



Video: Racial Discrimination Subtle and Overt Behaviors 2024

# Racial/Ethnic Discrimination Subtle and Overt Behaviors: Facilitation Guide



## Overview

This facilitation guide and accompanying videos have been developed to assist equal opportunity (EO) and equal employment opportunity (EEO) professionals and practitioners in discussing racial discrimination.

Additional information on facilitation can be found in *The Leader's Conversation* guide (at [deomi.mil](https://deomi.mil)).

This guided discussion focuses on subtle and overt examples of discrimination in the *Hard Worker* and *It's a BBQ* videos. The videos portray several examples of both subtle and overt racial/ethnic discrimination, as they occurred among coworkers. The facilitator can use the video and guide to discuss the demonstrated problematic behaviors and how unit members and leaders can prevent, mitigate, or address them. Adherence to this facilitation guide is encouraged to ensure consistency in training and delivery.

This guide is not all-inclusive and may be adapted based on the facilitator's experience. Throughout this guide, questions are framed to stimulate the facilitator's thoughts on areas to explore and consider in this process and the specific topic. Facilitators should provide a controlled, safe, and non-attributational environment where individuals will be willing to share their perspectives. EO and EEO professionals, practitioners, and leaders can use this to review and educate their members on policies and acceptable and unacceptable behaviors.



## Purpose

The objectives for this discussion:

- Define racial/ethnic discrimination and overt and subtle behaviors.
- Discuss the video and the behaviors that are observed.
- Recognize how overt and subtle racial/ethnic discriminatory behaviors can negatively affect individuals and organizations.
- Understand the negative impacts of overt and subtle racial/ethnic discriminatory behaviors when they are not addressed.
- Discuss strategies to mitigate overt and subtle behaviors leading to racial/ethnic discrimination.

## Preparation

This guide has been developed assuming that users have some basic facilitation skills and understand the facilitation process. Users should also review *The Leader's Conversation* guide for additional parameters, techniques, and information on facilitation (available at [deomi.mil](https://deomi.mil)). *The Leader's Conversation* guide provides areas to consider, including the following:

- Site selection
- Ground rules for facilitation
- Question development
- How to conduct a discussion

## Definitions

The Department of Defense Instruction (DoDI) 1350.02 (Office of USD P&R, 2022), defines these terms:

- **Prohibited discrimination:** discrimination, including disparate treatment, of an individual or group based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex (including pregnancy), gender identity, or sexual orientation that is not otherwise authorized by law or regulation and detracts from military readiness.
- **Race or ethnicity:** a division of human beings identified by possessing traits transmissible by descent and sufficient to characterize persons possessing these traits as a distinctive human genotype. Race discrimination involves treating someone unfavorably because they are of a certain race or because of personal characteristics associated with race (such as hair texture, skin color, or certain facial features).
- **Color:** skin tone or complexion. Even though race and color overlap, they are not synonymous. Thus, color discrimination can occur between persons of a different race or ethnicity, or between persons of the same race or ethnicity.

Parrillo (2003) and DoD Instruction 1350.02 (Office of USD P&R, 2022) define this term:

- **Ethnicity:** “A cultural concept in which a large number of people who share learned or acquired traits and close social interaction regard themselves and are regarded by others as constituting a single group on that basis. (Parrillo, 2003 p. 12)”. Ethnicity categories include Hispanic or Latino, defined as an individual of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race, and not Hispanic or Latino (Office of USD P&R, 2022).



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The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) defines the following:

- **Classifications of Race or Ethnicity:** American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, Middle Eastern or North African, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and White. Each category is further divided into subcategories for more precise data collection (OMB, 2024).



## What Are Subtle and Overt Behaviors, and How Do They Relate to Racial/Ethnic Discrimination?

Subtle and overt behaviors that are racially discriminatory can occur in several different ways, including verbal behaviors, physical actions, and organizational policies and practices. Subtle behaviors arise in ways that are, as indicated by their description, subtle or indirect in their nature. For this reason, subtle behaviors may be more difficult for targets to pinpoint the behaviors or what about them makes them uncomfortable. In addition, the more indirect nature of subtle discriminatory behaviors can make them more challenging to report, leading many targets to ignore them. Subtle behaviors are often a precursor or early indicator that there could be a discrimination issue which, if unaddressed, may lead to more overt discriminatory behaviors. Overt behaviors are more direct and often more apparent and readily identifiable. These behaviors most often clearly violate discrimination policies and laws. Some examples of specific subtle and overt racially discriminatory behaviors are:

Subtle	Overt
Comments that single out racial or appearance differences in an individual	Threatening harm to an individual based on their race/ethnicity
Excluding some individuals from casual events based on their race/ethnicity	Denial of opportunities or purposely poor misrepresentations of achievements based on an individual's race/ethnicity
Referring to or anticipating behaviors of individuals based on associated stereotypes of their race/ethnicity	Not allowing individuals of a particular race/ethnicity to participate in membership or job opportunity

## Strategies for Preventing Racial/Ethnic Discrimination Behaviors

One strategy for preventing subtle and overt racial discrimination is to positively address subtle, negative behaviors early on, as they are often a precursor to more overt behavior. Taking these infractions seriously and holding offenders accountable can help prevent subtle discriminatory behaviors from escalating into overt discriminatory behaviors. Additionally, promptly handling reports of overt discrimination helps create a climate that does not promote tolerance of such conduct.

Another preventative measure includes providing awareness training on the topic of racial/ethnic discrimination (covering the subtle and overt behaviors associated with it). This training aims to improve understanding and the ability to identify the behaviors throughout the organization and among individual team members. Confidence in identifying subtle and overt racially discriminatory behaviors, combined with an understanding of their impacts, can empower bystanders to intervene in situations where leaders may not be present, such as social outings or separate work environments as depicted in some of the example scenarios.



## Process

The setting for the guided discussion must be determined and prepared before the participants arrive. Ensure the video is ready to view (directly from the Cultural Portal at <https://www.deomi.mil/Center-of-Excellence-Portal/Harassment-Prevention-and-Response/#discriminatory-harassment> or may be downloaded).

## Video Description

### Racial/Ethnic Discrimination Subtle and Overt Behaviors

FOR FACILITATOR USE ONLY:

**Subtle Behavior- Hard Worker:** In this scenario, a Service member wields a sledgehammer as he works to prepare a site and talks about the work environment (physical labor in the hot sun) that he is excited to be a part of (i.e., he was glad to be away from his desk). As he continues to work while others take a break to get out of the heat, he overhears a conversation from his team members that he feels is negative and derogatory. These overheard comments include some that contain stereotypes associated towards his ethnicity (Latin/Hispanic). The Service member states that, at first, he did not think much of the comments, but as he reflected upon them more, they made him uncomfortable.

### Video Participants

- **Target:** Hispanic/Latino male
- **Perpetrator:** Service members referred to as “some other guys” but not featured
- **Bystanders:** Other Service members nearby

**Overt Behavior- It’s a BBQ:** A Service member describes being invited to a cookout by a female coworker. However, after extending the invitation, the coworker began to backtrack, suggesting that “he might never be able to leave” because he might get “lynched” or “shot.” The Service member explained that she made these comments in a “casual” and “light-hearted” tone but that they made him feel very uncomfortable with the situation, describing the conversation as “disturbing” and expressing a desire for it to end.

### Video Participants

- **Target:** (non-White race) male Service member
- **Perpetrator:** Female Service member not featured
- **Bystanders:** none



## Directions

1. Introduce yourself.
2. Validate: Explain the purpose or objectives of the discussion/training.
3. Set expectations and establish ground rules.
4. Introduce the topic.
5. Explain what racial discrimination is and what overt and subtle behaviors are.
6. Provide the handout (if used) to the participants.
7. **Read instructions:** You are about to watch a video that is made for awareness purposes only. After watching the video, individually answer the questions using your handout. We will then ask you to share your answers with the group.
8. Show the video.
9. **Read instructions:** Answer the questions using the handout and apply critical thinking skills as you consider and construct your answers. This should take 5–10 minutes.
10. Review answers through open discussion. Encourage collaborative discussion and perspective sharing within the group as you guide the discussion.

## Best Practices

Open the discussion by asking volunteers to share their responses with the group. As you do so, keep in mind:

- Ensure all participants have an opportunity to share their thoughts.
- Encourage open communication among participants.
- When applicable, ask clarifying questions.
- Use anticipated responses to help the group when needed.
- Avoid “why” and closed-ended questions.
- Remind participants of the ground rules when necessary.
- Remember to let participants know that you are listening.
- Take notes for your summary and conclusion.
- Paraphrase when participants are unclear with their answers and assist them in reaching the objectives.
- Let the discussion be fluid with little to no disruptions or corrections.

## Facilitator Notes

*Suggestions:* Display the questions on a bulletin board, butcher paper, or PowerPoint, or prepare them in a handout. Explain to the participants that they will need a pen and paper (or handout) to answer the questions you will use during the guided discussion. **The anticipated responses (ARs) after each question can assist the EO professional in identifying potential discussion points.**

*\*Facilitator Note:* The facilitator should be prepared to discuss the questions (or similar questions) with the participants.

*\*Give students ample time to answer the questions.*



## Facilitator- Developed Questions

Below are potential questions and ARs for use in guiding the discussion. Before the session, the facilitator should review them and may develop their own. The handout provided matches the questions below. If you modify or add additional questions, modify the handout accordingly.

*\*Facilitator Note:* The facilitator should be prepared to discuss the questions (or similar questions) with the participants.

### 1. What did you observe in the videos?

**AR:** In both videos, the characters described or indicated how others' comments and behaviors made them uncomfortable. In the *Hard Worker* (subtle behavior) scenario, some of the comments might have been considered positive or flattering by the perpetrator, such as pointing out the hard work of the Service member in the field. However, the target did not receive the comments as in a positive way. The target in the *It's a BBQ* (overt scenario) described a female coworker inviting him to a family cookout but then backtracking the invitation, suggesting the harm that might come to him (presumably because of his race). In a light-hearted tone, she suggested that he might not be able to leave the cookout because he might get shot or lynched.

### 2. What are the subtle and overt discrimination behaviors you observed in these scenarios?

**AR:**

- The subtle discrimination behaviors in the *Hard Worker* scenario video were the comments made about the target. These behaviors are considered subtle because the comments were not made directly to the target, but were overheard. They also did not threaten any physical or direct mental or emotional harm, but were based on common racial stereotypes that could be considered demeaning to the target
- The overt discrimination behaviors in the *It's a BBQ* scenario video were the comments made by the female character directly to the target. These comments insinuated direct physical harm that might come to the target for attending the BBQ with the female character's family.

### 3. Based on the scenarios, what are the concerning behaviors related to subtle and overt behaviors of racial discrimination?

**AR:** The most concerning factor across the two scenarios is that the perpetrators' comments to the victims made them feel uncomfortable with the situation. The subtle behaviors are concerning because the perpetrators may not even realize their comments are offensive or inappropriate. Another notable concern is that, in each scenario, it did not seem like the targets felt they could speak up about their discomfort or interpretation and address their feelings with others.

### 4. How would you approach the situation if you were a bystander in these scenarios?

**AR:** As a general approach, in both scenarios, a bystander could have chosen to address either the perpetrator or the target. In the subtle behavior scenario, a bystander might address the perpetrators by stating to the group that the comments are inappropriate and could harm someone who overhears them, even if they are meant jokingly or playfully. In the overt behavior scenario, no bystander was featured. However, a bystander could be a friend or coworker that the victim confided in. In this situation, a bystander could validate the victim's uneasiness and offer to go with the victim to report the incident as a gesture of support.





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### 5. What are some risk factors related to racial/ethnic discrimination?

**AR:**

- One risk factor in both scenarios is a degree of acceptance of subtle and overt discriminatory behaviors in the general climate. Both perpetrators were very open with their comments, suggesting that they view the behavior as acceptable or unlikely to be reprimanded.
- Other risk factors include having a low percentage of demographic differences (race) within the organization. In these cases, majority members may lack awareness on the gravity of the comments made, or they believe these comments have no or little impact upon the group. But in fact, these comments may foster negative consequences towards others.

### 6. What are some of the protective factors that could be associated with a similar scenario?

**AR:**

- One protective in both scenarios could be awareness training for all organization members. Such training could make personnel aware of the impact of overt and subtle discriminatory comments and behavior and foster their recognition of inappropriate behaviors that cross the line.
- Another protective factor would be an organization and leaders who do not tolerate discriminatory behaviors and take reports of such conduct seriously.
- Other known protective factors for subtle and overt discriminatory behavior relevant to the military, though not addressed in these scenarios, are that individuals with higher age, rank, and education are less likely to participate in discriminatory behaviors than more junior members.

### 7. As a leader, how could you support the targets in these scenarios?

**AR:** Leaders have several options for offering support to targets. As a first layer of support, leaders can create a climates where subtle and overt discriminatory behaviors are unacceptable, by taking reports seriously, and by holding offenders accountable. Individually, leaders should act with empathy, sensitivity, and sincerity throughout the complaint process. Finally, leaders can be mindful of the climate and social acceptability of discriminatory behavior within their units and organizations. This includes taking an active role in understanding the dynamics of diversity within their unit and staying aware of how subordinates interact with each other, particularly during times of stress.

**Note to Facilitator:** *If extra time permits below are some examples of other questions that can be asked.*

- In your own words, how would you describe subtle and overt discrimination behaviors?
- What are some ways your organization can support individuals who report racial/ethnic discrimination?
- Where can a Service member go to report racial/ethnic discrimination?
- As a leader, what behaviors can you show to create an environment where others feel open to report racial/ethnic discrimination?

## Close the Session

**\*Facilitator Note:** During the conclusion, paraphrase participant comments to show they were heard. The provided conclusion is an example of how to close out the guided discussion.

End your discussion by restating the objectives covered at the beginning and providing closing comments.





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### Summary:

Restate the initial objectives:

- Define racial/ethnic discrimination and overt and subtle behaviors.
- Discuss the video and the behaviors that are observed.
- Recognize how overt and subtle racial/ethnic discriminatory behaviors can negatively affect the individual and the organization.
- Understand the negative impacts of overt and subtle racial/ethnic discriminatory behaviors if they are not addressed.
- Discuss strategies to mitigate overt and subtle behaviors leading to racial/ethnic discrimination.

### Conclusion

During this discussion, we explored racial/ethnic discrimination and the related subtle and overt behaviors. As seen in these scenarios, individuals who do not have a good understanding of subtle and overt behaviors can inadvertently cause harm to those around them. Equally important is that the behavior is likely to persist if perpetrators do not think their actions are wrong because they are accepted within the climate or do not believe they will be held accountable for them.

Leaders need to be self-reflective and conscious of subordinates' behaviors to actively promote awareness and accountability for creating an environment that is tolerant and inclusive of diverse team members and holds offenders accountable. Discussing subtle and overt discriminatory behaviors brings more awareness into the workplace for appropriate behavior responses. Everyone wants to feel like they are appreciated and valued in their organization. Being inclusive to those who are different in appearance, such as racial/ethnic differences, can make the involved individuals, team, and organization more successful.



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## **Handout**

# **Videos: Racial/Ethnic Discrimination Subtle and Overt Behaviors**

1. What did you observe in the video(s)?
2. What are the subtle and overt discrimination behaviors you observed in these scenarios?
3. Based on the scenarios, what are the concerning behaviors related to subtle and overt behaviors of racial/ethnic discrimination?
4. How would you approach the situation if you were a bystander in these scenarios?
5. What are some risk factors related to racial/ethnic discrimination?
6. What are some of the protective factors that could be associated with a similar scenario?
7. As a leader, how could you support the targets in these scenarios?



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