SHADES of BIAS

Reflective case study template

Shades of Bias (SoB) is a case study template designed to help document and analyse discriminatory/oppressive/racist incidents effectively. Case study examples can be provided either from the perspective of victims/survivors of bias, observers/witnesses or the person/people responsible for the bias.

Please provide as much detail as possible whilst maintaining appropriate anonymity, confidentiality and sensitivity.

It may be helpful to read the associated SoB guidance before completing this template.

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1. **Case study title:**
   - *A brief descriptive title. For example: 'Discriminatory language used by a senior manager' or 'Inadequate adjustments made for a physically disabled colleague'*

(20 words max)

Minimising race in a team meeting

2. **Background and context:**
   - *Whose perspective is this case study written from?*
   - *Date of the incident (approximate or exact)*
   - *Location. For example: workplace, university, professional event, online etc*
   - *Setting. For example: team meeting, supervision, face-to-face interaction, training session etc*
   - *People involved. For example: anonymised service-user/lived experience/expert by experience, manager, colleague etc)*
   - *Relevant policies/protocols. For example: anti-racism policy, EDI framework, complaints process etc)*
   - *What prior experiences or organisational culture may have influenced the incident?*
   - *Were there any signs or indicators that the incident might occur? If so, what were they?*

(100 words max)

This account is written from my perspective as the team manager in an Adults' Services local authority team. The incident took place during an internal Microsoft Teams meeting on 21 September 2024 at around 2:15pm, during a discussion about resource allocation and service provision. The colleague who raised the issue was a Senior Social Work Practitioner and the concern related to the underrepresentation of culturally appropriate services. I had not reflected enough on how the team's culture and my own defensiveness may have made race-related discussions feel unsafe. In hindsight, there were already signs that these conversations had been dismissed or deprioritised before this meeting.

3. **Nature of the incident:**
   - *Describe the incident as clearly and factually as possible*
   - *Was the racism covert (microaggressions, exclusion, unconscious bias) or overt (racial slurs, harassment, direct discrimination)?*
   - *Was the racism internalised, interpersonal, institutional, medical and/or structural?*
   - *Were any other forms of discrimination/oppression present from an intersectionality perspective?*
   - *What was the immediate impact on you or others involved?*
   - *How did the incident affect the dynamics within the team or organisation?*

- *Were there any specific phrases or actions that stood out as particularly harmful or impactful?*
- *How did the incident reflect broader societal issues related to race, discrimination and oppression?*
- *What emotions did you and others involved feel before/during/after the incident?*
- *How did the incident affect your professional relationships?*
- *Did you notice any changes in team morale or cohesion following the incident?*

(400 words max)

During the meeting, when my colleague raised concerns about culturally appropriate services, I interrupted and said, "We mustn't make everything about race. We all have to manage with what's available." Several colleagues appeared to agree, and the conversation moved on without properly engaging with the concern.

I now understand that this was a covert racist act. Even though I did not use abusive language, my response minimised a valid race-related issue and reinforced an environment where racism could be dismissed rather than examined. My action was interpersonal, but it also reflected institutional and structural bias, because it supported a wider culture in which race was treated as secondary or inconvenient.

The immediate impact was likely embarrassment, frustration and isolation for the colleague who spoke up. My response may also have discouraged others from raising similar concerns in future. I can see that this affected team trust, psychological safety and openness. It sent a message to the team that speaking about race could lead to dismissal, rather than dialogue. I also now recognise that the eye-rolling and nodding from others showed how easily bias can be normalised when no one challenges it.

4. <u>How was the situation handled?</u>

- *Who responded to the incident (if anyone)?*
- *What action(s) were taken at the time? For example: reported to HR, challenged informally, ignored, escalated, etc.*
- *Did the organisational policies/processes support an adequate and fair response?*
- *Was trade union advice and/or representation provided?*
- *What was the final outcome? For example: no action, disciplinary response, mediation, etc.*
- *Were there any barriers that prevented a more effective response to the incident?*
- *If you could change one aspect of how the situation was handled, what would it be and why?*

(400 words max)

At the time, I did not respond constructively. I became defensive when the issue was later raised in supervision and did not fully acknowledge the harm I caused. I understand that the colleague escalated the matter through HR under the EDI policy, and that an informal restorative conversation was suggested. Looking back, that response was not enough on its own because it did not establish clear accountability or demonstrate that the impact had been properly understood.

If I could change one aspect of how this was handled, it would be my own immediate response. I should have stopped, listened, apologised and explored the concern rather than shutting it down. That would have created space for a more honest and fair process.

5. <u>Reflection and learning</u>

- *What could have been handled differently? For example: by you, colleagues, others involved or the organisation)*
- *How did this incident affect your professional confidence, mental health, or sense of belonging in the workplace?*
- *Has there been any follow-up action or commitment to change? If so, what?*
- *What structural/systemic issues contributed to this incident?*
- *Has the organisation taken any long-term corrective actions since the incident?*
- *Is there a timeline/deadline for implementation, investigation, resolutions and/or review?*
- *Key takeaways or recommendations for BASW*
- *What personal biases or assumptions did this incident reveal in yourself or others?*
- *Could your own practice be adjusted to avoid similar incidents in the future?*
- *What role does self-care play in your response to incidents of racism, and how can it be prioritised?*
- *Was there any resources or specific support that was helpful to you?*
- *What advice would you give to someone encountering a similar situation in future?*

(400 words max)

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This incident has forced me to confront how quickly I defaulted to defensiveness instead of curiosity. I now see that I was more focused on managing the discomfort in the room than on understanding the substance of the concern. I may also have assumed that because I did not intend harm, the impact would be limited. That was wrong.

What I should have done differently was to listen, validate the issue and keep the discussion open. I have learned that minimising race-related concerns is itself a form of bias. I also recognise that my behaviour may have reinforced silence among other staff, especially colleagues of colour who already felt unsafe raising similar issues.

6. Reflection and learning (for the person/people responsible for the bias)

- *What was your initial rationale, justification or motivation for your action/inaction?*
- *How has this incident changed your approach to discrimination, racism and oppression?*
- *How do you think your actions were perceived by the victim(s) and others involved?*
- *Have you since recognised any unintended consequences of your actions?*
- *What steps will you take to repair harm and/or prevent future incidents?*
- *Is there a timeline/deadline for implementation, investigation, resolutions and/or review?*
- *Were your actions shaped by wider workplace culture, policies, or expectations? If so, how?*
- *Are there systemic or structural factors that may have enabled your behaviour?"*
- *What have you learned from reflecting on this incident?"*
- *What concrete steps will you take to change your approach to discrimination, racism and oppression moving forward?*

(400 words max)

My initial rationale was that I was trying to keep the meeting efficient and avoid what I saw as a potentially difficult or divisive discussion. In reality, that was a poor justification for shutting down a legitimate concern. My actions were shaped by a workplace culture where race was not discussed openly enough, and where discomfort was often managed through avoidance rather than accountability.

This incident has changed my approach. I now understand that I need to make space for race-related concerns, even when they challenge me or the team. I also recognise that my response was likely perceived as dismissive, silencing and undermining. The unintended consequence was not just hurt in the moment, but reduced trust in me as a manager.

To repair this harm, I would apologise directly and specifically, acknowledge the impact without defensiveness and invite continued discussion in a safe and supported way. I would also commit to anti-racism reflection and training, and ensure race, equity and culturally responsive practice are built into supervision and team meetings, rather than treated as side issues. Fundamentally, I now realise I need to challenge bias earlier, name it more clearly and model a better response for others.

7. Other comments or reflections

(300 words max)

This was a difficult incident to reflect on, because it showed me that bias is not only about overt hostility. It can also appear through dismissal, silence and the failure to take a colleague's experience seriously. I can see that the responsibility sits with me to do better, not with the person who raised the concern.

Would you be willing to be contacted regarding your submission? If so, please confirm your name and email address below. These details will remain confidential.

Name (optional): _____

Protected characteristics (optional): _____

Email address (optional): _____

If you would like to share your case study with BASW England for collation and potential (anonymous) publication in the future, please send your completed form to wayne.reid@basw.co.uk.

Confidentiality Notice:
Please ensure all details remain anonymous. This form is designed to support constructive systemic change within the profession.

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