meetings dominated by senior staff. Dismissive interruptions are defended as 'robust debate.'	You are inadequate: your ideas are not worth the room's full attention.	Power dynamics in academic settings can make it easy for senior voices to inadvertently suppress junior ones. Labelling this as robust debate does not make it less exclusionary.	If you are senior, actively create space for junior voices. If you are chairing, notice who is being talked over and intervene.
A Disabled colleague is told they are 'so brave' or described as 'inspirational' for doing their job. Also framed as: 'I could never do what you do.'	You are inadequate by default: it is surprising and impressive that you function.	Framing ordinary professional activity as brave or inspirational sets the bar for Disabled people lower than for others. It also instrumentalises their experience for others' motivation. This is sometimes called inspiration porn.	Comment on the work itself. Treat Disabled colleagues' achievements the same way you would treat anyone else's.
A colleague is told 'you speak really good English' or receives repeated comments about their accent. 'Your accent is so cute.'	You are inadequate by default: I did not expect competence from you, or your accent is exotic rather than professional.	The compliment implies surprise at language proficiency and marks the person as foreign regardless of how long they have lived in the country. Describing an accent as cute is patronising and diminishing.	Do not comment on language proficiency or accent unless directly relevant to the work.
A colleague from a northern English city is told they could 'speak to the cleaners'	You are inadequate for this professional	Class-based assumptions about accent and professional	Reflect on any assumptions you make about competence or status based on accent.

The Act	Message Communicated	Explanation	What to Say or Do Instead
because 'they speak like them.'	environment: your accent places you in a lower-status category.	belonging are deeply embedded in UK culture.	
A student is told by a professor that they will never get funded for a PhD because they are a girl from the North East.	You are inadequate for this career: your identity makes you unsuitable.	This illustrates how inadequacy messages are sometimes delivered directly by those in positions of power over career progression.	Do not make judgements about someone's career potential based on their identity.
A colleague is micromanaged or their professional judgement is routinely second-guessed without clear reason.	You are inadequate: I do not trust your competence.	Micromanagement communicates a lack of confidence in someone's abilities. When applied unevenly across a team it can reflect unconscious bias about who is trusted.	Reflect on whether you apply the same level of oversight to all team members. If not, ask yourself why.
Older, more senior male colleagues are introduced with their titles while younger female academics are not, or women are described as 'helpful' and 'kind' rather than 'strategic' or 'diplomatic.'	You are inadequate: you do not merit the same professional recognition as your male peers.	The language used to describe women's professional qualities is consistently more domestic and supportive than the language used for men. Even when intended positively, it communicates a lower professional status.	Apply the same descriptive language to equivalent roles and behaviours regardless of gender.
At an event, three male panel members are introduced by the host but the female panellist is not and is asked if she would like to introduce herself.	You are inadequate: your presence is not worth the same acknowledgement as your male peers.	Treating panellists differently based on gender communicates a hierarchy of whose expertise is considered worth announcing.	Apply the same introduction standard to all panellists.
Treating technical or professional services staff as lower value than scientific staff, or talking about administrators in derogatory terms.	You are inadequate: your role makes you less important than scientific staff.	Hierarchies of role value are deeply embedded in academic culture. They communicate to professional services and technical staff that their contribution is secondary.	Recognise the contribution of all roles explicitly. Challenge language that implies a hierarchy of importance.
Talking over postdocs or PhD students in meetings, or telling early career researchers to be quiet.	You are inadequate: your career stage means your voice does not count yet.	Silencing junior voices communicates that their ideas and perspectives have no value until they have reached a certain level of seniority.	Actively create space for junior voices in meetings.
A researcher publicly and repeatedly blames an administrator for not supporting an event when the administrator had requested six months in advance that the event be scheduled at a more suitable time.	You are inadequate: your professional judgement is disregarded and you are blamed for the consequences.	Ignoring professional advice from a support colleague and then publicly attributing the resulting problem to them combines two acts of exclusion.	Take professional advice from support colleagues seriously. Do not publicly attribute problems to people whose advice you chose not to follow.
A vendor says: 'The women here are doing an amazing job considering all they have to balance with family too.'	You are inadequate by default: it is remarkable that you are performing well given your	Framing women's professional performance as notable in light of their family responsibilities communicates that domestic life is an impediment that makes achievement surprising.	Comment on the work itself without reference to gender or family responsibilities.

The Act	Message Communicated	Explanation	What to Say or Do Instead
	domestic responsibilities.		
Wide promotion of content implying physical ability or particular ways of working, such as outdoor walking, are necessary for good leadership or good science.	You are inadequate: you cannot be a good leader or scientist if you cannot do this.	Content that ties leadership or excellence to physical ability or specific working styles communicates that Disabled, Neurodivergent and other people who work differently are inadequate for senior roles.	Review the implicit assumptions in the content you promote. Ask who is included and who is excluded.
Using a baby voice or over-simplified language when speaking to a wheelchair user.	You are inadequate: I assume physical disability means intellectual limitation.	Using a different register when speaking to Disabled people communicates that you do not see them as full intellectual equals.	Use the same register you would use with any colleague.
A professional services colleague is asked: 'Why do you need to go to a conference?'	You are inadequate: professional development is for academic staff, not support staff.	Questioning why a professional services colleague would attend a conference communicates that their professional development is less valid or necessary than that of academic colleagues.	Apply the same attitude to professional development opportunities for all staff regardless of role.
Perpetuating harmful and outdated men versus women stereotypes in the workplace.	You are inadequate: your gender determines your capabilities and limitations.	Gender stereotypes communicate fixed assumptions about what men and women can and cannot do, limiting people before they have had the chance to demonstrate their actual capabilities.	Challenge gender stereotypes when you hear them. Evaluate individuals on their actual performance and capabilities.
Calling on men for questions after a seminar rather than women. Not giving women an equal opportunity to ask questions or contribute.	You are inadequate: your contribution to the intellectual discussion is not as valued.	Disproportionately calling on men for questions or contributions communicates that male intellectual engagement is more valued.	Actively monitor who you call on in sessions you chair. Make a deliberate effort to invite contributions from all participants.
Assuming elderly colleagues are hard of hearing and speaking loudly to them without being asked.	You are inadequate: I assume age means sensory decline.	Not all older people have hearing difficulties. Assuming they do and adjusting behaviour accordingly without being asked communicates that you have made a judgement about their capacity based on age alone.	Speak at your normal volume unless asked to speak more loudly. Let the person tell you what they need.
Assuming young or junior-looking colleagues can be told what to do, or that they are automatically junior regardless of their actual role.	You are inadequate: your age or appearance means you have low status.	Assuming seniority from appearance communicates that age and appearance are proxies for authority, which disadvantages younger colleagues and those who look younger than their role.	Do not make assumptions about seniority from age or appearance. Treat everyone with the same professional respect until their role is clear.
Assuming older colleagues cannot use computers or digital tools, or offering unsolicited help with technology.	You are inadequate: your age means you are behind with technology.	Assumptions about older people's technology skills communicate that age is a proxy for digital incompetence.	Do not offer unsolicited technology help based on age. If a colleague needs support, they will ask for it.
Asking someone for their age inappropriately, or	You are inadequate: your	Age-based jokes and comments communicate that	Do not ask for someone's age unless legally required.

The Act	Message Communicated	Explanation	What to Say or Do Instead
making jokes implying they are too young or too old to understand something.	age makes you unsuitable or limited.	a person's value or capability is determined by how old they are.	Do not make jokes that imply age determines understanding or capability.
Making jokes about older colleagues' lack of ability or experience with digital tools or new technology. Also: you are not normal.	You are inadequate: your generation cannot keep up.	Age-based technology jokes communicate that older colleagues are a source of amusement and that their experience and expertise matter less than digital fluency.	Do not make jokes that tie technological ability to age. Offer support if needed and asked for.

3. You Are Not an Individual

The Act	Message Communicated	Explanation	What to Say or Do Instead
A person is asked to speak on behalf of all members of their racial, gender, sexuality or other identity group, or is assumed to share the views of everyone from that group.	You are not an individual: you are a representative of your group.	No individual can or should speak for an entire group. This expectation reduces people to their identity and is also an additional unpaid labour burden on marginalised people.	Ask the individual for their own perspective. Make clear you are interested in what they think, not what their demographic thinks.
Two colleagues from the same (or different!) ethnic background(s) are repeatedly mistaken for each other despite looking quite different. Two colleagues with larger bodies are repeatedly mistaken for each other despite having different hair colours and accents.	You are not an individual: I do not distinguish between people who look like you.	Confusing people from the same racial or ethnic group communicates that you do not see them as distinct individuals. The same message is sent to plus size colleagues.	Make the effort to learn people's names and roles, take note of distinguishing characteristics.
A South Asian colleague is assumed to have a large family or to follow particular cultural practices.	You are not an individual: I am responding to a stereotype of your group.	Cultural assumptions, however well-intentioned, reduce people to a generalisation.	Get to know people through conversation rather than through assumptions about their background.
A member of a minority group is always the person used in diversity photos or communications, tokenising their visible difference.	You are not an individual: you are a symbol of diversity.	Tokenism uses people's visible identity for institutional benefit without genuinely including them.	Ensure representation is genuine and widespread. Ask people whether they are comfortable being represented in this way.
Assuming all people of East Asian heritage are from China, or reducing people to their nationality: 'the Chinese' rather than 'our collaborators at [institution].'	You are not an individual: all people who look like you or come from your region are the same to me.	Reducing the enormous diversity of East Asian heritage to a single nationality, or reducing people to their nationality rather than their professional identity, communicates that you do not see them as distinct individuals.	Do not assume nationality from appearance. Use specific names, roles or institutions.
Assuming every member of a minority group wants to be or is actively engaged in EDI advocacy, or asking them to provide free	You are not an individual: your identity makes EDI your responsibility.	EDI work is disproportionately expected of people from marginalised groups. This is an additional and unrecognised labour burden.	Do not assume that membership of a marginalised group makes someone responsible for EDI work. Recognise and

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emotional labour or education on EDI topics.			compensate EDI contributions properly.
Assuming a person's partner is the opposite sex to them, for example asking what department 'he' works in when a female colleague mentions their partner.	You are not an individual: I am mapping a heterosexual template onto your life. Also: you are not normal.	Defaulting to heterosexual assumptions erases LGBTQ+ relationships and requires people to correct or explain themselves in a way that straight colleagues never have to.	Use neutral language until you know more. 'What does your partner do?' rather than 'what does your husband or wife do?'
Assuming that long-term couples are or are not married, or that the absence of a wedding ring means someone is not married.	You are not an individual: I am applying my own assumptions about relationships to you.	Relationship structures are enormously varied. Making assumptions about marital status communicates that there is a standard relationship template everyone should conform to.	Do not make assumptions about relationship or marital status. Use the language the person uses to describe their own relationship.
Assuming someone's sexual orientation because of the gender of their partner, for example assuming someone is straight because they appear to be in a heterosexual relationship.	You are not an individual: I am categorising your sexuality from what I can observe.	Assuming sexual orientation from the gender of a partner erases bisexual, pansexual and other identities.	Do not assume sexual orientation from the gender of a partner.
Telling members of marginalised groups to 'be more positive' about EDI efforts, or saying 'things could be much worse.'	You are not an individual with valid concerns: your experience of exclusion should be minimised.	Asking people to be more positive about EDI efforts communicates that their concerns are an overreaction and that institutional comfort matters more than their experience.	Listen to concerns about EDI without asking people to moderate how they express them. 'Things could be worse' is never a helpful response to someone's experience of exclusion.
'You're not like other millennials' said as a compliment.	You are not an individual: I have been applying a negative stereotype to your generation and you are the exception.	This comment communicates that the speaker holds a negative generalisation about an entire generation and is treating this person as an exception. It is a compliment that insults everyone else in the group.	Do not apply generational stereotypes. Evaluate people as individuals.
Giving a colleague a nickname without their permission because you find their actual name difficult to say or remember.	You are not an individual: your actual name is less important than my comfort.	Substituting a nickname for a name the person has not offered communicates that their identity as expressed through their name is less important than the convenience of the speaker. This is distinct from asking permission to use a shortened version, which is respectful.	Ask the person what they would like to be called. If their name is unfamiliar, make the effort to learn it rather than substituting your own version. Pronunciation guides are often available online.

4. You Do Not Belong

The Act	Message Communicated	Explanation	What to Say or Do Instead
'Where are you really from?' or 'No, but where are you originally from?' Also: 'You speak English really well.'	You do not belong here: you are from somewhere else regardless of where you were	These questions imply that a person's appearance or accent makes them a foreigner permanently. The 'really' or 'originally' communicates that	Accept the answer you are given when you ask where someone is from. Do not follow up with 'originally' or

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	born or how long you have lived here.	the first answer was not satisfactory. Comments about English proficiency reinforce this.	'really.' Do not comment on English proficiency.
Social events are always held in pubs or venues centred around alcohol. Only arranging events around alcohol or bars.	You do not belong if alcohol does not fit your life.	Many people do not drink for religious, cultural, medical or personal reasons. Events that centre alcohol exclude them from the social connection that is part of team belonging.	Vary social formats. Include options that do not centre alcohol. Hold at least some key social activities during working hours so people with caring responsibilities can attend.
Not providing halal, kosher or vegetarian options at catered events, or not asking about dietary requirements in advance. Catered lunches that heavily contain pork or have no halal options.	You do not belong: your dietary needs are not part of our default planning.	Failing to ask about dietary requirements as standard forces people with restrictions to self-advocate or go without.	Ask about dietary requirements as standard before any catered event. Make clear this includes religious requirements, not only allergies. Always offer a vegetarian dish as default.
Scheduling important meetings or events on religious holidays, forcing the person to miss the meeting or compromise their religious practice.	You do not belong: the default calendar does not account for you.	Scheduling without awareness of religious observance forces people to choose between their faith and their professional participation.	Check major religious and cultural dates before scheduling important events.
A colleague's Neurodivergence is referred to as an excuse or something they lean on. References to Neurodivergence as an excuse to not do things.	You do not belong unless you perform neurotypical norms.	Framing Neurodivergent needs as excuses communicates that the neurotypical standard is the only valid one.	Treat reasonable adjustments as the norm they are.
Assuming that someone who is Jewish does or does not observe kosher dietary rules, or making assumptions about the extent of any individual's religious practice.	You do not belong as a full individual: I am applying a generic version of your religion to you.	Religious practice varies enormously between individuals. Applying assumptions communicates that you see the religion before the person.	Ask rather than assume. 'Do you have any dietary requirements?' is more respectful than assuming the answer.
Not asking if there are any access needs before a meeting, seminar or reception with food, or not providing a point of contact for reasonable adjustments.	You do not belong if your needs differ from the default. Also: you are a burden.	Failing to ask about access needs as standard forces Disabled people and others with specific requirements to self-advocate in every setting.	Ask about access needs as standard before any event. Make clear there is a named person people can contact.
Talking about how 'civilised' the UK is relative to other countries in terms of marriage equality.	You do not belong in the same category as us: your country of origin is less advanced.	Framing marriage equality as a marker of civilisation communicates a hierarchy between countries and cultures that others colleagues from countries where LGBTQ+ rights are less advanced.	Be aware of colleagues who may be from countries where their identity is criminalised. Do not use national comparisons that implicitly rank people's home countries.
Not treating adoptive parents as 'real' parents.	You do not belong in the same category as biological parents.	Treating adoptive parenthood as less valid communicates that only biological family structures are legitimate.	Treat all parents the same regardless of how their family was formed.
Asking women why they do not have children, telling them their biological clock is	You do not belong in your current life stage: you are	Questions about reproductive choices are deeply personal and communicate that	Do not ask questions about reproductive choices or

The Act	Message Communicated	Explanation	What to Say or Do Instead
ticking, or asking when they are going to start a family.	expected to follow a particular path. Also: you are a burden.	women's lives are subject to public assessment.	family planning. These are private matters.
Assuming that only the major religions exist, or not providing space or understanding that other religions exist including ones you may not have heard of.	You do not belong: your faith is too obscure to be considered.	Designing events, communications and spaces around only the most commonly known religions communicates that less well-known faiths and their requirements are not worth accommodating.	When asking about dietary or other requirements, make clear you are asking about all religious, cultural and personal needs, not only those you are already aware of.
December office decorations that are predominantly Christmas-themed with at most a token nod to Hanukkah, communicating that Christmas is the default.	You do not belong: this space is designed for people who celebrate Christmas.	Treating Christmas as the default winter celebration communicates that non-Christian staff are guests in a space designed for others.	Either celebrate a genuinely wide range of winter celebrations or keep seasonal decorations secular. Do not assume all staff celebrate Christmas.
Prayers before work meetings that make atheist or non-religious colleagues feel unable to speak up or opt out.	You do not belong: religious practice is assumed as the default in this space.	Beginning professional meetings with prayer communicates that religious practice is the default and that those who do not share it must either participate or identify themselves as different.	Keep professional meetings secular unless all participants have specifically agreed otherwise.
Use of antiquated language such as 'third world country' when referring to developing nations, or 'Oriental' when referring to people or cultures from East or Southeast Asia.	You do not belong in the same category as us: language that diminishes your country or region is used without awareness of its history.	These terms carry histories of colonialism and hierarchy. 'Third world' implies a ranking of nations with Western nations at the top. 'Oriental' reduces the enormous diversity of East and Southeast Asian cultures to a single exoticised category.	Use 'Global South' or specific country or region names rather than 'third world.' Use specific geographic, national or ethnic descriptors.

5. You Are Not Normal

The Act	Message Communicated	Explanation	What to Say or Do Instead
A gay colleague is told: 'I didn't realise you were gay, you don't talk like you are.' Also: 'I wish I was a lesbian/gay.'	You are not normal: gay people are supposed to look and sound a certain way, and it is noteworthy that you do not.	The first comment enforces a stereotype of how gay people are supposed to present. The second trivialises LGBTQ+ identity by treating it as a desirable attribute to try on.	Do not comment on whether someone conforms to or defies stereotypes associated with their identity. Do not treat someone's identity as something you might wish you had.
Eye contact is cited as a requirement for demonstrating attention, engagement or respect.	You are not normal if you do not communicate in neurotypical ways.	For many Neurodivergent people, direct eye contact is not a natural or comfortable way to connect. Treating it as a universal standard is an act of exclusion.	Be open to multiple ways of demonstrating engagement. Do not interpret the absence of eye contact as disrespect or inattention.
A colleague who uses a different communication style, for example more	You are not normal: your cultural or	Communication norms vary significantly across cultures and Neurodivergent profiles.	Seek to understand the communication context before making a judgement.

The Act	Message Communicated	Explanation	What to Say or Do Instead
direct or more indirect than the local norm, is consistently read as rude, aggressive or passive.	neurological communication style is a deficit.	Applying a single standard ignores this variation.	
A colleague posts about Dyslexia Awareness Day and receives a defensive email from a senior manager asking for examples of how the team is not inclusive for Dyslexic people.	You are not normal for raising this: awareness of difference is unwelcome.	Responding defensively to awareness-raising signals that discussing difference is unwelcome and discourages future efforts.	Respond with curiosity and openness rather than defensiveness. Thank people for raising awareness.
Use of ableist language: 'manic', 'lame', 'crazy', 'double-blind review', 'deaf to my suggestions', 'dwarf', 'midget.'	You are not normal: language that pathologises or diminishes your identity is used casually.	Casual use of ableist language normalises the idea that certain conditions or physical characteristics are inherently negative or comical.	Use 'really busy' instead of manic, 'not very useful' instead of lame, 'doesn't make sense' instead of crazy, 'double-anonymous review' instead of double-blind, 'not listening' instead of deaf to, 'little person' instead of dwarf or midget.
Use of the word 'gay' to mean weak, ineffectual or strange.	You are not normal: your identity is used as an insult.	Using gay as a pejorative communicates that gay identity is something negative or lesser. Even when not directed at a gay person, it is heard by everyone in the room.	Challenge this usage when you hear it. A simple 'that's not okay' is an effective response.
Misuse of mental health terminology: 'I'm so OCD about tidying' or 'I'm so triggered by X' when not referencing genuine trauma.	You are not normal: your diagnosis is casual shorthand for a mild preference.	Using clinical terms casually trivialises the conditions they describe.	Use everyday language for everyday experiences.
Telling someone they 'don't seem' to have depression, OCD, bipolar disorder or another mental health condition.	You are not normal if you have this condition, but you seem normal, so I question your diagnosis.	Invalidating someone's diagnosis because they do not conform to a stereotype is deeply harmful. It communicates that their experience requires your validation.	Do not comment on whether someone's presentation of a condition matches your expectations.
Making ill-informed comparisons: 'I understand depression because I've had episodes of low mood.'	You are not normal for having a clinical condition: what you experience is the same as what everyone experiences.	Comparing clinical conditions with ordinary emotional experiences communicates that the person's condition is being minimised.	Listen without comparing. 'I can't fully understand your experience but I want to' is more honest and more respectful.
Asking people who are religious how they can possibly be scientists, implying a natural conflict between religion and science.	You are not normal: your identity and your profession are assumed to be incompatible.	The assumption that science and religion are incompatible is both factually wrong and othering.	Do not make assumptions about the relationship between someone's faith and their professional capacity.
A woman balks at a colleague using the pronoun 'they' for a nonbinary person because 'it doesn't make grammatical sense.'	You are not normal: your identity is too grammatically inconvenient to accommodate.	Using grammatical arguments to resist using someone's correct pronouns communicates that the speaker's comfort with	Use the pronouns people ask you to use. The singular 'they' has been in common usage in English for centuries.

The Act	Message Communicated	Explanation	What to Say or Do Instead
		language matters more than the person's identity.	
Perpetuating harmful and outdated men versus women stereotypes, or making inappropriate gender-based jokes in the workplace including during social events.	You are not normal if you do not conform to gender stereotypes.	Gender stereotypes and jokes that rely on them communicate fixed and limiting ideas about what men and women are like.	Challenge gender stereotypes and gender-based jokes when you hear them, including in social settings.
Assuming all trans people undergo gender affirmation treatment or surgery, or asking when they are going to 'fix' their body or 'have the surgery.'	You are not normal until you have completed a medical process I have decided is necessary.	Trans identity does not require surgery or medical treatment to be valid. These questions communicate that a trans person's identity is conditional on conforming to a particular medical narrative.	Do not ask about surgery or medical treatment. A trans person's body is their own business.
Assuming everyone must be male or female and not being aware that nonbinary people exist.	You are not normal: binary gender is assumed to be universal.	Designing systems, communications and spaces around a binary gender assumption communicates that nonbinary people are not considered.	Where gender is collected in forms or systems, include nonbinary and self-describe options. Use gender-neutral language in communications where possible.
Making suggestions about how a person with mental health issues could get better, such as 'Why don't you try yoga?' or 'Have you tried exercise?'	You are not normal: I know how to fix you.	Unsolicited advice about managing mental health communicates that the person's condition is something others feel entitled to have opinions about and that their existing management approaches are inadequate.	Unless you are the person's healthcare provider, do not offer unsolicited suggestions about managing mental health conditions. Ask instead how you can support them.
Assuming LGBTQ+ people can be identified by a rainbow lanyard or other visible signifier.	You are not normal: I am trying to categorise your sexuality from visible cues.	Assuming that visible LGBTQ+ symbols mean someone is LGBTQ+ communicates that you are actively trying to categorise people's sexuality from external signals.	Do not try to infer someone's sexual orientation or gender identity from visible symbols or cues.
A one-off mispronunciation of a trans or nonbinary colleague's pronouns before correcting yourself.	You are not normal: your identity requires adjustment from the people around you.	A single mistake with pronouns is unintentional and human. What matters is that you correct yourself, apologise briefly and move on without making a performance of it. Over-apologising can shift focus back onto the person and create discomfort.	Correct yourself simply: 'They — sorry, she —' and continue. A brief apology is fine. Do not dwell on it or apologise repeatedly.
A person cisplains a nonbinary or trans colleague's gender identity to others, or makes assumptions about what their identity means.	You are not normal: I feel I understand your gender identity better than you do.	Explaining someone's gender identity to others without their permission, or correcting how they describe themselves, communicates that their own account of their identity is not authoritative.	Accept how people describe their own gender identity. Do not explain it to others on their behalf without being asked.

6. You Are a Curiosity

The Act	Message Communicated	Explanation	What to Say or Do Instead
A colleague spots a photo of a same-sex partner on someone's desk and asks: 'What happened to you with men?' followed by 'Why don't you have children?'	You are a curiosity: your identity invites personal questions that would not be asked of straight colleagues.	LGBTQ+ people are frequently asked intrusive personal questions that their straight colleagues are never asked. The curiosity, however well-intentioned, communicates that their life is unusual and open to examination.	Apply the same standard to everyone. Ask yourself whether you would ask the same question of a straight colleague. If not, do not ask it.
A trans colleague is told: 'You don't look trans,' meant as a compliment.	You are a curiosity: trans people are supposed to look a certain way, and it is noteworthy that you do not.	This comment enforces a stereotype of how trans people are supposed to present. Even when intended as a compliment, it communicates that the person's trans identity is something to be evaluated.	'You look great' is a compliment that does not require reference to their trans identity.
Asking intrusive questions about a trans person's body, surgery, genitals or sex life. Asking which sex they were assigned at birth or for their deadname.	You are a curiosity: your body and history are available for examination.	Trans people are routinely asked questions about their bodies that would be considered deeply inappropriate if directed at cisgender people. Medical history and anatomy are private.	Do not ask about surgery, genitals, deadnames or assigned sex. These are private matters.
A colleague's hair is touched without consent because it is different from what others are used to, or racialised physical features are commented on: 'I'm almost as dark as you.'	You are a curiosity: your body is available for examination and comment.	Touching someone's hair without permission is a physical violation. When it happens because the hair is associated with a particular racial identity, it communicates that the person's body is an object of curiosity.	Do not touch anyone's hair, body or possessions without permission. Do not comment on racialised physical features.
A Muslim colleague is asked about their hijab or Muslim identity in a way that treats it as exotic or unusual.	You are a curiosity: your faith and how you practice it are subjects for my education.	Questions about religious dress and practice become exclusionary when they are one-directional, treating the person as a source of education for others' curiosity.	Reflect on whether this is the right context and relationship for that conversation. Do not treat religious dress as an open invitation to question.
Asking 'You're Korean? I was so close' after guessing someone's nationality incorrectly from their appearance.	You are a curiosity: I was trying to categorise you by how you look.	This communicates that the person was being examined and categorised based on appearance.	Do not guess people's nationality from their appearance.
Making jokes using mock versions of other languages or accents: 'No problemo', 'grassy ass' instead of gracias.	You are a curiosity: your language and culture can be used as entertainment.	Using another language as entertainment, particularly in the presence of speakers of that language, communicates that their culture is an object of amusement.	Do not use other languages or accents as comedy.
A window fixer says to a female homeowner: 'Do you have a partner? We'll have to wait for him to be home.'	You are a curiosity: I assume you need a male partner to make decisions about your home.	Assuming that a woman needs a male partner present to authorise work on her own home communicates that female authority is limited or conditional.	Address the person who is present and treat them as the decision-maker.
Asking intrusive questions about someone's sexuality: 'Are you a top or a bottom?' Making jokes about	You are a curiosity: your sexual identity is a	Intrusive questions and jokes about sexual identity communicate that LGBTQ+ identities are unusual enough	Do not ask intrusive questions about sexual practice. Do not make jokes about sexual identities.

The Act	Message Communicated	Explanation	What to Say or Do Instead
pansexuality: 'Does that mean you're attracted to pans?'	subject for jokes or questions.	to require explanation or that they are appropriate subjects for comedy.	
Approaching a service dog, trying to pet it, or drawing attention to it.	You are a curiosity: your disability aid is an object of interest.	Service dogs are working animals. Distracting them or drawing attention to them communicates that the Disabled person and their equipment are an object of curiosity rather than a colleague going about their work.	Do not interact with service dogs. Do not comment on or draw attention to disability aids.
A colleague with an invisible disability has their use of a disabled toilet or lift questioned or receives a suspicious look.	You are a curiosity: I am trying to work out if you really need this. Also: you are a threat.	Many disabilities are invisible. Questioning whether someone really needs an accessible facility communicates that visible conformity to an idea of disability is required before adjustments are legitimate.	Do not police others' use of accessible facilities. Not all disabilities are visible.
Asking why someone is in a wheelchair or what their diagnosis is without being invited to do so.	You are a curiosity: your disability is something for me to understand and categorise.	Uninvited questions about the cause of someone's disability or their diagnosis communicate that their condition is something for others to examine rather than simply a part of who they are.	Do not ask about the cause of a disability or someone's diagnosis unless they have invited that conversation.
'I don't even see you as Black' said as a compliment to a Black colleague.	You are a curiosity: you are acceptable to me because I have decided to look past your race.	This is distinct from general colour-blindness. It communicates that the person's racial identity is something to be looked past rather than simply a part of who they are, and that the speaker has made a personal determination to overlook it.	A person's race is not something to look past. 'I value who you are' does not require you to erase their identity.
'You people' when referring to a group defined by a shared identity.	You are a curiosity: you are fundamentally different from us and I am grouping you together.	The phrase creates a separation between the speaker and the group being referred to, communicating that they are a distinct and homogenous category.	Refer to people by their names, roles or specific identities. 'You people' is never an appropriate way to address or refer to a group.
Commenting on a colleague using a different mobility aid than usual, or commenting on any visible aspect of someone's disability management even positively.	You are a curiosity: your disability and how you manage it are subjects for comment.	Drawing attention to changes in how a Disabled person is managing their condition communicates that their disability is subject to monitoring and commentary by others.	Unless there is a direct and practical reason to ask, let people manage their own conditions without commentary.
Making a big deal of getting someone's pronoun wrong and apologising profusely, putting the burden on the offended person to comfort the apologise.	You are a curiosity: your identity requires a performance of correction from me.	Over-apologising after a pronoun mistake shifts the focus from the person affected to the person who made the mistake. It creates a situation where the person who was misgendered must now manage the feelings of the person who misgendered them.	Apologise briefly, correct yourself and move on. The person does not need to manage your feelings about your mistake.

7. You Are a Threat

The Act	Message Communicated	Explanation	What to Say or Do Instead
Purse is clutched, car is locked, or street is crossed when a Black man approaches.	You are a threat: I am afraid of you because of your race.	These physical responses communicate fear or suspicion based on racial identity. Even when unconscious, they are visible to the person on the receiving end.	Notice your physical responses in different situations. Ask yourself what is driving them. If it is not actual evidence of threat, examine the assumption.
A woman is described as 'bossy' or 'aggressive' for behaviour that would be described as 'assertive' or 'decisive' in a male colleague.	You are a threat: female authority is read as aggression.	The language used to describe women's leadership behaviour is consistently more negative than the language used for equivalent male behaviour.	Apply the same descriptive language to equivalent behaviours regardless of gender.
A female African student is described as 'hysterical' by a male professor with no attempt to understand her communication style or cultural context, and is dealt with in a patronising way.	You are a threat: your emotional expression is pathological.	Labelling emotional expression as hysterical or unreasonable, particularly when applied to Black women, has a long and harmful history.	Before labelling someone's emotional expression, ask whether you are responding to the content of what they are saying or the way it is being said.
A colleague who raises concerns about inclusion or discrimination is labelled a troublemaker or difficult.	You are a threat: you challenge the status quo and that is unwelcome.	People who raise concerns about exclusion are often penalised for doing so. This communicates that maintaining comfort for the dominant group matters more than addressing harm.	Respond to concerns about inclusion with curiosity and openness. Thank people for raising them.
Discussions of 'benefit scroungers', 'fakers' or 'fraudsters' in the context of disability or mental health.	You are a threat: people who claim support may be taking advantage.	These conversations, even when not directed at a specific person, communicate suspicion towards anyone who claims support or adjustments. The rate of fraudulent benefit claims is vastly overstated in public discourse.	Challenge these conversations when you hear them.
A female colleague is repeatedly told to smile more by a male colleague.	You are a threat: your natural expression is unwelcome and needs to be managed.	Telling someone to smile more communicates that their natural emotional expression is inappropriate and that their face should perform positivity for others' comfort. This is disproportionately directed at women.	Do not tell colleagues to smile or manage their facial expressions.
Making unwarranted comments on the appearance or attractiveness of colleagues in professional contexts.	You are a threat to professional norms: your physical presence is being evaluated rather than your professional contribution.	Commenting on appearance in professional settings communicates that the person is being assessed physically rather than professionally.	Keep comments about appearance out of professional contexts unless directly relevant.
Refusing to use a microphone or accessibility tool, saying 'I don't need this, my voice is loud' or making jokes about using it.	You are a threat to spontaneous interaction: your access needs are an inconvenience	Refusing to use microphones or other accessibility tools communicates that the speaker's preferred style matters more than the access needs of audience members.	Use microphones and other accessibility tools when requested or when they are provided. They are not optional extras.

The Act	Message Communicated	Explanation	What to Say or Do Instead
	to how I prefer to present.		

8. You Are a Burden

The Act	Message Communicated	Explanation	What to Say or Do Instead
A colleague asks to work from home to attend their child's school assembly and receives a sigh, a pointed comment, or is made to feel their request is an inconvenience. Offhand comments that make people feel their parenting responsibilities are seen as excuses.	You are a burden: your caring responsibilities are a problem for the team.	Responses that communicate inconvenience when caring responsibilities are raised signal that the default worker is one without caring responsibilities.	Respond to caring-related requests with the same practicality you would bring to any other flexible working request. Do not editorialise about the reason.
A Neurodivergent or Disabled colleague's request for reasonable adjustments is treated as special treatment or an imposition.	You are a burden: your needs are excessive.	Reasonable adjustments exist to create a level playing field. Treating them as special treatment communicates that the default standard is fair and that asking for adjustments is asking for more than you deserve.	Treat reasonable adjustment requests as standard professional practice.
A colleague with a mental health condition is told that emotional PhD students are viewed as weak and PIs do not want weak students.	You are a burden: your mental health is a professional liability.	This communicates that expressing any emotion is incompatible with professional credibility, creating an environment where people feel unsafe disclosing mental health needs.	Create an environment where people feel safe to be human. Distinguish between emotional expression and professional competence.
A woman expecting her first child has hospital appointments questioned, is asked to rearrange them around work, or has colleagues sigh when she mentions them. Comments about who is looking after the kids, particularly directed at women.	You are a burden: your pregnancy and caring responsibilities are an inconvenience.	Pregnancy is a legally protected characteristic. Treating medical appointments as an imposition communicates that the person's health matters less than operational convenience.	Apply the same flexibility to pregnancy-related medical appointments as you would to any other medical need. Do not editorialise.
A colleague with a disability that prevents full-time work is complained about for not answering emails outside their working hours.	You are a burden: your capacity is less than the team needs.	Part-time working, whether by choice or necessity, does not make someone less committed.	Respect contracted working hours for all colleagues.
A heavily pregnant colleague is asked by a male colleague to get on the floor and plug in his laptop charger at a committee meeting.	You are a burden if you cannot perform the same physical tasks as everyone else.	Asking a pregnant person to perform a physically awkward task communicates either a lack of awareness or a lack of consideration for their circumstances.	Be physically aware of the people around you and what is reasonable to ask of them.
A colleague says: 'She's off, popping out another sprog,' about a colleague on maternity leave.	You are a burden: your reproductive choices are an inconvenience and	Casual language that diminishes pregnancy communicates that having	Speak about colleagues on leave with the same respect you would use in their presence.

The Act	Message Communicated	Explanation	What to Say or Do Instead
	a source of ridicule.	children is something that inconveniences the team.	
Offering to pray for Disabled people, treating them with pity, or treating disability as shameful.	You are a burden to yourself and others: disability is a tragedy to be overcome or mourned.	Framing disability as something to be pitied or prayed over communicates that the Disabled person's life is diminished.	Follow the lead of Disabled people in how they talk about their own disability.
Making negative comments about colleagues changing to part-time working after having a baby, or assuming they are less committed.	You are a burden: your changed working pattern is an inconvenience.	Negative reactions to part-time working after maternity leave communicate that full-time availability is the price of professional respect.	Treat part-time working with the same respect as any other contracted working arrangement.
Not being flexible when colleagues ask to work from home to attend a child's assembly or school event.	You are a burden: your family commitments should not intrude on work.	Inflexibility around family events communicates that professional belonging is conditional on prioritising work over family.	Where operationally possible, accommodate reasonable requests to attend family events. Model this from leadership.
Repeatedly offering assistance to a Disabled person after they have declined it.	You are a burden: I have decided you need help regardless of what you say.	Continuing to offer assistance after it has been declined communicates that the person's assessment of their own needs is not trusted.	Offer assistance once. Accept the answer you receive.
During an interview, a manager subtly asks probing questions to determine whether a woman is interested in having children.	You are a burden: your reproductive potential is a risk factor for us.	Probing questions about family plans during recruitment communicate that women's reproductive choices are a factor in hiring decisions. This is also potentially unlawful.	Do not ask about family plans, relationship status or reproductive intentions in interviews.
A colleague slipped a disc in their neck opening a door on campus. A member of the Estates team came and told them they did not know how to open a door properly and showed them how.	You are a burden: your injury is an occasion for instruction rather than support.	Responding to someone's injury with criticism of their behaviour rather than care communicates that the instinct is to assign blame rather than offer help.	Respond to colleagues' injuries and difficulties with care first.
Holding meetings in inaccessible rooms, such as those requiring stairs or those that are difficult for people with hearing issues, when a person with access needs is likely to attend.	You are a burden: accommodating your access needs is not worth changing where we meet.	Holding meetings in inaccessible rooms communicates that the access needs of Disabled colleagues are less important than convenience for others.	Check accessibility requirements before booking meeting rooms. If the usual room is inaccessible, find an alternative rather than asking the Disabled person to manage.
Assuming only visible Disabled people are on site, or assuming disabilities are either fully present or not present at all rather than existing on a spectrum.	You are a burden if your disability is not obvious enough to be believed.	Many disabilities are invisible or variable. Treating disability as binary communicates that people must visibly perform their disability to have their needs taken seriously.	Do not make assumptions about who is Disabled based on appearance. Do not question whether someone's disability is severe enough to merit support.
'But you could do it yesterday, why can't you today?' said to someone whose disability affects them variably.	You are a burden: your inconsistency is inconvenient and suspicious.	Many conditions fluctuate. Expecting consistent performance communicates that variable capacity is a choice.	Accept that capacity can vary day to day. Respond to what a colleague needs today rather than comparing to what they could do yesterday.
Shouting at someone who is Deaf, unless they have asked you to speak more loudly.	You are a burden: I am performing accommodation for you in a way	Shouting at a Deaf person without being asked to does not help and communicates that the speaker's attempt at	Ask the Deaf person what communication method works best for them. Do not assume shouting helps.

The Act	Message Communicated	Explanation	What to Say or Do Instead
	that is about my discomfort, not your actual need.	accommodation is more about being seen to try than about what the person actually needs.	
Using 'wheelchair bound' to describe a wheelchair user rather than 'wheelchair user.'	You are a burden: your wheelchair confines you.	The phrase 'wheelchair bound' frames the wheelchair as a limitation rather than a mobility aid that enables independence.	Use 'wheelchair user.' The wheelchair enables mobility; it does not confine.
Expecting wheelchair users to look up at a standing colleague during a conversation rather than the colleague taking a seat or crouching to eye level.	You are a burden: I will not adjust my position to communicate with you on equal terms.	Expecting someone to strain their neck to look up at you communicates that your physical comfort takes priority over theirs.	If you are having a sustained conversation with someone in a wheelchair, find a way to get to their level rather than expecting them to look up at you.

9. Examples of Intentional Acts of Exclusion

The Act	Message Communicated	Explanation	What to Say or Do Instead
A person refuses to use a trans colleague's correct pronouns, persistently and after being asked to change.	Intentional exclusion: deliberate refusal to acknowledge someone's identity.	A one-off mistake with pronouns is unintentional. A persistent refusal after correction is intentional.	This requires a formal response through your organisation's HR and disciplinary processes.
A supervisor deliberately excludes someone from lab meetings or withholds information about research opportunities such as grants because of who they are.	Intentional exclusion: deliberate withholding of professional opportunities.	Using positional power to prevent someone from accessing professional development is intentional exclusion. It is particularly harmful in academic settings where access to opportunities is controlled by a small number of people.	This requires a formal response through your organisation's HR and disciplinary processes.
A group leader refuses to refer someone for opportunities unless they comply with demands unrelated to their work.	Intentional exclusion: using career leverage as a control mechanism.	Conditioning professional support on personal compliance is an abuse of the power that group leaders hold over the careers of those they supervise.	This requires a formal response through your organisation's HR and disciplinary processes.
Using deliberately derogatory language against a person or group: homophobic, racist, sexist or ableist slurs.	Intentional exclusion: deliberate communication of hostility based on identity.	The use of slurs is always intentional. It communicates that the person is not a full member of the community and that their identity is a source of contempt.	This requires an immediate response and a formal process through your organisation's HR and disciplinary procedures.
A colleague makes repeated derogatory comments after being told they are unwelcome. Behaviour that continues after being raised and addressed.	Intentional exclusion: continued harm after the opportunity to change has been given.	An unintentional act becomes intentional when it is repeated after being flagged. At that point the person has chosen to continue causing harm.	This requires a formal response through your organisation's HR and disciplinary processes. Document the date and content of previous conversations.

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