

Awkward Silence - a thought experiment

Last month I joined a new project. To break the ice, the five of us met for dinner—four colleagues I had never seen in person before.

The project leader, **Markus**, and I got to the restaurant a few minutes early. Soon the others arrived: **Clara**, **Liam** and **Felix**. The mood was light—talk of conferences, bike tours and the recent long weekend.

When the menus came, Liam turned to me with a friendly smile:

“Maya, you must have the best eye for detail—would you take the minutes?
Women are usually so organised.”

Markus nodded, Felix chuckled, Clara stared at her glass.
And me? Inside I froze. If you could snapshot my thoughts, you’d see:

- Is this really happening—again?
- I’m already tired and the evening—let alone the project—has barely started.
- Why is no one saying anything?
- Do I have to speak up?

At first glance the remark sounds harmless, almost like a compliment. In truth it is packed with stereotypes: women as note-takers, organisers—not experts.

Micro-aggressions, everyday sexism, responsibility - my brain is spinning.

It’s not the first time. Women are repeatedly steered toward “female tasks” while their expertise remains invisible.

And the worst part wasn’t the comment. It was the silence. Not even a simple “Hey, that was out of line.”

Allyship would have meant *not* laughing along—perhaps even saying:

“Let’s rotate the minutes—Maya’s here for her detector skills, not as a secretary.”

Responsibility also means checking our reflexes and realising that “well-meant” doesn’t always land well.