GATE+ LGBTQIA
process

Introduction to Gender and Sexuality Topics

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process
THEORY

Introduction

Gender and sexuality are two categories that are considered socially constructed, this means that they are concepts created and shaped by society and culture, rather than being determined solely by biological or innate factors.

Sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, sex characteristics, family structures, relationships, and similar aspects of human experience **exist in a vast range of diversity and complexity. They are not rigid, stable, or limited to binary classifications**, even though the hetero/cis-normative socialisation system makes us believe so. As we have mentioned before, this social system tries to impose strict norms and expectations based on binary definitions of male/female, man/woman and heterosexual/homosexual, but in reality, human experiences of gender and sexuality are far more varied and fluid.

The spectrum of sexuality and gender, which is gradually gaining popularity and becoming more widely known, describes the lived reality of LGBTQIA+ people, who have struggled for decades to make their experiences visible and socially accepted. The LGBTQIA+ community, °despite the progress that undoubtedly has been made in the past years, **still faces major institutional and social challenges.** Discrimination, inequality, exclusion and violence are the most severe consequences of homo-, bi-, inter- and transphobia, and systemic injustice.

This framework does not cover all issues related to LGBTQIA+ experiences. Our goal is to highlight important aspects, clarify basic terms, and provide some food for thought.

Gender and Sexuality Concepts

What is the difference between gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, sex characteristics, and other terms related to LGBTQIA+ topics?

As you can see in this great illustration of the **Gender Unicorn** (designed by TSER[1]) there are different aspects of our GENDER, SEXUALITY and SEX CHARACTERISTICS that we should understand:
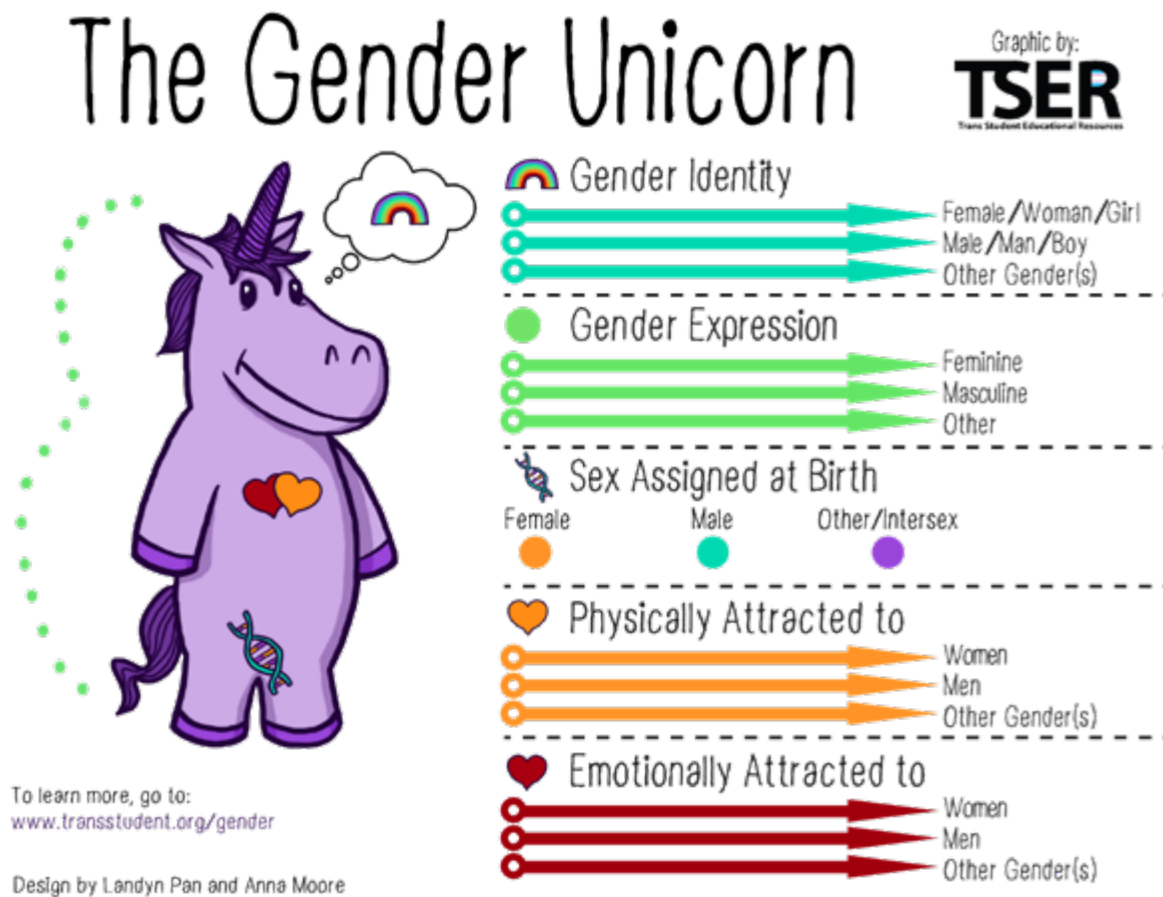
Although the GATE process focuses on the inclusion of LGBTQIA+ people, the concepts depicted in the Gender Unicorn (and explained in detail below) are not solely connected to LGBTQIA+ identities, but to the experiences of everyone (including people who do not identify as LGBTQIA+) regarding gender and sexuality.

1 Designed by Landyn Pan and Anna Moore for TSER. Find more info in www.transstudent.org/ gender. Image source: Trans Student Educational Resources, 2015. "The Gender Unicorn."Illustrations by Anna Moore. Design by Landyn Pan, Eli Erlick, and many others.

Sex assigned at birth

The first term that we will look into is sex assigned at birth. Historically, when a person is born, doctors establish whether they are male or female based on a combination of **anatomical characteristics** (internal and external reproductive organs), **hormones, and chromosomes**. The categories of "male" and "female" sex have a distinct set of characteristics:

- Male: XY chromosomes, penis, testicles, higher testosterone levels.
- Female: XX chromosomes, vulva, vagina, ovaries, higher oestrogen levels.

We have learnt that sex is just male and female, and that all people can fit into one of these two categories. However, every single person is different and there exist so many variations!

Intersex Variations: intersex is an **umbrella term used to encompass all variations** of sex characteristics that do not fall within the strict male/female binary. Some of these are **hormonal variations**, others are variations of **physical/anatomical characteristics**, or **variations in the combinations of sex chromosomes**.

Some examples of intersex variations are:

- Individuals may develop external genitalia that appear typically female, including a clitoris and labia, but internally they have testes instead of ovaries and may lack a uterus. They may also have a short vagina or no vagina at all.
- A person who is assigned female at birth may have a larger than "normal" clitoris that resembles a penis or fused labia that resembles a scrotum.
- A person who is assigned male at birth may have an extra X chromosome, resulting in a chromosomal configuration of XXY instead of the typical XY. They may have characteristics such as smaller testes, reduced fertility, and in some cases enlarged breast tissue.
- And many more!

Intersex variations are more common than we think, although not so visible and still stigmatised. Approximately **2% of the global population** are individuals with intersex variations, which is similar to the prevalence of redheads! We all know someone with natural red hair, don't we?

Intersex bodies are neither wrong nor unnatural. Sex characteristics exist on a spectrum, not just in the narrow categories of male or female. Intersex people are not born with two sexes, nor are they both male and female simultaneously. Rather, they are born with bodies that do not fit the traditional binary idea of a girl's or boy's body.

Being intersex it's just another way humans can be. People's bodies can take on an infinite number of forms, and all are valid.

Gender Identity

Gender Identity refers to one's internal sense of gender. As with sex characteristics and the categories of male and female, most of us have been taught that there are only two genders: man and woman.

However, this is not real, as there are many different ways of being a person! When we talk about gender identity, too, people do not always fit in one of the two boxes. There are many identities outside the gender binary, and people may identify themselves as men, women or non-binary.

This binary division creates numerous challenges, difficulties, discrimination, and violence. Everyone has a gender identity, including you. **Gender is one of many characteristics that contribute to forming your entire identity as a unique person!**

Gender identity encompasses two core aspects: the gender a person identifies themselves as, and whether they are cisgender or transgender.

- A **cisgender** person is a person whose sex assigned at birth is in line with his/her gender identity. *E.g. a person who was <u>assigned male at birth</u> and identifies himself as a <u>man</u> is a **cisgender man**.*
- A **transgender** person is someone whose sex assigned at birth and their own internal sense of gender identity are not the same. *E.g. a person who was <u>assigned male at birth</u> and identifies herself as a <u>woman</u> is a **transgender woman**.*

*Both the terms cisgender and transgender are used as adjectives with the gender a person identifies as in the present; for example a *transgender man* is a person who identifies himself as a man, but was assigned a different sex at birth (female).

Transgender (or simply trans) people may have a gender identity within the gender binary (man/woman) or outside (non-binary). The term **non-binary** is used both as a distinct gender identity, and as an umbrella-term for all identities that do not coincide with the binary of man/woman, such as: agender, genderfluid, genderqueer and many more!

Transition (or gender transition) is the process that a transgender person undergoes to better express and present their gender identity. There are many different ways of transitioning: medically, socially, and/or legally. It is a deeply personal experience that may involve different steps at various times, depending on access to gender-affirming surgery and hormone replacement therapy (healthcare), support from the community, personal safety and other personal reasons.

The Transgender Umbrella °
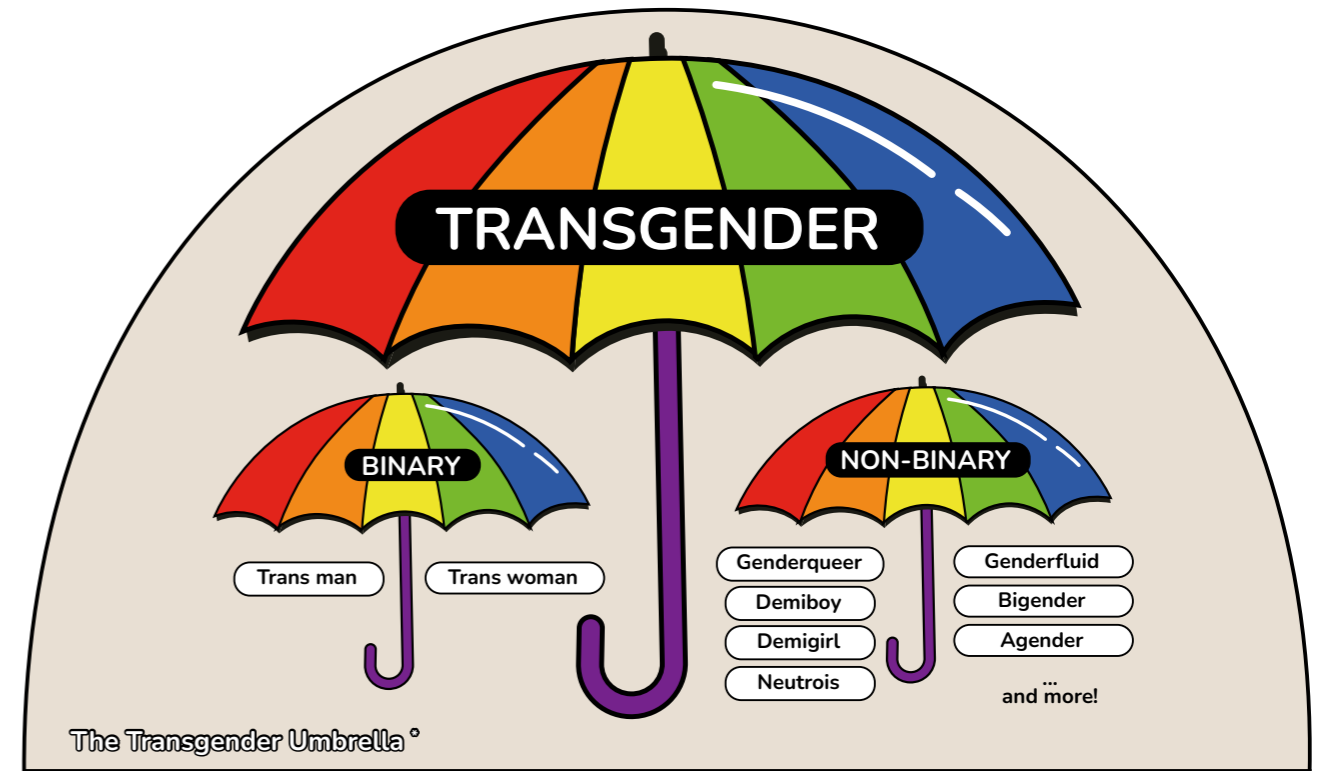
Some examples of transition steps a person may take are the following:

Social transition	Medical transition	Legal transition
Coming out, sharing their gender identity	Gender-affirming surgeries	Changing their name and gender marker on official documents
Changing their name and pronouns	Hormone-replacement therapy (HRT)	
Changing their gender expression	Hormone blockers (for trans children or adolescents, or complementary to HRT)	

There is no right or wrong way of transitioning, no specific steps a person should take, or specific order in which they should make these changes; some people may not want to change certain things, others may want to do some of the steps mentioned above but may not be able to (due to safety, health, legal or financial reasons). We know however that support from friends, family, community and institutions is essential for navigating this process with respect and dignity.

A person's gender identity is valid regardless of whether they have made any steps in their gender transition or not.

Gender Expression

Gender Expression refers to how we "present ourselves"; it is the manifestation of one's gender identity **through clothing, hairstyle, voice, body shape, accessories, etc.**

It is expected that based on a person's sex assigned at birth and gender identity, they will express themselves in specific ways, **consistent with gender norms.** For example:

- A cisgender man will have a masculine gender expression: he will wear clothes that are considered masculine (shirts, trousers), will have short hair, will not wear make up and will enjoy typically masculine activities such as sports

- On the other hand a cisgender woman is expected to express herself in a typically feminine way, wearing "women's" clothes, having longer hair, using make-up, and enjoying typically feminine activities.

These expectations around gender expression also affect trans people. While of course, many transgender people may have a gender expression that is in line with the societal expectations for their gender identity, this is not true for all trans people; especially those who do not see themselves in the gender binary.

People can have any gender expression they like and there is no correct or wrong way (or 'normal' way) of expressing gender. We can even change our gender expression all the time! A person's gender expression does not invalidate their gender identity: a man (whether cis or trans) who likes to wear dresses is not less of a man than someone who has a typical masculine expression.

It is very important to highlight that **we cannot presume a person's gender identity based on their gender expression**. For example, a person with a beard wearing a skirt might identify as a hetero-cis man, or as a woman, or as non-binary. To know the persons' gender identity we need to **ask them!**

Sexual orientation

We may be attracted, and interested in different people because of a diverse variety of reasons: sexual, physical, romantic, emotional, intellectual, etc. We can experience attraction to people of one specific gender, of multiple genders, or at different times different genders. You may also feel no attraction at all… all the possibilities are valid! We all experience attraction in our own way, which may be very different to others.

But we are still taught, and it's often assumed, that everybody is heterosexual (straight).

When we talk about the people we are **physically/sexually attracted** to, we refer to our **sexual orientation**. This means the desire for sexual and physical intimacy with someone, who we find physically attractive.

Another different part of attraction is the **emotional or romantic attraction**: the desire for a romantic relationship or intimacy with others. This could mean very different things: sharing good conversations, going on a date, spending a lot of time, kissing and cuddling, or any other expression of romance we can think of.

Most often it is assumed that sexual and romantic attraction coexist and are experienced towards the same person (or different people but with the same gender); thus, the term sexual orientation is often used to refer to both types of attraction. However, these different kinds of attractions can be felt towards people of the same gender, multiple genders, or people of different genders at different times. One person can feel sexually attracted to girls, but romantically attracted to non-binary people, for example. There are no rules!

Heteronormativity and Cisnormativity

Heteronormativity is a worldview that promotes heterosexuality as the "*normal*", "natural" or "preferred" sexual orientation. The **assumption** is that heterosexuality is the standard for defining normal sexual behaviour and that sex assigned at birth and binary gender roles are the natural and immutable essentials in human relations. This assumption is fundamentally embedded in and legitimises social and legal institutions that **devalue, marginalise, and discriminate against people who deviate from its normative principle.**

Along with heteronormativity, **cisnormativity** refers to the societal assumption that sex assigned at birth and sex characteristics define gender identity, and that all people are by default cisgender. Furthermore, cisnormativity views cisgender identities as inherently better, more natural and normal than transgender identities, promoting conformity to gender norms and instigate stigma, discrimination and harassment towards trans and gender nonconforming people.

Where does the conflict come from?

As we previously explained, g**ender and sexual identities are as diverse as people in the world, and everyone should be respected, valued, and celebrated for who they are.** Unfortunately, this is far from our current reality.

We live in a patriarchal system - and we have been living in it for centuries - which establishes men as the primary holders of power and authority in society, thereby marginalising women and non-binary individuals. This binary hierarchical system not only limits opportunities and underestimates women but also delegitimizes and marginalises LGBTQIA+ identities because of them not conforming to heterosexual and cisgender norms.

Gender socialisation begins early in life, shaping expectations and behaviours based on sex assigned at birth. This process reinforces traditional gender roles, of which there are only two: masculinity is often associated with dominance, strength, and leadership, while femininity is linked to nurturing, submissiveness, and domesticity.

Let's understand this a little bit better!

Patriarchal System

Patriarchy is a **binary system in which the masculine predominates over the feminine and has meant, throughout history, the dominance and power of men over women, non-binary people, children and nature.** To control and perpetuate this power, men have exercised different forms of violence, control and domination, including gender-based violence, to ensure that the people suffering from it do not reverse gender roles.

The heteropatriarchal model that is based on competition, capitalism, consumption, destruction of the earth, and a system in which multiple axes of oppression predominate, such as machism, racism, ethnocentrism, homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, interphobia, sexual violence, etc.

Fighting against the heteropatriarchal system involves challenging and dismantling societal structures and norms that prioritise and enforce cisgender, heterosexual and patriarchal supremacy and the related power dynamics. The aim is to promote gender equality, challenge gender roles and stereotypes, and create a more inclusive and equitable society. This fight includes advocating for LGBTQIA+ rights, countering the assumption that all people fit into certain, pre-defined boxes regarding their

gender and sexuality (being dyadic, cisgender and heterosexual), dismantling systems of oppression rooted in gender and sexuality, and promoting social justice for all individuals regardless of their gender identity, gender expression, sex characteristics or sexual orientation.

By incorporating an ***intersectional perspective***[2], the change of paradigm becomes more comprehensive and inclusive. It involves recognizing and addressing how systems of oppression such as racism, ableism, classism, and others intersect with gender and sexuality.

As the United Nations points out *"gender inequality is the most pervasive form of inequality around the world and a pressing human rights [3]concern"*. Progress towards gender equality is essential for securing human rights for everyone, fostering peaceful societies, and constructing socially inclusive and sustainable development pathways where the benefits of progress are equitably distributed.

Norms & stereotypes around gender and sexuality

As we have already seen, societal expectations around gender are based on the assumption that all people are dyadic, cisgender and heterosexual, meaning that:

- They have sex characteristics that can be defined as either male or female;
- Based on these characteristics they identify either as men or women;
- They have a gender expression that is "coherent" with their gender identity (masculine or feminine, respectively);
- They are attracted to people of the "opposite" gender.

Enforcing norms through discrimination & violence

The expectations mentioned previously create a power system which values dyadic, cisgender and heterosexual identities more than intersex, transgender and non-heterosexual identities.

Violence is used to reinforce power dynamics, ensuring that the oppressed cannot challenge or change their unjust situation. This violence can be physical, emotional, psychological, or structural, manifesting in various forms to uphold the status quo and prevent any shifts towards equality and justice.

2 Check our section on Intersectionality in this document, and our Infographic of Intersectionality.
3 https://sdgs.un.org/statements/sweden-11630

Discrimination is a kind of violence where there is an **unequal treatment of persons** based on a characteristic of their identity. Discrimination can refer to any act or behaviour that distinguishes or singles out individuals based on factors such as age, sex, race, national origin, sexual orientation, and gender identity. Includes the exclusion from core areas of everyday life (education, employment, supportive services, housing), the provision of services of lesser quality, or the provision of better/more options for men and cis-hetero people.

Violence and abuse are best understood as a pattern of behaviour intended to **establish power and maintain control over individuals.** The roots of all forms of violence are founded in the many types of inequality which continue to exist and grow in our society. LGBTQIA+ people experience physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, spiritual and cultural violence, as well as verbal and financial or material abuse and neglect. Violence and abuse may occur only once, it may involve various tactics of subtle manipulation or it may occur frequently while escalating over months or years. In any form, violence and abuse profoundly affect an individual's safety, health and well-being.

For LGBTQIA+ individuals, violence is used to intimidate them into hiding or changing their identities, punishing them for openly expressing themselves. Extreme types of violence include (among others) murder, conversion therapies (including corrective rapes), "normalisation" interventions for intersex people, forced sterilisation for trans people, involuntary hospitalisation, and more.

The discrimination and violence is reflected and reinforced through:
- *Assumptions of people's identities:* Everyone is assumed to be dyadic, cis and straight. LGBTQIA+ people need to explicitly "come out" in order to refute this assumption.
- *Pathologisation:* LGBTQIA+ identities have a long history of being viewed as either mental or physical "disorders". Non-heterosexual identities used to be classified as mental disorders, until less than 35 years ago. Transgender identities were officially depathologised in 2019, and intersex variations continue to be considered by the medical field as "disorders of sex development". Pathologisation is based on the assumption that being dyadic, cisgender and heterosexual is "natural", "normal" and "healthy", while any variation from the above is classified as "unhealthy" or as a situation needing to be "cured".
- *Criminalisation:* Expression of non-cis identities, as well as same-sex relationships have been, and still continue to be, in many countries, criminalised, with LGBTQIA+ people facing arrests, imprisonment, torture, and even the death penalty for openly expressing their gender and sexuality.

- *Lack of legal protections:* LGBTQIA+ people continue to have limited access to basic rights, such as the right to family, bodily autonomy, freedom of expression, accessing education, social and health services, etc.
- *Microaggressions:* Small, everyday, actions or comments, often subtle and even unconscious, that show disrespect, disdain, contempt, or hostility towards a person because of their LGBTQIA+ identity. They occur in different distinct ways:
  - ◇ Microassaults: statements that overlook, ignore, or devalue the lived experience of LGBTQIA+ people and are usually expressed without the member of the dominant group realising it.
  - ◇ Microinsults: statements and behaviours that communicate covert negative attitudes towards LGBTQIA+ people.
  - ◇ Microinvalidations: statements and behaviours that communicate covert negative attitudes towards LGBTQIA+ people.

All the above are used to reinforce power dynamics, ensuring that the oppressed cannot challenge or change their unjust situation, upholding the status quo and preventing any shifts towards equality and justice.

Less "extreme" forms of violence, such as microaggressions, are not less serious, nor have a lesser impact on individuals that experience them. These forms of violence affect immensely people's lives and the way they perceive themselves and relate to each other. Although they may seem insignificant or harmless individually, their constant accumulation can have a profound and negative impact on the mental and emotional health of those who experience them.

This kind of subtle violence sustains and allows for more extreme forms of violence to occur. Allowing, tolerating and normalising small acts of everyday violence reinforces gender inequality -and other forms of power dynamics- and consolidates the power imbalances, with men holding more power than people of other genders.

Sexism

Sexism refers to stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination based on gender, typically against cis-straight women and LGBTQIA+ people. It is linked to beliefs around the "nature" of women and men (from a binary perspective) and the roles they should play in society. Sexism assumes that men are inherently superior to others, leading to unequal treatment or opportunities. Such hierarchical thinking **can be conscious** and hostile, **or** it can be **unconscious**, manifesting itself as unconscious bias. Sexism can touch everyone, but cis-straight women and LGBTQIA+ people are particularly affected.

LGBTQIA+ phobia

This term refers to different forms of discrimination and violence that LGBTQIA+ individuals suffer because of their gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation or sex characteristics. Although it is called a "phobia", it is more connected to the **feelings and behaviours of hate** against the discriminated people, resulting in violence.

Terms such as homophobia, transphobia, biphobia and interphobia refer to the specific set of beliefs, negative emotional reactions and discriminatory actions towards groups within the LGBTQIA+ community. You can find the detailed definitions of these terms in our glossary.

Hate Speech

The UN define hate speech as "any kind of communication in speech, writing or behaviour, that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language with reference to a person or a group on the basis of who they are, in other words, based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender or other identity factor."

It has **three important attributes,** according to the UN[4]:

1. **Can be conveyed through any form of expression,** including images, cartoons, memes, objects, gestures and symbols and it can be **disseminated offline or online.**

2. **It is "discriminatory"** (biassed, bigoted or intolerant) or **"pejorative"** (prejudiced, contemptuous or demeaning) of an individual or group.

3. Calls out **real or perceived "identity factors"** of an individual or a group, including: religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, origins, gender; but also characteristics such as language, economic or social origin, disability, health status, or sexual orientation, among many others.

Hate speech **is becoming increasingly prevalent in our societies**, and the narratives stemming from them are **beginning to be normalised**, laying the grounds for violence that occasionally goes even as far as taking people's lives.

Hate speech **often targets LGBTQIA+ individuals. We cannot allow these harmful narratives to persist.** They directly impact the well-being and lives of people, fostering violence, discrimination, and societal division.

The hard-earned rights of the LGBTQIA+ community and other minorities are at risk and the progress made towards the recognition and protection of their rights is threatened.

We can find hate speech in the comments under posts in social networks, in declarations of politicians, in interviews to famous people, in public gatherings, in media outlets, in educational institutions and workplaces, and in public spaces (like graffiti, posters, etc.).

Mobbing

Mobbing is a form of psychological harassment that occurs within a workplace, when a group or an individual repeatedly and systematically targets a colleague with negative and hostile behaviour.

Pinkwashing

Pinkwashing is a term contextualised in 2010 to describe the strategy of promoting gender/LGBTQIA+ inclusivity on the surface level while distracting from human rights violations and discrimination of LGBTQIA+ people in everyday functioning. Today, the term is often used to describe the actions of corporations who use Pride campaigns as an advertising tool while acting in ways that are harmful to the LGBTQIA+ community, such as donating funds to anti-LGBTQIA+ politicians.

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4 Source: https://www.un.org/en/hate-speech/understanding-hate-speech/what-is-hate-speech
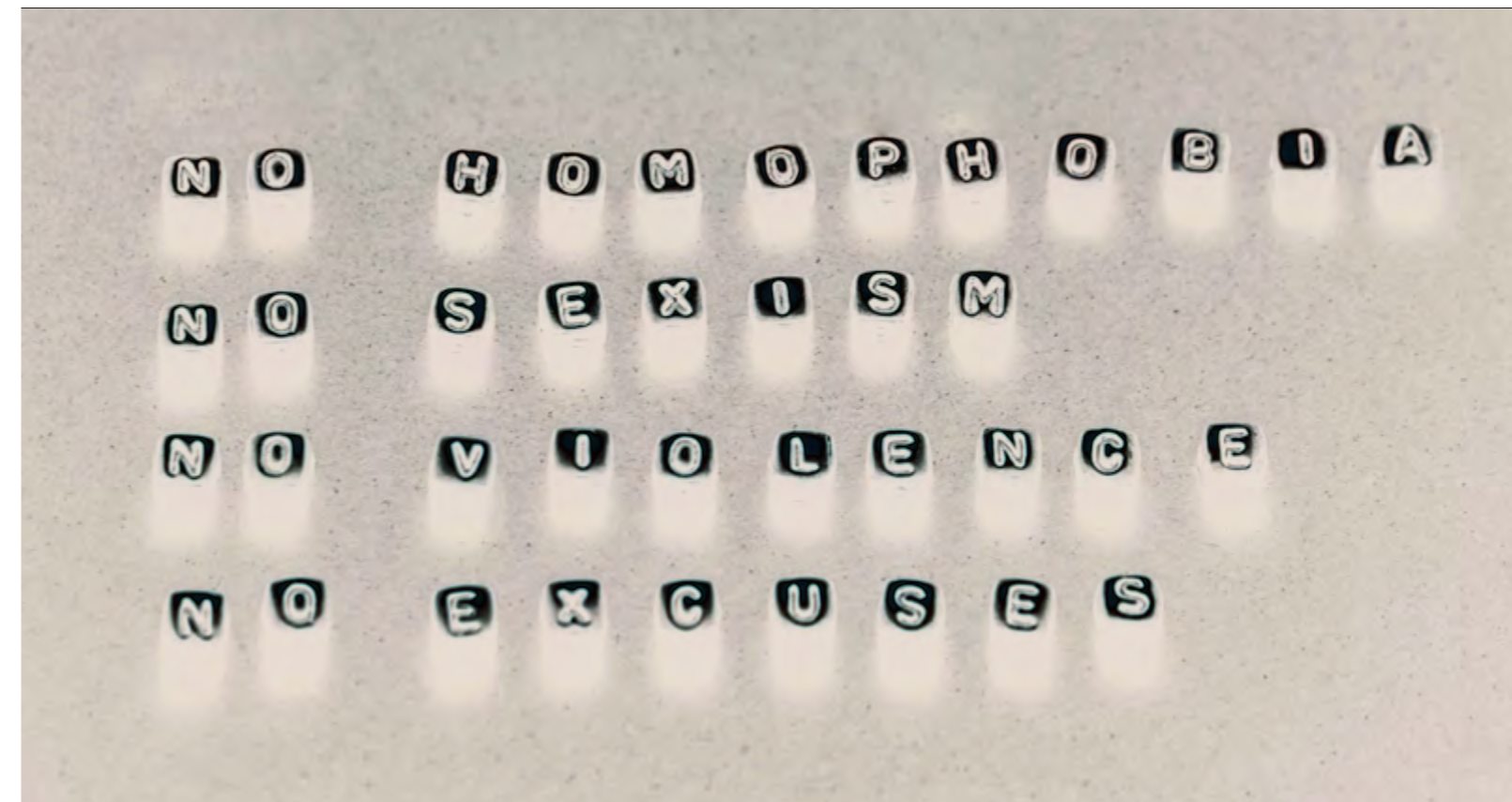
Intersectionality

Intersectionality is seen as the interconnected nature of social categorisations such as race, class, and gender, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage[5]. It is an analytical tool for studying, understanding and responding to the ways in which sex and gender intersect with other personal characteristics/identities, and how these intersections contribute to unique experiences of discrimination[6].

Kimberlé Crenshaw, a North American law professor who coined the term in 1989 explained Intersectional feminism as, "a prism for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other"[7].

Intersectionality centres on the voices of those experiencing overlapping; concurrent forms of oppression in order to understand the depths of the inequalities and the relationships among them in any given context[8].

"We tend to talk about race inequality as separate from inequality based on gender, class, sexuality or immigrant status. What's often missing is how some people are subject to all of these, and the experience is not just the sum of its parts," Kimberlé Crenshaw said.

Why is this framework useful?
Intersectionality highlights the complexity of discrimination and exclusion, emphasising that addressing a single issue is insufficient for solving these interconnected problems. It is not only theory; its importance lies in integrating this perspective into our everyday lives.

How can we include intersectionality in our everyday life?[9]

Recognise differences.
It is easier to believe that "all women are" or that "LGBTQIA+ people believe or feel" in a certain way, but this does not reflect reality. We must recognise that all unique experiences of identity, and particularly ones that involve multiple overlapping oppressions, are valid.
Do not shy away from recognizing that people experience the world differently based on their overlapping identity markers. People are sometimes uncomfortable naming another person's perceived race or asking for someone's pronouns. However, it is important to recognize these identities as a way to step beyond our assumptions that our experience is common.

Avoid oversimplified language.
Once we recognise this difference, we can move away from language that seeks to define people by a singular identity.

Analyse the space you occupy.
Becoming comfortable recognising variance in identities also involves recognising when this variance is not represented in the spaces you occupy. Diversity of all kinds matters in your workplace and in all the spaces you are part of. Are there any identities or experiences that are not present/represented? What might they be related to? E.g. race, (dis)ability, ethnicity, etc. Be conscious of the welcoming or distancing practices of the spaces you frequent.

Seek other points of view.
Explore the narratives of those with different identities and realities than you. Take the opportunity to listen to their experiences and points of view.

Intersectionality and LGBTQIA+ activism
Since the mid-twentieth century, works from the perspective of black feminism connected to intersectionality began to be published. The GATE LGBTQIA+ project especially resonates with the ideas originating from the 1977 manifesto of the Combahee River Collective, a black and lesbian organisation that originated in Boston, United States in 1974 that advocated intersectionality from the intersecting oppressions of race, sex, gender, and class (Akotirene, 2019)[10]. The words that opened that manifesto are absolutely self-explanatory: "The overarching statement of our politics today is that we are actively engaged in the struggle against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression, and we see our particular task as the development of integrated analysis and practice based on the fact that the major systems of oppression are intersected. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives." (The Combahee river collective statement, 2000)[11].

5 Definition based on Oxford Dictionary's Intersectionality definition available at https://www.oxford-learnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/intersectionality?q=intersectionality
6 Christodoulou, J. (2005). Glossary of gender-related terms. Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies. European Institute for Gender Equality. https://medinstgenderstudies.org/wp-content/uploads/Gender-Glossary-updated_final.pdf
7 Women, U. (2021, December 15). Intersectional feminism: what it means and why it matters right now. Medium. https://un-women.medium.com/intersectional-feminism-what-it-means-and-why-it-matters-right-now-7743bfa16757
8 Crenshaw, Kimberle (1989) "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," University of Chicago Legal Forum: Vol. 1989, Article 8. Available at: https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8

9 What is intersectionality, and what does it have to do with me? (2020, July 2). YW Boston. https://www.ywboston.org/2017/03/what-is-intersectionality-and-what-does-it-have-to-do-with-me/
10 Akotirene, C. (2019). Interseccionalidade. São Paulo. Pólen Produção Editorial LTDA.
11 The Combahee river collective statement (2000). En Smith, B. (ed.). Home girls: A Black feminist anthology, 1, 264-274. Rutgers University Press

Inclusive Language

Sometimes we can be exclusionary or offensive with our words, even without any bad intention. To avoid it check our Infographic!

INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

LGBTQIA+ inclusive language means communicating in a way that is not discriminatory towards any gender identity or sexual orientation and that doesn't reproduce existing stereotypes and prejudices. Moreover, inclusive language avoids assumptions based on hetero- and cis-normativity, and promotes visibility of the existing diversity related to gender and sexuality.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Language **shapes the way we understand the world** that surrounds us. The words that we use **build our own reality.** They have the **power** to invalidate and stigmatise identities, or to promote respect and visibility

NOT INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE examples:

- It's common to use the "generic masculine": the use of masculine-gendered words to address a mixed group or subjects whose gender is not clear ("men" as a synonym for "persons").
- Using titles that indicate a woman's marital status (Mrs.).
- Words that assume connections between jobs and gender (policemen, chairman).
- Using language that assumes everyone's relationships follow a heteronormative paradigm (boyfriend/girlfriend, father and mother).

TIPS FOR MAKING LANGUAGE MORE INCLUSIVE:

✓ Avoid using the generic masculine by default, and use persons, people, etc. instead.
✗ firemen, salesman ✓ firefighters, salesperson

✓ Avoid using language that is gender binary and **use** more **gender neutral words**.
✗ ladies and gentlemen ✓ people, everybody, y'all.

✓ Avoid using gendered terms when referring to family and relationships
✗ girlfriend, boyfriend ✓ partner ✗ mother, father ✓ parents

✓ **Pronouns** can be a way to communicate one's gender. Be conscious about their use!

✓ To refer to people in general, you can use gender-neutral pronouns such as "**they" – it also works in singular!** The singular use of "they" is preferred to the binary "he or she".

✓ **Important: don't assume someone's gender!** You can **ask for their pronouns** and/or use their name when referring to them! **Keep in mind that pronouns are not 'preferred'.** Using the term "preferred pronouns" implies that gender identity is a choice or preference, which is not the case. Therefore, when asking about pronouns, use: "Which pronouns do you use?" or "Which are your pronouns?", and avoid "Which pronouns do you prefer?".

✓ Get to know gender terminology and use terms correctly.

✓ **Avoid using stigmatising language.**
Many words have been –and continue to be– used to refer to LGBTQIA+ people in a way that is derogatory, stigmatising or pathologising. For some, it may be more clear that they are used in a stigmatising way, while others may be less obvious for someone who is currently learning about gender and sexuality diversity. Some examples of words to avoid:
✗ *Hermaphrodite:* it is stigmatising and does not reflect the diversity of intersex experiences.
✗ *Real, Biological or Natural* when referring to cisgender and/or straight people: using those terms implies that LGBTQIA+ identities are somehow less valid or less authentic. Instead, use "cisgender" or "heterosexual" without implying superiority or normativity.
✗ *Transgendered:* suggests that being transgender is something that happens to a person, rather than an inherent aspect/identity of who they are. Use "transgender" instead.

Gender Awareness and Transformation for Equality

GA+TE

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Co-funded by the European Union

Coming out process

Coming out refers to the process of willingly expressing one's sexual orientation/gender identity/intersex variation to their family, social and work environment, etc. Coming out can also refer to the process of identifying/accepting one's sexual orientation, gender identity or intersex variation.
There are lots of different ways to come out: calling someone on the phone, sending someone a text, sending an email, writing a letter and /or talking with someone in person.

Perhaps coming out may not go according to our hopes and plans. Even if people don't react the way we wish, it does not reflect on the realness of our identities, and it is not our fault. We deserve to be accepted with care and love. In situations where we may feel unsafe, it could make sense to prepare a back-up plan for housing, food, school, and/or transportation, just in case. Safety and well-being are of the utmost priority.

Coming out VS Outing

While coming is a process initiated by the person themselves, outing is when someone else discloses the sexual orientation, gender identity or intersex status of an LGBTQIA+ person without their consent. Outing is a harmful act that can traumatise the person being outed. It can also lead to someone experiencing violence or getting in dangerous situations. Even if the risks aren't that severe, it's still not acceptable to share someone's identity without their consent.
If someone wants to share their LGBTQIA+ identity with other people, the decision is up to them. However, if someone gives you consent to share their LGBTQIA+ status, then you are not outing them.

Representation of LGBTQIA+ people

Cis-/Heteronormative narratives establish strict, binary categorisations around gender and sexuality, invisibilising, discriminating, and punishing all other ways of being or behaving.

While LGBTQIA+ identities and experiences have been systematically made invisible, LGBTQIA+ people always have and continue to exist.

In the following pages, we present some aspects that are especially relevant from the point of view of representation of LGBTQIA+ identities and experiences.

Sexual Education

Existing sexual health education programs predominantly adopt a dyadic, cisgender and heterosexual viewpoint, which makes LGBTQIA+ identities invisible and can leave LGBTQIA+ people feeling marginalised. This issue is exacerbated by a shortage of training and inclusive curriculum materials, leaving educators unprepared or constrained by their biases.

LGBTQIA+ individuals are often left outside of mainstream sexual education, feeling that those classes and information do not directly relate to them, due to several factors:

- Sexual education often focuses on heterosexual relationships and cisgender identities and does not address the needs and experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals, who feel invisibilised and excluded.
- Moreover, LGBTQIA+ identities and relationships are often stigmatised by the current educational system, promoting discrimination and taboos, leading to silence or avoidance of topics that are non-heteronormative.
- There are not many resources and materials on sexual health and relationships that include LGBTQIA+ realities, leaving these students without access to accurate information about specific LGBTQIA+ topics such as safer sex practices, coming out, navigating relationships, etc.
- As mentioned before, educators and youth workers may lack the knowledge and training needed to address LGBTQIA+ topics effectively in sexual education curricula.

Rainbow Families

Rainbow families are families where **at least one person identifies as LGBTQIA+.** These families can include **same-sex couples raising children, queer couples, single LGBTQIA+ parents.** Many LGBTQIA+ people also form "families of choice": networks of close relationships that are not necessarily legally recognised or based on biological relationships (e.g. close friends, partners who are not legally recognised, etc).

It is important to challenge the view that traditional formats of families are the only possible ways to be a family, and to create a safer space for all individuals and diverse kinds of relationships. The visibility and support of Rainbow families are crucial for reducing the stigma around LGBTQIA+ identities and promoting acceptance and respect.

It is important to promote the recognition of rainbow families, not only by the law but in all social contexts, such as in schools, in workplaces, in cultural spaces, in TV shows and films, etc. This can lead to better social services, healthcare, and educational support tailored to the needs of LGBTQIA+ families.

The recognition and respect of rainbow families has a direct effect in reducing homophobia, transphobia and other types of discrimination.

Pride

On a summer night in New York, on June 28, 1969, police raided the Stonewall Inn, a gay club in Greenwich Village. During this time, in every state but Illinois, acts of homosexuality were illegal and bars and restaurants that publicly served or had employees who identified as part of the LGBT community risked being shut down. Furthermore, the Stonewall Inn was one of many bars owned by the Mob – which both took advantage of and provided refuge for the LGBT community. This resulted in bar patrons, staff, and neighbourhood residents rioting in Christopher Street, outside the bar. Among the many leaders of the riots there was a black, trans, bisexual woman, Marsha P. Johnson, leading the movement to continue over six days with protests and clashes. The message was clear — protestors demanded the establishment of places where LGBT+ people could go and be open about their sexual orientation without fear of arrest.

Establishing Pride Month is largely credited to bisexual activist Brenda Howard. Known as 'The Mother of Pride,' Brenda organised Gay Pride Week and the Christopher Street Liberation Day Parade a year after the Stonewall Riots. This eventually morphed into what we now know as the New York City Pride March and catalysed the formation of similar parades and marches across the world. Since then Prides around the world have been the biggest events of the LGBTQIA+ community promoting visibility of gender and sexuality diversity, advocating for the protection of LGBTQIA+ rights, and creating spaces where LGBTQIA+ identities can be celebrated.

GATE + LGBTQIA
process

Introduction to Gender and Sexuality Topics