

# Micro Aggressions & 'Polite Policing'

Participants often highlighted their experience of micro-aggressions over overt-aggressions when discussing experiences of discrimination. There were, however, a number of experiences that could be classed as being closer to overt than micro, suggesting that there may be a pattern in the way the participants viewed discrimination, in addition to there potentially being a greater impact from covert discrimination over overt discrimination in the lives of disabled arts workers. A number of participants also cited an experience of repeated public 'call-outs' regarding their disability with the intention of helping them to 'fit' or 'exist' in spaces that they were in 'better'. That these call-outs were handled often with a sense of 'politeness' or 'appropriateness'. This led, in the research project, to the term 'Polite Policing'.



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Topics covered were:

**Topic 1:** Ableism Closer to Overt

**Topic 2:** Ableism Closer to Covert

**Topic 3:** 'Polite Policing'

**Topic 4:** Job Application Fears and Issues

*Please note all documents have been written for screen reading software.*

## Topic 1: Ableism Closer to Overt

1. You know I've got friends whose disabilities are more overt and they've had... I mean it's just part of their daily lived experience to have folk commenting on things and that's not my experience and I'm glad cause I think it's horrendous.

2. Yeah, I have experienced discrimination due to my disability at work.. Directly and covertly. But what I would say, is being perceived... is how I'm being perceived as too much. For either having higher support needs or being perceived as having higher support needs. And then an inference being made that, that means that I will be too much work, unable to do the job, or that there will be some kind of repercussion for the company if they refuse to support me.

3. I feel like I've become more visibly disabled than I was earlier in my life when I was still disabled. And feel that that has impacted where I went to an extreme of sort of being a champion of wearing my disability on my sleeve that has now impacted me going... equipping more hiding, masking, soft and (inaudible). When I tune into how the pattern of that increasing the more vulnerable, the more was open I was, the more discrimination I experienced.

4. *On Borderline Personality Disorder*. It's a term which exists in the common vernacular as basically a shorthand for someone who you don't like or somebody who has horrible behaviours. And I think that's kind of the whole issue with personality disorders broadly as labels is even the term personality disorder it sounds like you're saying they're just a bad person.

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I think like how can you fight a stigma when the very terms that are used to describe you are kind of inherently stigmatising.

5. '...you can hear the borderlines from the end of the corridor because they're always screaming.'

6. There have been times in training. Where I was... either felt like I was a pariah In every situation. Or a lecturer specifically would go out of their way to try and get a reaction out of me, by challenging my brain because I have lots of thoughts and like to talk about them.

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And they would go out of their way to try and get an argument out of me. And that was, like, repeatedly during my year of training, which I would say was, you know, it was the numbers... Within the tens, or even twenties mark of like how many times that happened.

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And that was also like other students... and I guess that's a bit different. But like where students would actively throw things at me or say things to me in a way that was like... would be kind of unacceptable unless... yeah, just yeah. All kinds of stuff where like, they had a meeting about me behind my back. Where they had a bunch of complaints about me and then went to the lecturers and were like [name of participant] smells and they're also really weird. Which was.. and like, they had complaints about my behaviour, which was like oh great I can't feel safe here for the rest of my training.

7. And [they] would in [their] words 'get too into it' and physically really hurt and grab me and that was quite triggering and upsetting for me. And I went to [them] and I was like listen can



you not grab my wrist, it hurts [...] And they were like, basically blamed me. Well if you were to stand where you were supposed to stand it wouldn't happen [...] And you know after that [they] were like I don't want to talk to you unless it's about work because you're being you know dramatic.

8. I would say with training the counts about twenty-five times that I could go that was a discriminatory moment. In work itself, since just working, I put it on like five times, intentional or not. It's often unintentional, it's just the ways that people work or the ways that people think that they should work that unintentionally, because of my needs and my barriers, mean that I can't engage at the work properly.

9. A kind of not just disability discrimination but a backlash around my propensity to advocate for myself and that working against me.

10. Even seeing comments from student doctors and research talking about ME and it being... and some horrific things are said that that is like: 'Oh, I hope in a way. I hope I don't get the patient. I have this like what the hell am I going to do with you?' You know, the mentality that these are beings that you know, aren't fit for the world or like aren't... just can't hack it. You can't really hack it being alive. It's like, actually what if I can't do some things, so I'm less worthy? (laughs) That is the narrative, you know, buck-up, you're not, you're not strong enough and it's so basic, it's really consistent and it feeds the gas, the internalised ableism and gaslighting that I have around the severity of my own symptoms because I feel even when I go to the doctors, they still just try to say that ME and fibromyalgia are the the same condition

when they're not. And then I have both, they're just like, oh, you know what? 'You're going here, you know, for the same thing so you're getting treatment for this but it'll be for this as well.'

## Topic 2: Ableism Closer to Covert



1. I think that I experience covert ableism every single day that I go into work, because there's always going to be someone who thinks something that isn't accurate or has a thought that they don't share or has just been conditioned to think something even if they're not trying to be nasty. So honestly I think every single day that I show up for work really.

2. I've missed out on opportunities of even just learning or practicing a skill because someone else has decided that they know better than me which can be really frustrating.

3. I don't know if they're all intentional. But I have experienced it. For example, this year, I would say that I've experienced two where I am on a production, I have written for the show, and they do not make it accessible for me to go to rehearsals. I was repeatedly emailing asking for schedules and they refused to give them to me. So at that point, I just stopped trying because that is, as far as I know, the only process I've got of getting that information.

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And like, that's explicitly what they said they would do and then they didn't do it. That's the contract of our negotiation of that like... Our communication was meant to be held like this. I expect it to be held like this and then when it's not, I'm like... I'm following your rules but you're not following the rules that you set out for yourselves. Or like, you know, there is budget literally, like a good amount of budget allocated for transport to go to rehearsals and they find ways not to spend it by not giving me the things I need to go.



4. But, yeah, I suppose you know a rose by any other name... If you've not been diagnosed as disabled are you still being discriminated against? Well if it's going on, then it's going on.

5. I don't know how different this is from other folk, but I think because I've had a long period of undiagnosed problems then in the workplace they were my problems. And so people wouldn't think that they were being discriminatory they were just like: 'Well you're not doing what we want you to do, and you should be, so get on and do it.' And now I'm going: 'Oh now I understand why those conflicts arose, and why those situations were difficult or hard to manage.'

6. Instances where I felt so let down is where I felt this expectation to... I just felt on the other side. I felt a very us versus them dynamic, on this thing that is really that feels really scary to bring into a workspace. And it needed me to self-advocate, but I think it, not being understood, that it's not everyone's preference to bring their health conditions and stuff that is very intimate in their lives into a workspace if they had a choice and that to need to do that is really vulnerable. And so it being treated like a oh uh (noises) just puts stim here like (laughs).



### Topic 3: 'Polite Policing'

A theme arose within depictions of micro-aggressions where participants often recounted being policed by others in 'polite' but detrimental ways

1. *On cross intersectionalities:* Yeah, I found it really saddening and the lack of insight around the... or even tolerance or acceptance for how the overlapping of identities and to be experiencing multiple marginalisations can impact someone as well, being black, being disabled, being gender queer, being queer, being houseless, being an abuse survivor. All things that are really like, ew to society and you put them - say them - even separately not to talk about putting them together, but when having multiple marginalisations impacts how the world treats you and how open you are able to be with the world.

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When that's shied away from, it's really easy to feel like, you don't belong in a workspace and it's very hard to relax actually and feel, and it can be very distracting because you are having to hold so much by yourself.

2. So I go in and the show is sold out, and I was like 'do you have any wheel chair spaces?' And I'd walked in and she took one look at me and she was like 'yeah but those are for wheelchair users'. And I was like 'I know uh huh could I, could I book a wheel chair space please.' And then about 6 times, she let me do it, but about 6 more times throughout our conversation, it was like 'just clarifying this is a wheelchair space it's for a wheelchair user'. 'Uhhuh, I know thank you very much.' And I just I mean that's a very tame example and there's been plenty of others

and its micro-aggressions/ableism but yeah I just think that people need to be very careful with their words and even people trying to help it can come across as like assuming that you know what we need.

3. There have been times when I've been told like oh... crewing work, and like rigging when I say I can do it and people deciding for me that I can't work at height, or that that's too heavy and I shouldn't be carry trying it, or you know I shouldn't be doing what I'm doing. Which is really frustrating because I don't like to be told what I can and can't do.

4. Because it's people's assumptions that come out in the words and they're not trying to be ableist or discriminatory but because they don't understand they are just reflecting their assumptions on to me.

5. I need to stay but having to defend it and prove it and you know it should just be accepted that like some people just need someone with them and that's just it or I need the radar key to your accessible bathroom

6. I don't, it's always sort of like, micro-aggressions, I think like and they're common like even with close friends so I don't know I could... I can think of ten off the top of my head, do what I mean?

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I don't. I don't know. It's a pattern.

I don't know it's a kind of feels like a more or less like constant thing like it's one of those things

that's like a running joke. I think people don't like mean and but like obviously there's some truth to it because there's truth to jokes.

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I do have a really big thing about being called stupid even as a joke, like I don't like it and I don't allow it.

7. When people see you in a chair and they're like you know oh you're too young or you're not really disabled or all the nonsense that people can come out with... like, believe you me it's really bloody hard work and I wouldn't do it unless I had to.

8. I have a big thing about not being heard as well. Because I think my thoughts are so disorganised. I feel like sometimes things get lost in translation, [inaudible] people aren't fucking listening, and it really stresses me out.

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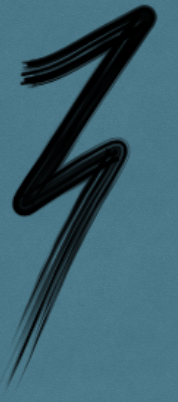
Sometimes, I think I'm treated as a bit of a joke in a way. And I don't... it's funny because people seem to know that I'm like neurodivergent like they can kind of tell, but it's not like I I'm pretty adaptable so it's not... I mean I don't bring it up a lot.

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I don't think they feel like they're discriminating. I think they're kind of like teasing someone that they care about.

9. I think I've I've received the note multiple times after I've worked with someone; I talk too much. Or I need to know when to shut-up. Now that feels a little bit disconnected. I think some of that is like, you know, self-control is a thing that we all have to like deal with. And it's always I

think in good faith that they're telling me this cause they're like, we want you to get more work, we just know the way that you work, sometimes would not work with everyone else. But like I'm like, yeah, but listen, I *am* trying to stay shut-up for the most part. The fact that like this is the minimum I could maybe say, is what I'm always trying to do is like, I'm trying to contain myself. And that's still too much for people. It's like, maybe that's like just discriminatory in the way that we work.





## Topic 4: Job Application Fears and Issues



1. I've not had a lot of negative stuff about my disability in the workplace but that's largely because I haven't been in the workplace rather than because it's not going on.

2. It feels like there's still... you're still waiting to get caught out around access or that really you still need to... it's a test. You're testing if I'm going to ask, I'm testing you if you're gonna collaborate with me as an employer. I'm testing that you're going to give me this or that and you're testing me about how much I'm gonna ask for... to know whether I'm going to be too much and there's this, still this landscape of mistrust that doesn't actually feel like a genuine exchange of care, and a caring consciousness.

3. Often when it, when a thing says, if you meet the minimum requirements for this job, 'if you're disabled, you're getting an interview', I've never had that happen. Now that might be because I am misunderstanding the minimum requirements. Or that I feel that I meet those and haven't communicated that well. But it is a thing that I've noticed where I've never experienced that happening. And it's like, 'oh great, okay, so am I just not... am I not misunderstanding something here?'

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Like the way that interviews are conducted, sometimes just feeling silly not out of like active decision. Just out the way that they decided to run their process has felt that I could never achieve that.

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One example would be, I was going for an assistant directing job. The first round of interviews were five minute interviews that I had no way of being good at. It felt like a personality quiz in a way that I just couldn't meet. I'm a person who likes to talk and discuss and engage with the questions. I like having questions sent to me in advance, that's really useful. Does it ever really help? No, but it's good to know about what the vibe is going in.

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And I don't know if this is like disability related but to me as someone who has a certain way of working and requires these specific, like good communication and set out rules. When they break those rules, that feels like, I can't engage with that, and that becomes a barrier for me to access my work.