



GÖTEBORGS  
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# On norms and discrimination

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

GÖTEBORGS UNIVERSITET

# Contents

- What are norms?
- Norm criticism
- Norms linked to grounds of discrimination (protected characteristics)
- Everyday oppression: norms that exclude in everyday life
- Structural discrimination
- From everyday oppression to structural discrimination
- Five tips for inclusion

# What are norms?

About norms and norm criticism and how certain norms are related to grounds of discrimination (protected characteristics)

# What are norms?

- Norm means a guiding principle or rule.
- The 'normal' or acceptable behaviour in a social group.
- Context determines what is the 'correct' behaviour.
- Norms are an inevitable part of any human grouping.
- Control our perception of what is right/wrong, good/bad, safe/dangerous.

## **Behaviour:**

People's ways of being and of relating to their environment.

## **Norms:**

Underlying, usually unconscious, reasons for people's behaviour.

# Norm criticism

Norm criticism is an approach or a tool for identifying inequalities in power relationships.

A norm-critical perspective shifts the focus from those 'others' – those who deviate – to us, the 'normal', who uphold norms and power.

# Why utilise norm criticism?

- Norms are often the basis for discrimination.
- Norm criticism can make discrimination visible and counter discrimination and lead to greater inclusiveness.
- Inclusion contributes to safety, a sense of community, good health and increased motivation.

# Norms change over time

- Grouping people as **us** and **them** is not a new phenomenon.
- Who belongs to 'us' and 'them' can change depending on time and place.
- Some groups have been regularly grouped as deviance, threats or of less value.

# Grounds of discrimination tell us something

- The protected characteristics in antidiscrimination law can tell us something about what the common norms are.
- Why are these very characteristics protected by law?
- Because some norms are so widely spread and accepted that some groups have been disadvantaged and continue to be disadvantaged more often than others.

# The seven protected characteristics

- Sex
- Gender identity or gender expression
- Age
- Ethnicity
- Religion or other belief
- Disability
- Sexual orientation

# Example of the relationship between norm and protected characteristic in a Swedish context

## Norm

1. Gender norms: expectations on women and men
2. Gender binary norm: expectations of being *either* a woman *or* a man
3. Adult norm: not too old or too young
4. Swedishness, whiteness
5. Secularisation, Christian values
6. Health norm, functionality norm
7. Hetero-norm: that women are expected to be attracted to men and vice versa



## Grounds of discrimination (protected characteristics)

1. Sex
2. Gender identity/gender expression
3. Age
4. Ethnicity
5. Religion/other belief
6. Disability
7. Sexual orientation

# Examples of how norms can be expressed

Norm
Gender norm
Gender binary norm
Age norm
Swedishness, whiteness norm
Secularisation, Christianity
Health norm, functionality norm
Hetero-norm



Expression
Sexism, gender inequality
Transphobia
Age discrimination
Racism
Islamophobia, anti-Semitism
Disablism, Ableism
Homophobia and bi-phobia

# Examples of how norms can be expressed

**Gender norm:** Women and men are regarded as opposites and are found in different arenas in society. Women and men do not equally get higher education, they work in different occupations, earn different salaries, have different pension levels, and so on.

**Gender binary norm:** Often expressed in the first question after a baby is born: 'Is it a boy or girl?'

**Hetero-norm:** Rare to portray couples consisting of anything other than a woman and a man in media, film, text and image.

# Examples of how norms can be expressed

**Whitness norm:** Whiteness is considered neutral, which can be seen in everything from adhesive bandages to make-up foundation and skin-coloured underwear.

**Adult norm:** Young adults are portrayed as irresponsible and unreliable. To be old is to be passé and not have anything to contribute.

# Examples of how norms can be expressed

**Health norm, functionality norm:** Can be seen, for example, in how buildings are designed, how cities, trams and streets are planned, how meetings are organised, etc. Being able to see, hear, walk and have complete mental and physical health is the norm.


**Christianity as a norm:** For example, expressed in workplaces by employers planning based on Christian holidays.

# Everyday oppression


About excluding norms in everyday life

# Everyday oppression

- A joke, unwanted touch, or a derogatory comment may not seem particularly dangerous in the moment.
- But taken together, all those jokes, unwanted touch and derogatory comments form a climate of threats, fear and uncertainty.
- This leads to the acceptance of discrimination and abusive behaviour.



It was just a  
joke!



It's okay to  
tolerate a bit of  
this...

# Microaggression

- Microaggression means words or actions that have an aggressive and violent character, but are expressed in a barely noticeable way.
- It can be treating someone as invisible, looks, questions or comments that reflect lack of comprehension or prejudices.
- Microaggression is often expressed unconsciously.
- The victim may find it difficult to put into words what has happened.

# Examples of microaggression

- Assuming that someone's partner is of the opposite sex.
- A person raising their voice and/or speaking excessively slowly when talking to someone with a disability.
- Assuming that people with a foreign appearance do not speak Swedish.
- Accusing someone who points out injustice of being 'overly sensitive'.

# Experiences of microaggression can be

- A feeling that some groups are favoured over others.
- A sense of missing out on something.
- Feeling stupid, invisible, silenced.
- Feeling questioned, pointed out, ridiculed.
- The feeling of often being seen as the representative of a particular group.

# Minority stress

Minority stress is the psychosocial stress that people who belong to a minority in a context can experience when they are repeatedly subjected to microaggression and/or discrimination.

Being constantly on guard against being victimised or questioned is exhausting and damaging to health.

# Structural discrimination

From everyday oppression to structural discrimination

# Structural discrimination

Structural discrimination refers to rules, norms, procedures, accepted attitudes and behaviours in institutions and other social structures that hinder certain groups from enjoying the rights and opportunities that the majority have.




## From everyday racism to structural racism

- Structural discrimination based on skin colour affects a large portion of Sweden's population.
- In the Swedish labour market, this can be seen in the form of segregation, for example in recruitment and promotion, in pay differentials and in social resources, such as access to the 'right' networks.

# Examples of structural racism

- Afro-Swedes need to have doctoral degrees in order to get up to the same level of income as other people with three-year post-secondary education.
- Afro-Swedes in managerial positions only have around 77 per cent of the salary of a manager from the rest of the population with an equivalent level of education.
- Afro-Swedes spend more days unemployed than the rest of the population with an equivalent level of education.
- It is almost ten times as common that people from the rest of the population rise to managerial positions than Afro-Swedes do.



# Me too

## From everyday sexism to structural gender-based discrimination

- Sexism is all kinds of expression (actions, words, images, gestures) that are based on an idea that some people, mostly women, are inferior because of their gender.
- Throughout the world, in a variety of areas, women have poorer opportunities than men.

# Examples of structural gender-based discrimination

- Men make up more than 93% of the world's heads of government.
- In the majority of countries in the world, the proportion of women parliamentarians is less than one third.
- Every third woman in the world is subjected to physical and/or sexual violence by a partner or sexual violence by another person.
- In the 28 EU Member States, between 45% and 55% of women (equivalent to around 100 million women) have experienced sexual harassment during their working life.

# Together for an inclusive university

Five tips to increase inclusion

# What does inclusion mean?

- Working with inclusion can mean looking at whether there is anything that is hindering people from participating on equal terms.
- It can also be about creating more security and a greater sense of community within your activities and finding new ways to make more people feel welcome.
- When people feel welcome, safe and included, it is easier to do a good job or to focus on their studies.

# Tip 1: Become aware of your advantages and disadvantages

- Think about the advantages or disadvantages you have in different situations as a consequence of your skin colour, your last name, your age, or your gender, for example.
- Your background can give you influence and power, or on the contrary, mean that you are excluded.
- If you have many advantages, use your influence to drive change.

## Tip 2: Assume that everyone is in the room

- Assume that 'everyone is in the room' when you're going to joke, say or show something.
- This means that you probably wouldn't say what you intended to say about a person or group if they were in the room.

## Tip 3: Stand up for yourself and for others

If you or someone else is subjected to bullying behaviour, it is important to try to reject that behaviour.

Examples of things to say include:

- That's not OK.
- What you mean?
- That sounds transphobic / racist / sexist / etc.
- I don't agree.

## Tip 4: Acquire knowledge

- It is common for people who are subjected to discrimination/workplace bullying to feel that they need to educate others.
- Don't make vulnerable groups responsible for educating others.
- Read up on things you are not uncertain about, such as accessibility, gender equality, post-colonial history or trans terms.
- Accept that you can never know everything and that you will never do everything right.

## Tip 5: Be generally friendly!

Create a safe and positive environment by, for example:

- saying hello
- remembering people's names (the name they themselves want to be called)
- listen when others are talking
- show interest in other people's thoughts and opinions





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