



# **BREAK THE NORM!**

**methods for studying norms in general  
and the heteronorm in particular**

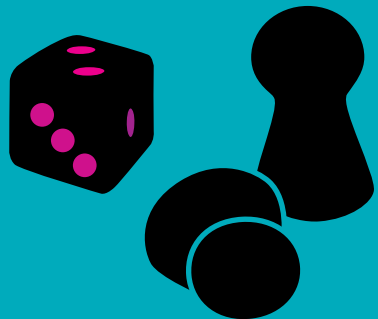
**The Living History Forum  
RFSL Ungdom**

# BREAK THE NORM!

**methods for studying norms in general  
and the heteronorm in particular**

The Living History Forum

RFSL Ungdom (The Swedish Youth Federation for Lesbian, Gay,  
Bisexual and Transgender Rights)



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# Introduction

## **Break the Norm!**

Norms are the notions, ideas and unwritten rules that form us humans. They are present in all areas of life and make up the limits that define acceptable behavior. Some norms are positive and guide how we act towards others. They may for example discourage us from spitting in another person's face or from plowing into people on the street. Without thinking much of it, we adapt to most norms. For example, most people know to shake hands with their right hand and do so without thinking twice. It is not until someone breaks the norm that norms become visible.

There are norms that affect society as a whole and that determine who is allowed power and influence. These too only become obvious when someone breaks them. Few people question the normalcy of a girl who talks of her boyfriend or the normalcy of a boy who attends a formal event dressed in shirt and tie. But what if the girl instead talks about her new girlfriend? Or if the boy decides to accessorize his outfit with nail polish? With these small changes, they break the unwritten rules for proper male and female behavior.

Even the functioning of the human body is subject to norms. Few people who can walk think much of two steps leading into a building, whereas these steps are a significant challenge for wheelchair users. As far as norms are concerned, it is never considered an advantage to have a disability. But not all norms are as fixed; oftentimes, people who follow/break norms are perceived differently depending on the situation.

History shows us that norms change. For example, it is no longer taboo in Sweden for women to dress in pants. Throughout history norms have played a great part in which people/groups are discriminated. Nowadays, women in Sweden are entitled to a university education and are not expected to stop working once they have children. Though the norms that determine proper male and female behavior have changed, there is still much that has remained the same. For example, there are still relatively few female professors and when it comes to childrearing, women still take the bulk of the responsibility.

Norms are about discrimination, power and influence. And there are consequences for those who break the norms. Homosexuals, transgenders, persons with disabilities and those who look different may be harassed at school, denied a job or become victims of racist or homophobic hate crimes. Those who break the norms are lumped together and thought of as

all being the same. It is much more common, for example, to hear »truths« about homosexuals than »truths« about straights.

This material takes a critical approach to norms. We have made an active choice to look at how norms affect our values and everyday lives rather than to focus on the people who break them. The exercises will show how norms discriminate against those who do not fit in. Racism, sexism and homophobia are examples of oppressive opinions that are based on color, gender and sexuality norms. Norms tend to be interconnected. It is not enough to look at how conditions differ between main groups because of the differences between groups *within* the main groups. For example, white able-bodied men are likely to be treated differently than white men with disabilities. Therefore, the exercises will illustrate how norms *interconnect and interact*.

### **What Is It Like in Your Organization?**

This material was developed with youth organizations in mind. Therefore, many of the exercises deal with organizational norms. These can easily be applied to schools and workplaces.

It is always important to look at the structures in our own organizations. Do some people's opinions weigh heavier than others? Which individuals or groups establish the rules? What is considered right and wrong, normal and abnormal? Are there people in your organization that are victims of offensive behavior or discriminatory treatment?

Norms do not exist to cause people harm or pain. Likewise, people are rarely intentionally spiteful or malicious. Most often times, what is perceived as spiteful or malicious treatment is simply a result of people following the norms without thinking. For example, a person may unthinkingly ask a girl about her boyfriend or assume that a person who looks different from the 'natives' is an immigrant. In addition, it is often difficult for those who follow the norms to see how they are affected by them. They may even question whether norms exist. To understand how people are isolated and discriminated, it is important to listen to the victims of isolation and discrimination.

When we study norms, it is important that we look at how we influence norms and are affected by them. Because even if we understand that societal norms can cause problems, we nonetheless help to confirm and

reinforce the norms. Even when we break certain norms, we are often rewarded in other ways. When we follow norms, we as people and our actions are considered good, normal and natural. We don't often reflect on our appearance unless it is significantly different from others, we don't think much of our sexual orientation if we are heterosexual, nor do we question our ability to walk, read, see, hear and talk when we are able-bodied. It is considered so normal to be heterosexual and free from disability that few give it a second thought.

The first exercises in this material examine norms and how we categorize people. The next exercises deal with the societal norms of today. Here we hope to spark discussions about how we all maintain and reinforce them. The last exercises will help you make practical use of what you have learned.

# Norm-Critical Pedagogy

Equality and anti-discrimination exercises usually focus on creating understanding, tolerance and sympathy for the victims of abuse, discrimination and offensive treatment. And the victims in focus are often LGBT people, ethnic minorities or those with disabilities.

But this approach poses problems. Firstly, there is a great risk that the norms and power structures that label people as norm-followers and norm-breakers are ignored. For example, by only focusing on creating an environment in which homo- and bisexuals can be open about their sexual orientation, we miss the reasons *why* they are repeatedly forced to reveal their sexuality and *why* heterosexuals are not. In other words, the hetero-norm is never brought to the surface.

Secondly, we risk assuming that those who are learning about victims of discrimination are not victims themselves. For example, when discussing the matter of whether same-sex marriage should be allowed, it is often assumed that there are only straight people in the discussion group in spite of the fact that homo- and bisexuals are everywhere!

Thirdly, we risk simply reiterating the norms and not actually changing them. Norms cast deviators in a negative light – as abnormal or strange – whereas abiders are seen as normal and ordinary. In addition, those who are part of the norm are permitted to discuss and express their opinions regarding the deviators' rights and conditions. For example, the topic of whether same-sex couples should be allowed to adopt is often up for debate whereas the right of heterosexuals to adopt is never contested.

We have chosen to take another approach. Rather than focus on those who deviate from the norms, we will focus on the norms that control who is perceived as normal versus abnormal. We believe that this method will raise awareness and cause us to question *why* certain people are discriminated against. This is better than simply showing pity once the damage is done. It is not enough to be knowledgeable of the conditions of those who break the norms. Most people know that women are at a disadvantage to men and though each and every one of us knows at least one woman, the disadvantages still remain! Many courses for raising awareness of LGBT issues expose the course participants to a homo-, bi- or transgender person in order to increase understanding and stop discrimination. It's not enough. We need to learn about how norms, power and influence work in order to bring about fundamental societal change.



# Leading Groups: Before, During, After

Help each other out when doing the exercises in this material. It's easier to understand what is happening in the group when you work together. To lead these exercises, you should have experience from similar exercises. It is recommended that you participate in a course that uses this method before leading a group of your own because the experience will help you understand the discussions that arise. It is also important that you reflect on norms and how they have affected your life before you lead the exercises. The risk is otherwise that you unconsciously reinforce the norms rather than question them. Begin your first lesson with a norm brainstorming session to create understanding of what you will be discussing.

Adapt the exercises to a suitable level for the group, but only begin the exercise when you feel ready. Feel free to adapt the methods. It is more important that the exercises serve a purpose in your group than that you follow them exactly. Also give some thought to your own personal purpose of doing these exercises before you begin. Remind yourself that in your role as course leader you are in charge. By posing the right questions, you choose the path the discussion will take. When working from a norm-critical perspective, keep in mind that the focus of the discussion should be the norms themselves. The discussions tend to easily drift towards how people deviate from norms.

Make sure that everyone in the group is given a chance to speak! You may find rounds helpful. By working in *rounds* each person is given a chance to speak without interruption. Each person is allowed to have a say while the others actively listen. Only allow people to ask questions when they don't understand, otherwise, they must wait for their turn to speak. Once one group member has said his piece the next person is allowed to speak. When working with larger groups, it may be beneficial to pair off or make smaller groups in order to allow each person more time to speak.

The aim of these exercises is to spark interest and curiosity. But keep in mind that the exercises may also give rise to negative reactions. People may feel threatened or uncomfortable when they learn that there are advantages to following norms. It can be just as uncomfortable to be reminded of the disadvantages of not following the norms. Don't be intimidated by the reactions that may arise – discuss them instead. Where are these reactions coming from? Is it fear of what is different or the prospect of losing power and status that feels threatening?

Consider how you want to handle any situations that may arise before you start the exercises. For best results, you need to create a secure and friendly atmosphere. Fear and aggression block constructive discussion. You must set the limits for what may be expressed in the discussion process. How will you react to homophobic, racist or sexist comments? How will you act towards the victims of these comments? How will you allow for an open forum without giving individual participants the opportunity to question and insult those who deviate from the norm?

The aim of *Break the Norm!* is to make you question your norms and values. Use cases from your own organization, school or workplace as examples. The more based in reality, the better. What norms are prevalent in your organization? What people are mentioned and highlighted in your organization's documentation? Which are not? How do people talk? Which unwritten rules apply? Which groups are best positioned in the organization? Formulate more questions that apply to your organization and involve everyone in the discussion.

Regardless of which method(s) you use, you may benefit from ending your sessions by summarizing how you have reasoned about your own organization and how you can further work with these issues. Use one of the two closing exercises to discuss how you can bring about actual change.

Good luck!

## CHAPTER 1

# Norms – How They Work

The heteronorm is one of the most basic and influential norms in our society. It dictates that there are fundamental differences between men and women, that a person must be either man or woman and that it is »natural« to be attracted to the opposite sex. There are also influential norms that award people advantages depending on their skin color, level of physical disability and class.

This chapter contains thought-provoking methods for explaining what norms are and how they shape our way of thinking.

# Method: Guess Who's Straight

The purpose of this method is to bring our own and society's notions and »rules« regarding heterosexuality into the light. Those who break these rules – homosexuals for example – are normally the objects of focus. But we will take a different approach. We will explain and question the heteronorm, a norm that many usually take for granted.

## Material

- ▶ Copies of pictures on pages 18–31
- ▶ Whiteboard/flipchart
- ▶ Whiteboard pen/marker

## Method

Spread the pictures out on a large table or on the floor in plain view of all. Have everyone select a picture of a person they think looks straight. In rounds, talk about each selected picture and allow the person who selected it to explain his/her reasons for choosing it. Summarize how the pictures were selected and list the words on the board – for example, »macho«, »manly«, »make up«, »girlie«, etc.

In pairs, discuss the following:

- ▶ How do our preconceptions of femininity and masculinity affect how we view heterosexuality?
- ▶ Does society view people's sexual orientation differently depending on their skin color, class or visible disability?

Discuss and sum up your thoughts regarding the heteronorm in the entire group.

## Watch Out!

When discussing the heteronorm, the discussion easily drifts to homo- or bisexuality. This takes the heteronorm out of focus and it loses its importance. Remember that talking about what does not »fit in« actually serves to uphold the heteronorm and the definition of what is considered abnormal. For example, a comment such as »lesbians are all manly« implies that straight women are not. In the group, discuss why this happens, why it is easier to talk about deviators than the norm itself. Continue working, but remember that the heteronorm is to stay in focus.

It is fully possible that people will declare »truths« about those in the pictures such as, »This person can't possibly be gay – his country and religion would never allow it. He must be straight!« Point out that we know nothing about the subjects of the pictures. Therefore, it's impossible to know who they are or anything about their sexual orientation! What is of interest is how society perceives the people in the pictures. We are focusing on our own and society's preconceived notions, not on »truths«. Here too it is important to shift the perspective. Comments that suggest for example that a person could not possibly be gay because of his/her oppressive culture also suggest that other cultures (but not our own) are oppressive.

## Method: Frames

Our society has more or less explicit rules for appropriate male and female behavior. In other words, there are in reality two frames that everyone should fit into – a masculine male frame or a feminine female frame. With this method we will show these rules and their connection to rules of ethnicity and sexuality. In this method, it is important to consider the role that the frames play for a person's level of authority and status.

### Material

- ▶ Whiteboard/flipchart
- ▶ Whiteboard pen/marker
- ▶ Two drawn frames to be filled with attributes

### Brainstorming

Present the societal gender frames and draw two frames side by side on the board. Brainstorm on the contents of the frames. What is considered masculine? What represents acceptable male behavior and appearance in our society? What is considered feminine? What represents acceptable female behavior and appearance in our society? Point out that the purpose is to describe the general societal standards for femininity and masculinity, not personal standards. Start with one frame. Write the words that the group attributes to masculinity and femininity in each frame.

## **Reflections**

In pairs, consider the contents of the frames.

- ▶ What comes to mind when reading the words?
- ▶ Why are many of the attributes in the masculine frame considered to be of greater value than those in the feminine frame?

Review some of these reflections in the group. If it does not come up naturally in your discussions, add information such as the fact that it is impossible to entirely live up to the standards in the frames. Also point out that the masculine frame can be placed higher than the feminine frame because women and femininity are considered to be inferior to men and masculinity. Also highlight that manly men and feminine women are assumed to be heterosexual in our society.

Once again, ponder the following in pairs.

- ▶ What are the advantages of adhering to the attributes in the frames?
- ▶ What are the consequences of deviating, for example when a woman is too forward/pushy or a man is too sensitive? What happens if you cannot tell a person's sex?
- ▶ What roles do skin color and class play in how males and females are perceived?
- ▶ Why are tomboys often perceived positively? Why, on the other hand, are boys who have feminine qualities not perceived as positively?

In the entire group, discuss the consequences that may arise from deviating from the frames. The consequences may come in the form of jokes, comments, strange looks, harassment and violence.

# Method: Matchmaking

In our society, a lot revolves around the notion of having a partner or striving to have a partner. Housing and family politics often assume that we will live in couples. Why is it then that some couples are perceived as a less likely match than others? The purpose of this exercise is to elucidate the invisible rules and boundaries for sexuality in relation to sex, disability, class, color and age.

## Material

► Copies of pictures on pages 18–31

## Method

Spread the pictures out in plain view of all. Have everyone pair up the pictures according to who they think are couples. What is considered feminine/masculine? What represents acceptable female/male behavior and appearance in our society? Try not to limit how people match the pictures up. It is not necessary for the group to reach consensus. A greater number of couples will only add to your discussion.

## Reflections

How have the people been matched? Was the match based on age, color or class? Write everyone's reflections down and repeat them out loud so everyone can hear.

Discuss which couple is most unlikely and list the reasons for this. Also talk about why people often choose a partner according to category, for example why whites choose whites, why members of the middle class choose other middle class members. Why are relationships consisting of more than two people not as common?

## Watch Out!

The aim of this method is to discuss what is most commonly seen and what invisible standards there are, not to discuss each individual's idea of what is normal or abnormal. It is important to steer the discussion away from individual opinions and perceptions. In your role as leader, make clear that you will be discussing society's perception of normalcy and of certain groups of people.

# Method: Scavenger Hunt

Norms and power influence who is allowed a forum in the media and by what method. The purpose of this scavenger hunt is to demonstrate which groups of people are represented in the media and how. The group is tasked with finding certain groups and discussing who is included/excluded in our society's media.

## Material

- ▶ Copies of the list of people to be found, page 17
- ▶ Whiteboard/flipchart
- ▶ Whiteboard pen/marker
- ▶ Pens for participants
- ▶ Newspaper or similar

## Method

Explain to the group that they will be divided into teams for the scavenger hunt and that the goal is to find as many of the listed people as possible. Have everyone jot down how they found each person so that they can later report back to the group. There are no right or wrong answers. In some cases, a listed person will be obvious in the text or picture, others can be found by reading between the lines. The point is to discuss norms in the media, not to have the highest score.

Work in groups of three and allow 15 minutes for the scavenger hunt.

## Regrouping and Statistics

Once regrouped, take inventory of what the individual groups found. How many found a feminine looking non-immigrant girl/woman? A person in a female body who does not feel female? And so on. Write the number of each person found and repeat it out loud.

Next, ask what criteria were used for finding the people. What was their definition of »non-immigrant«? What defined a »foreigner«? A heterosexual? Could straight people found in fact be bisexual but have a partner of the opposite sex? What defines »masculinity«? And so on. Allow for various perspectives and solutions and encourage the group to reason aloud about their own perceptions and difficulties categorizing people.



## **Hierarchies**

Move on to reflecting over norms and hierarchies.

Pose such questions as:

- ▶ Which people did you find first? Why is that? Were the people in the list difficult to find?
- ▶ Which people didn't you find? Were they not found because the group barely exists, because they are not allowed space in the media or because they are simply not visible?
- ▶ Were these people quoted in articles or were they only visible in pictures?

## **Closing Thoughts**

If necessary, you can sum up the session. Examples of summary questions:

What are our visual judgments based on? What visible/invisible criteria do we have? Which groups are best positioned in society? Clarify what »good positioning« entails – from being perceived as normal to being heard in debates or holding upper-level management or political positions.

Consider the state of things in your organization. In smaller groups, discuss the list of people. Which groups are represented in your organization? What people are mentioned and highlighted in your organization's documentation? Which groups hold upper-level/lower-level positions in the organization? How do people talk? What invisible rules are there? Which groups represent the norm and which are oppressed?

## **TIME FOR A SCAVENGER HUNT! YOU NEED TO FIND:**

- A feminine non-immigrant woman
- A person in a female body who does not feel female
- A person who could pass for male or female
- A masculine white man
- A masculine woman
- A visibly disabled person
- Five heterosexuals
- A black homosexual man
- A white bisexual woman
- A white homosexual in a position of power
- A disabled person whose disability is not visible
- A lesbian who looks to be of foreign descent
- A white heterosexual who holds a high-level position in society
- A white man who holds a low-level position in society
- A foreign woman who holds a high-level position in society
- A non-immigrant woman who holds a high-level position in society



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# It's All about Power!

We are constantly categorized  
and sorted into groups.

The group that we belong to  
greatly affects our opportunities  
to influence society and  
our own lives.

It is often argued that we  
must tolerate norm-breakers  
and minorities to reduce  
discrimination in society,  
but is this the only way?

# Method: The Societal Ladder

We are all different. Society values some higher than others. This may not be openly expressed, but the fact can be seen in how similar those who hold positions of power and influence are. For example, it is most common to find men on boards of directors and whites in European parliaments. The purpose of the Societal Ladder exercise is to discuss who is allowed positions of power and influence in society and how this is related to sex, color, sexual orientation, disability and class.

## Material

- ▶ Copies of pictures on pages 18–31
- ▶ Whiteboard/flipchart
- ▶ Whiteboard pen/marker
- ▶ Sticky notes

## Brainstorming

Brainstorm on the concept of power. The following are points you should mention if they do not come up naturally in your discussions. Power can be an expression for what type of person is viewed as normal, who is allowed to influence and make important societal decisions, which applicants tend to be best positioned in employment situations, which people are grouped together and according to which attributes, and which people are never grouped or categorized.

Spread the pictures out on a large table or on the floor. Have the group arrange the pictures into a hierarchy placing those that you think have most power on the top and those with the least at the bottom. The group members may choose to discuss their train of thought or remain silent during the exercise. Specifically point out that the group should focus on the current state of your own society.

## Reflections

Discuss what it was in each picture that caused you to position the person higher or lower in the hierarchy. Write the group's reflections down and repeat them out loud. Next, change the focus from your society in general to other places and societies. How would these people place in the UN General Assembly? In a small village in the country? On the beach in the summer? In Parliament/government?

As a second step, stick notes onto each picture. Have each group member write the monthly salary that they think each person earns in relation to a

mean salary that you supply. Discuss how it is possible that you can »determine« from a picture how much a person earns in spite of the fact that we know nothing about the subjects! Also point out that an upper-level position in the hierarchy does not necessarily imply a higher salary nor does a lower-level position imply a lower salary.

Most importantly of all, have the group reflect on how things are in your own organization.

- ▶ What is the hierarchy in your organization like?
- ▶ What are the prevailing norms?
- ▶ Ask the following questions: What people are mentioned and highlighted in your organization's documentation? Which people obtain the highest positions? Which people are made to feel welcome? Which group(s) remain in the organization for long periods of time?

### **Watch Out!**

People may tend to place certain people high up in the hierarchy arguing that there are famous people of the same color, sexual orientation or disability who are successful. Remind them that the focus is to lie on society at large rather than on individual cases.

## **Method: Who Belongs?**

This exercise can be used to discuss the power structures that are present in your own organization.

### **Material**

- ▶ Pictures on pages 18–31
- ▶ Tape

### **Method**

Make a triangle of tape on the floor. Explain that the triangle symbolizes the group's organization. The top part of the triangle represents those who are in positions of power and influence, those who are seen and heard in meetings and who others in the organization look up to and listen to. Pass out the pictures. As a group, lay the pictures in relation to where the subjects would be found in your organization. Those who would not be found in the organization are to be laid outside the triangle. Place the others hierarchically in the triangle.

Discuss the following:

- ▶ Which people belong to the organization and which do not?
- ▶ What is the internal hierarchy like?
- ▶ How can this be changed?

## Method: I Tolerate You

We often hear how important it is to be tolerant of those who are different. But who defines what is »different« and what exactly does it mean to be tolerant? What is the difference between being tolerant and being tolerated? Is it positive to be tolerated? The purpose of this exercise is to study the power and influence of those who follow the norms. It is a position that allows them to choose to tolerate another person's appearance and lifestyle.

Each group member will practice being actively tolerant and passively tolerated. Use these experiences to discuss tolerance and power. You can choose to mix and match the various parts of this exercise.

### Material

- ▶ Whiteboard/flipchart
- ▶ Whiteboard pen/marker

### I Tolerate Your Appearance

Pair up the group members or let them walk around the room and stop when they meet another participant. Have Member A make a neutral comment about one of Member B's visible attributes. Tell Member A to avoid making judgmental comments such as »nice shirt«, »gorgeous shoes« or »fantastic hairstyle« but to make neutral comments about external details. Member A is then to ensure Member B that he/she tolerates/accepts this attribute. For example: »I accept that you wear glasses«, »It's totally ok with me that you are wearing brown shoes today«, »I'm tolerant of your hair color.« Member B replies to each tolerant comment with »Thank you«. Let each member make a number of comments before having the pairs switch roles.

After switching roles a couple of times, Member A is to choose one comment to develop further. He/she is to emphasize that Member B is a good person »in spite of this«, that it's »ok with him/her«. Member A should speak in as kind a tone as possible. Member B continues to say

»Thank you«. Switch roles. After some time, stop the activity and discuss as a group what their experiences of the exercise were. Which comments were funny, which were irritating? Are there any similarities between the comments that led to giggles or the comments that led to irritation? How did it feel to tolerate another? How did it feel to be tolerated? Also ask the group to silently reflect on whether they consciously decided to not comment on certain attributes.

You can do this exercise while mingling. Move from person to person and comment on their visible attributes. Ask the group members if they made any active choices. What didn't they comment on and why?

### **I Tolerate Your Choices**

Split the group up into pairs. Have your group members tell each other a bit about themselves. Member A is then to state that he/she tolerates or accepts parts of Member B's lifestyle or life situation, both major and minor aspects. For example: »I have no problem with you playing soccer in your spare time.« »I accept that you have a boyfriend.« »I accept that you DON'T have a boyfriend.« Switch roles.

### **Watch Out!**

This exercise may cause strong reactions. It is important that you complete the entire exercise and resolve any conflicts or emotions that may arise.

### **Discussion**

Regardless of whether the group does both exercises or only one, end the exercise by discussion the following:

- ▶ Let each person voice his/her opinions about the exercise and what it is like to be tolerated. What are the advantages and disadvantages of tolerance? Make two columns, »Advantages« and »Disadvantages«, on your flipchart and write down and read out loud the group's opinions. Which column contains the most comments? Does everyone agree with the comments?
- ▶ Ask the group which groups are tolerant and which are tolerated. The following are examples of groups. Write and repeat these so that everyone can see and hear.

Brainstorm to come up with other categories.

Discuss which groups most often come up in relation to tolerance. Circle these groups on the flipchart. Which groups are rarely to never mentioned

in the context of tolerance? Compare similarities and differences between the circled groups and the uncircled groups. Ponder which groups have historically been the tolerators and the tolerated. How has this changed or remained the same?

► Ask the group to silently reflect over and write down situations in their own lives in which they have felt negative and positive pressure from the norms. How did it feel to be tolerated? When were they part of the norm and could choose to tolerate or not tolerate, accept or reject? Let those who want to share their experiences do so, but make clear that sharing is voluntary.

**THE POOR**

**JOURNALISTS**

**COUNTRY FOLK**

**YOUTHS**

**HOMOSEXUALS**

**BLACKS**

**STRAIGHTS**

**ETHNIC  
MINORITIES**

**UPPER-LEVEL  
MANAGERS**

**BLONDS**

**THE RICH**

**TEACHERS**

**THE  
UNEMPLOYED**

**WHEELCHAIR  
USERS**

**TRANSVESTITES**

# Method:

## Refusing to Say »Thank You«

People react differently to tolerance. Some are grateful that they are accepted, others become angry. Read and discuss the following text about refusing to be grateful. There are suggestions for discussion at the end of the text.

### Material

- Copies of *Queers Read This*, page 39

### *Queers Read This*

This is an abbreviated version of the flyer, 15,000 copies, that was handed out during the New York Gay Pride Parade in 1990. The authors encourage all queers to stop being grateful for being tolerated. Instead, they are encouraged to protest and fight back. Pass out copies of the text and read it out loud to the group.

Instruct the group to do what the queer activist encourages them to do: spend a couple of hours or a day in public holding a same-sex person's hand. Have a third participant follow the couple to watch the reactions they get. Try other behaviors that break the norm – for example, have a man walk around in makeup or a woman be loud and boisterous. If your group doesn't want to or dare do these exercises, discuss what could happen if they did.

Once the group congregates, share your experiences and discuss the text.

- Why would you object to saying »Thank you«?
  - What alternatives are there to being grateful for being tolerated?
- Come up with concrete examples of how to protest and fight back against oppression and injustice.
- What more can those who are normally the tolerators do than to »shut up and listen«?

The entire »I Tolerate You« exercise and parts of the »Refusing to Say Thank You« exercise have been extracted from *Någonstans går gränsen. En lärarhandledning om kön, sexualitet och normer i unga människors liv [The Line Must be Drawn Somewhere. A teacher's guide to gender, sexuality and norms in the lives of young people]*, by Gunilla Edemo and Joakim Rindå, RFSL Stockholm

## **QUEERS READ THIS**

»I have friends. Some of them are straight....  
Year after year I continue to realize...that I am  
only half listened to, that I am an appendage to  
the doings of a greater world, a world of power and  
privilege, ... a world of exclusion.... I hate straight  
people who can't listen to queer anger without  
saying, »Hey, all straight people aren't like that.  
I'm straight too, you know«, as if their egos don't  
get enough stroking or protection in this arrogant,  
heterosexist world.... They've taught us that good  
queers don't get mad.... Let yourself be angry that  
the price of our visibility is the constant threat of  
violence, anti-queer violence to which practically  
every segment of this society contributes.  
Let yourself feel angry that **THERE IS NO PLACE  
IN THIS COUNTRY WHERE WE ARE SAFE**, no place  
where we are not targeted for hatred and attack,  
the self-hatred, the suicide --- of the closet.  
The next time some straight person comes down on  
you for being angry, ... go tell them go away until they  
have spent a month walking hand in hand in public  
with someone of the same sex. After they survive  
that, then you'll hear what they have to say about  
queer anger. Otherwise, tell them to shut up and  
listen.«



## See Yourself!

Norms entail that we are categorized into »us« and »them«, »homo« and »straight«, »non-immigrants« and »immigrants«, »guys« and »girls«. What purpose do these categorizations serve?

The methods in this chapter aim to get the group to think about the advantages of belonging to the »us« group as opposed to the »them« group.

# Method: Invisible Labels

We all belong to many different groups. We choose to belong to some of them, but we are categorized into others whether we want to be or not. By considering which groups you belong to, you could become more aware of how you categorize others and what the effects of doing so are.

## Material

- ▶ Sticky notes. You'll need about three times as many notes as there are group members.
- ▶ Felt-tip pens

## Labels

We categorize people in various ways and often at the speed of lightning. This becomes very obvious when we meet a person who can't be categorized, such as when we can't tell the person's sex. Many become confused and curious, sometimes even angry and irritated.

We categorize and group people and things in order to understand and feel safe in our surroundings. But the fact that we categorize is not always positive. Not all groups are considered equal, some are seen as superior to others. We are forced into groups and our behaviors are explained according to which group we are assumed to belong to.

Explain how we group and categorize people, label them as »homo«, »foreigner«, »retiree«, etc. When we label people, many stereotypes come to the surface.

## Our Own Labels

Explain that you are shifting focus to the labels that other place on you. In the group, consider the following: How are you labeled by people in town, school, your workplace, etc? What is important here is how people react to you at first sight – what do others think of you when they meet you on the street or bus? The number of groups is almost limitless. Some are large, others small, ranging from »girl« to »bookworm« for example.

Pass out sticky notes and pens. Each person should make two labels that they believe people put on them at first sight, one per sticky note. Collect the notes. Stick the labels up on the wall for everyone to see. Discuss one label at a time. Stick a label to yourself and have the group consider:

- ▶ How is this label defined? How is a person with this label viewed? What is assumed by the word? How is the group perceived?
- ▶ Are males and females treated differently in this group?
- ▶ Is the label positively or negatively charged? How is this group received and treated? Which labels are narrow and which could contain pretty much anything? Which labels are very rarely used? How often is the label “straight” used for example?

Are you and others labeled against your will? Which labels do you choose to have put on you and which are forced? One person may choose to wear a rainbow flag to show that he/she is gay, bisexual or transgender, just as another might wear designer clothes to show that he/she is wealthy. In cases where a person’s physical appearance differs from that of the majority, they often find themselves labeled against their will.

To illustrate the issues of labels and power, discuss how group rapes are depicted in the media. When there was a rape in an immigrant area of Stockholm, Sweden, journalists went to immigrant areas and interviewed young boys about their views on girls and sexuality. In contrast, when there was a rape committed by Swedish boys, no journalist went to »Swedish areas« and interviewed boys about their views on girls and sexuality, it was not considered relevant. But in Sweden, immigrant boys are assumed to rape because of their culture, because they were not born in Sweden.

## Method: Anything’s Possible!

Bringing norms to the surface is an important first step, but it is important that you do not stop there. You could proceed by discussing ways to counteract norms. The purpose of this exercise is to start thinking of concrete ways that you can work against discriminating norms in your life and surroundings

### Material

- ▶ Whiteboard/flipchart
- ▶ Whiteboard pen/marker

In order to come up with solutions, you must first define what you are working against. Start by defining the problem. For example, formulate problems such as »The heteronorm in society«, »Our building is not disability-accessible«, »Only men receive credit for their work«, »Racism«, etc.

### **Brainstorming**

Brainstorm about possible solutions to the problem – none is too outrageous. Emphasize that it could be as simple as how to act towards a rude person on the bus or a decision that our politicians could make to promote anti-discrimination. These solutions may be practical or far-fetched. For example: construct a hot-air balloon with »STOP RACISM« printed in large letters or submit a motion or plan of action for preventing discrimination. Anything and everything is acceptable.

Further questions: What can you begin to act on tomorrow? Which ideas can be implemented next week? What should be done within a year?

## **Method: Do the Opposite!**

Are solutions for fighting injustice in society slow in coming? Then do the opposite! This method aims to awaken your creativity to allow you to find new ways to change.

### **Material**

- ▶ Whiteboard/flipchart
- ▶ Whiteboard pen/marker

Formulate a vision such as »workplace diversity«. Then brainstorm on the strategies that can be used to ensure that the vision *fails*, that there is as little diversity as possible. Realistic or far-fetched – your imagination is the limit. You may decide to forbid women from becoming members, to only allow white, non-immigrants to be on the board of directors or to have the landlord remove wheelchair ramps from the entrances.

In the group, select the three most drastic measures that would ensure that your vision failed. Then do the opposite! Reformulate your three suggestions to practical, positive and concrete measures that individuals can take.

# Checklist

We have compiled a checklist for you to use to make your organization more welcoming to all kinds of people. Use the list as support, not as a manual. Let it inspire you in your work to diversify your workplace.

One option is to write up a plan of action for continued equality work. Take your time formulating your basic beliefs and reasons that the issues are of such importance. Define who will be responsible for ensuring that measures are taken, when the measures are to be completed and how they are to be followed up. By drawing up a plan, you force yourselves to come up with a real proposal for what you want to change. It is important that you follow up your work to see what methods worked and what methods need to be improved.

**Should you decide not to make a plan of action, you may choose to discuss some of the following questions:**

- Keep track of the amount of time people are allowed to talk during meetings. Also keep track of how many times people demand the floor or interrupt each other. Keep an eye on how people react when others talk – are they rustling through their papers, chatting or listening with interest?
- How are bylaws, principles documents, policies and operation plans formulated? Can these documents be formulated to be more inclusive? What kind of information do you find in informational brochures, on websites and in member magazines and newsletters? Which people are given a forum to express themselves and which are represented in photographs?
- Evaluate the culture and traditions of your own organization to see which behaviors and actions are considered acceptable and unacceptable. How are parties and get-togethers organized – seating assignments, dress code, etc?
- Is there a budget for equality work? Where are resources allocated in the organization and which groups are attracted to these parts of the organization?
- Do those who are active players in the upper-level positions of the organization differ from those in the lower-level positions? Which people represent the organization? Are you required to indicate your sex to become a member? What alternatives are there for transgender people in this case? It is common that men advance career-wise more rapidly than women – what is it like in your organization?

# Glossary

Discussions that may arise during the exercises may introduce words and terms that not everyone is familiar with. There are often different ways of defining terms and concepts. Short definitions may be problematic because so much weight goes into the words, which can be used and interpreted in many different ways. We should all keep in mind that terms and concepts often change over time and can mean different things to different people. Use the glossary below as an introduction to this meaningful area!

**Able-bodied norm** a norm that assumes that people are free from disability – that they can see, walk, read, hear, etc.

**Accessibility** the state of an environment being open and available regardless of disability. For example, equipment for the hearing impaired in a conference room or availability of Braille translations for the blind.

**Bisexual** a person who falls in love with, becomes sexually and/or emotionally attracted to others regardless of their sex.

**Cisgender person** a person who remains within the norm for the gender that was established for him/her at birth. For example, a woman who feels like a woman, looks like a woman whose birth certificate specifies that she is female. A non-transgender person. In no way related to sexual orientation.

**Class** a societal stratum determined by education, health, financial standing and occupation. Is closely related to gender and ethnicity, for example.

**Color** a socially constructed category in which people are sorted by the color of their skin. This category is often confused with ethnicity, which denotes cultural group affiliation rather than skin color.

**Couple Norm** the perception that it is positive, good and normal to have or strive to have a partner. Monogamy, to love and have sexual relations with one person at a time, is central to this norm.

**Disability** a lasting physical, psychological or mental impairment caused by illness or injury. For example, dyslexia, autism, visual impairment, hearing impairment and HIV.

**Discrimination** that groups or individuals are treated differently based solely on groups they really belong to or are assumed to belong to. Structural discrimination is a form of discrimination that is inherent in how society functions.

**Ethnic origins** the group of people to which a person belongs who share a culture, language or geographical origin.

**Ethnocentrism** the attitude that one's own culture is superior and that everyone should adhere to its values.

**Everyday racism** the racism that occurs in everyday situations. It is systematic and is based on societal perceptions and notions. Everyday racism can be found in assumptions such as that each member of an ethnic minority is the same or that an immigrant from Eritrea is an expert on Africa just because he/she originated from Africa.

**Feminism** a political analysis and movement that observes the subordination of women as a group to men as a group in all societal layers. Feminists strive to change this relationship.

**Gay** a non-heterosexual male.

**Gender** socially constructed category that groups people into men and women.

**Gender equality** equality between women and men, achieved when women and men have the same opportunities, rights and obligations in society.

**Harassment** the act of subjecting a person to offensive acts and behavior such as bullying, exclusion or slander aimed to offend or harm.

**Hate crime** a crime spurred on by hatred towards certain groups of people based on color, nationality, ethnicity, belief, sexual orientation or other circumstances.

**Heteronormativity** norm that dictates that there are fundamental differences between men and women, that a person must be either a man or a woman and that it is »natural« to be attracted to the opposite sex. Allows for financial, political and social gain for those who adhere to the norm and disadvantages to those who deviate.

**Heterosexual/straight person** a person who falls in love with, becomes sexually and/or emotionally attracted to others of the opposite sex.



**Homophobia** an ideology, notion or conscious assessment that takes a pronounced negative standpoint on homosexuals and bisexuals. Homophobia and transphobia sometimes overlap.

**Homosexual** a person who falls in love with, becomes sexually and/or emotionally attracted to others of the same sex.

**Identity** a person's conception of who he/she is. This is influenced by other people's perceptions of who he/she is.

**Inaccessibility** the state of an environment of not being accessible to the disabled. For example, the lack of a wheelchair ramp at an entrance with stairs.

**Intersectionality** a perspective that examines how various power orders are interwoven and how various identities come about as a result of race/ethnicity, sex, sexuality, class, age, etc.

**Lesbian** a non-heterosexual female.

**LGBT people** a collective term for lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender people.

**Norms** expectations and ideals regarding the acceptable/unacceptable and positive/negative attributes of our society.

**Patriarchy** the power structure in society that upholds that men as a group are superior to women as a group and that men shall have more resources, power and influence than women.

**Polyamorous** the act or practice of a person who has sex with and/or love relationships with more than one person at a time.

**Power structure** a societal structure that provides people with more or less influence and conditions for influencing society and their own lives. The opportunities and conditions a person has are related to financial standing, sex and ethnicity, for example.

**Queer** a perspective of society that questions gender and sexuality norms. A person can identify him/herself as queer. This can mean that a person is a transgender or non-heterosexual person.

**Racism** a perception that people of a certain background are inferior. Leads to discrimination.

**Sexism** the consequence that arises from gender inequality in society as seen for example in discrimination, oppression and exploitation of women based solely on their sex.

**Sexual orientation** a term often used to group people according to their inclinations of whom they fall in love with or are attracted by. Examples of sexual orientation are heterosexuality, homosexuality and bisexuality.

**Transgender people** a collective name for individuals whose gender identity or gender expression occasionally or always differs from the norm for the gender established at their birth. The term usually includes drag queens, drag kings, intersexuals, transgender individuals, transsexuals, intergender individuals and transvestites. The transgender concept is in no way related to sexual orientation.

**Transphobia** an ideology, notion or conscious assessment that takes a pronounced negative standpoint on transgenders or others who somehow deviate from the gender norms. Transphobia and homophobia sometimes overlap.

**Transsexual** a person who identifies with a gender other than the one established at his/her birth. Can be medically diagnosed and be a form of identification. Describes a person whose physical body and gender identity do not coincide. Due to the conflict, the individual desires to »correct« his/her body with hormone treatment or surgery.

**Transvestite** a person who occasionally, often or always dresses or utilizes the clothes or attributes of the opposite sex.

**Whiteness** a word used to illustrate that even white people have a skin color and ethnicity. Generally, ethnicity, culture and color often come up when speaking of people who differ in appearance from the rest. Is not a skin color in itself, but rather a term to express a position of power.

**Break the norm!** is intended for anyone who works with or wants to work with anti-discrimination and diversity within their organisation, their school, or their workplace. The material contains methods to examine and challenge norms related to gender, ethnicity, sexuality, class and ableness. The methods focus on norms rather than on those who don't fit into them. The goal is to create a non-discriminatory and inclusive organisation where everyone feels welcome.

