

Spotting and Addressing Discrimination

Promoting LGBTQIA+ inclusive practice in your organisation

This resource was developed by members of the LGBTQIA+ Collective Advocacy at CAPS Independent Advocacy. This group is made up of people who identify as LGBTQIA+ with lived experience of mental health issues, living in Edinburgh. Collective advocacy creates a safe space for people to get together, support each other to explore shared issues and to find common ground.

This resource was created to accompany the LGBT Mental Health Audit tool, which the group refreshed in 2021 to reflect current issues related to LGBT inclusion. The recommendations of this resource come from a lived experience perspective on what discrimination against LGBTQIA+ people may look like in a mental health service and how it can be addressed.

For more information about LGBTQIA+ Collective Advocacy, visit <https://capsadvocacy.org/collective-advocacy/lgbtqi/> or contact Mohasin Ahmed, mohasin@capsadvocacy.org



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What is discrimination?

Discrimination is the unfair treatment of groups of people with particular characteristics e.g., religion, sexuality, gender etc. Discrimination can be conscious or unconscious, and it can also be direct and indirect.

Direct discrimination involves treating someone with a particular characteristic differently than someone without that characteristic.

Example: refusing to call a transgender person accessing your service their chosen name as it is not the name on their legal document.

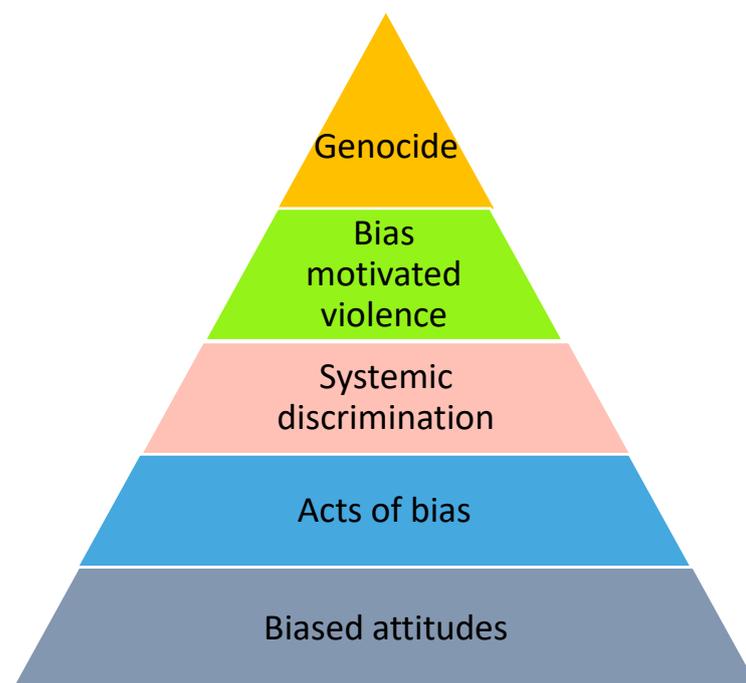
Indirect discrimination involves imposing a requirement that causes disadvantage to those with a certain characteristic.

Example: making staff members who do not have children work more night shifts and weekend shifts. This may indirectly disadvantage staff members who are gay or lesbian, who are less likely to have children.

What might discrimination look like in your service?

- Not using someone's preferred name or pronouns
- Asking questions that you wouldn't ask someone outside of the LGBTQIA+ community
- Asking invasive questions based on preconceived ideas relating to gender or sexuality.
- Dismissing someone's experiences based on your own bias.
- Being patronising about someone's gender identity or sexuality based on personal beliefs.
- Expressing discriminatory attitudes/ using discriminatory language against LGBTQIA+ people.
- Making assumptions about the needs of people accessing your service due to their gender or sexuality.

The Pyramid of Hate demonstrates how bias at each level upholds a wider system of oppression. Unchecked bias can become “normalized” and contribute to the acceptance of negative attitudes and discrimination against certain groups. Although every biased attitude or act does not lead to genocide, genocide occurs when bias attitudes and actions are accepted. **Therefore, it is important to challenge biased attitudes and behaviours** to help to prevent the escalation of bias across the levels of the pyramid.



It is important that attitudes and actions at the **lower levels of the pyramid are explored and challenged** so that people feel safe and welcomed. They may be more difficult to identify so it is important that we **try to understand the bias** behind actions/attitudes and listen to people from marginalised groups when they raise concerns.

The following section demonstrates how discrimination at the lower levels of the pyramid may look like in practice.

Biased attitudes

An example of biased attitudes is **stereotyping**. Stereotypes may not always be negative but having ideas about who people are and what they do based on a part of their identity can be harmful.

Below are some common incorrect stereotypes about people in the LGBTQIA+ community. Have a think about if you are aware of, or have ever heard any of these statements, and why they might be harmful.

- All lesbians hate/dislike men.
- Gay men are flamboyant and possess mostly 'feminine' traits.
- Bisexual people are promiscuous and 'greedy.'
- Asexual people are asexual because of a traumatic experience or mental health issue.
- Transgender people must fit into binary gender roles. For example, a transgender woman must possess stereotypically feminine roles and traits and vice versa for transgender men.
- Only cisgender men can be drag queens, and they do drag because they want to be women.
- Only homosexual men can get AIDS.

Heteronormativity and **Cisnormativity** are also types of bias attitudes.

Heteronormativity looks like assuming everyone is heterosexual and that other sexualities are not 'normal.' This may look like:

- Assuming that a gay couple wouldn't have children.
- Assuming everyone you work with is straight unless they have said otherwise.
- Assuming that someone identifies as L/G/B due to a negative experience or because of a mental health issue.

Cisnormativity is the idea that being cisgender (a term to describe those whose gender identity aligns with the gender they were assigned at birth) is the norm, and that other gender identities are not 'normal.'

This may look like:

- Dismissing non-binary/genderqueer/ genderfluid identities as confused.
- Assuming everyone you work with is cisgender.
- Assuming that someone is transgender due to a negative experience or because of a mental health issue.
- Thinking that appearance and sexuality correlates with gender. e.g., assuming a 'gay man with a 'feminine' style wants to be woman.

Acts of bias

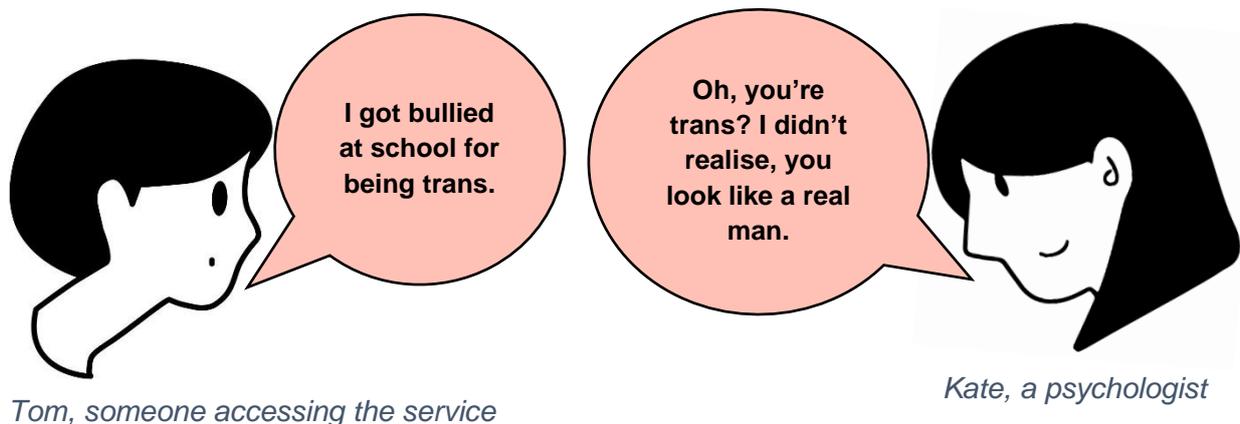
Microaggressions fall under acts of bias, at the second level of the Pyramid of Hate. A microaggression is a discriminatory statement, action, or incident against a marginalised group which is indirect, subtle, or unintentional. To avoid microaggressions, it is important to think about why you are asking specific questions and what could be the potential bias behind your actions/words towards people from a marginalised group.

Often there are expectations on individuals who identify with an LGBTQIA+ group to know everything about everyone across the community, and there is an expectation that they will inform you about these issues. However, if you are unsure about what is offensive or not, it is best to try to research this yourself before asking a member of the community as this can be an emotionally taxing experience for them.

If you are curious about gender / sexuality / LGBTQIA+ issues, be respectful when asking questions and think whether it is appropriate to do so. Certain questions might be invasive or triggering to some people, so think about your relationship to the person and be aware of the environment you are having the conversation in. If someone discloses something to you about their identity, do not share it with others unless you have been given consent to do so.

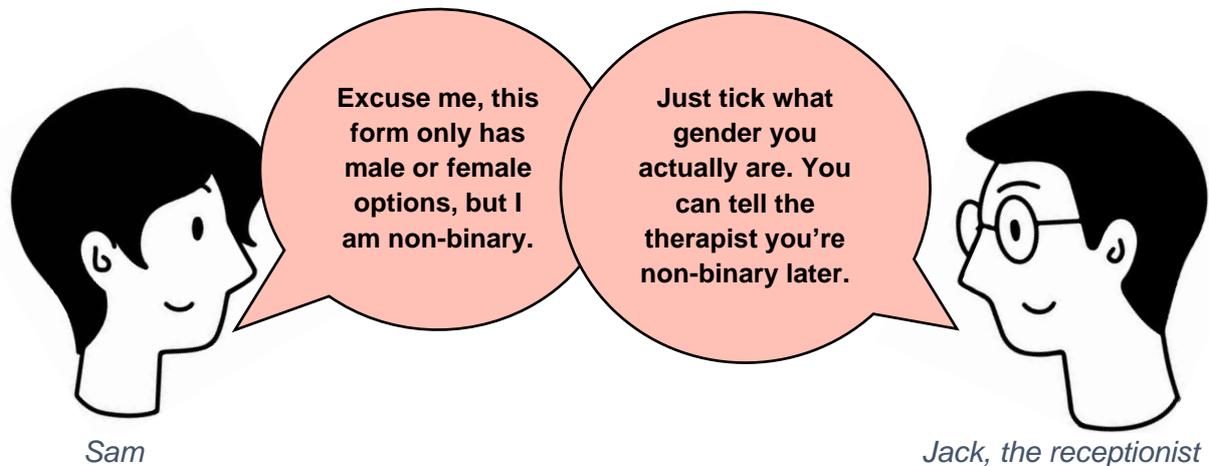
Example scenarios of discrimination in everyday conversations:

Situation: Kate, a psychologist at a mental health service, has an appointment with someone who has just joined the service called Tom. In their initial meeting Tom tells Kate that he is transgender:



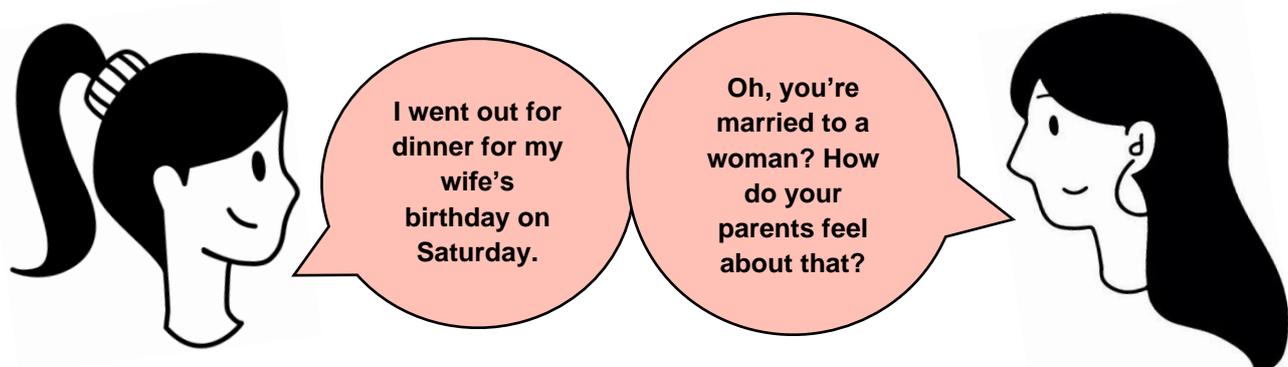
Issue: Kate's response may seem well meaning however, it is harmful as it comes from stereotypes of what a 'real man' is, and how transgender people look.

Situation: Jack is the secretary at a therapy and wellness centre. Sam is filling out a form to register to the service but finds an issue with the form:



Issue: Jack's response is dismissive of Sam's gender, as being non-binary means that you do not identify as being male or female. An experience like this can make people feel overlooked and set a negative tone for service delivery. Making sure there are multiple options on registration/monitoring forms can help people to feel more included. If you are not able to amend the form or registration options, respond in an understanding way and try to help as best as you can. For example, add a notes section to forms so that people accessing services don't need to explain their identity multiple times to other staff members.

Situation: In the staff room, people are chatting about their weekend:



Issue: This response is patronising as it implies homosexuality is something not to be approved and is 'bad.' It is also an invasive question,

as it may be a difficult subject for someone that they do not want to disclose.

Comments such as telling a lesbian woman that she “**just hasn’t found the right man!**” or telling a bisexual person to “**pick a side**” are also insensitive and dismissive as they reinforce the idea of choosing to be heterosexual or not. Any comments about ‘choosing’ or ‘rejecting’ a sexuality are harmful as they invalidate sexualities out with heterosexuality.

Social exclusion is also an act of bias which is a common experience for LGBTQIA+ people. Exclusion may not always be purposeful; people may also feel excluded by choice of language and activities.

For example, asking a male colleague if he has a girlfriend. This might be uncomfortable as he may feel like he needs to lie about his identity, or ‘come out’ before he is ready, which can be a daunting experience. A more inclusive way to ask this would be to ask if he is in a relationship or if he has a partner.

Exclusion can also happen within LGBTQIA+ communities. For example, transgender women and non-binary people, who identify as lesbian, may be excluded from lesbian spaces and conversations- and vice versa for gay men. Bisexual people are often excluded from conversations surrounding LGBTQIA+ issues and rights by others in the community- this is known as ‘bi-erasure.’

Having limited options on equalities monitoring forms and registration forms also excludes people. To avoid this, ensure that there are multiple gender and sexuality options available, and include 'other' or 'not listed' options with space to self-identify to be more inclusive.

Not considering or dismissing gender variants and sexual identities you do not know is also a form of exclusion. If you have not heard of the term someone uses to describe their gender or sexuality, e.g., genderqueer or pansexual, don't deny or dismiss them- you can be respectful by saying- "**Do you mind if I ask what that means?**" or by researching yourself, as opposed to responding, "**what is that?**", which may come across judgemental.

Systemic discrimination

At the third level of the pyramid, we can see issues like employment inequality. When trying to diversify your workplace and clientele, it is important to be truly inclusive by avoiding **tokenism**.

Tokenism in employment involves creating an illusion of inclusivity by employing a more diverse workforce. You may employ more people from LGBTQIA+ or BAME communities, or you may try to reach out to more people accessing services from these groups. However, if your workforce is only diverse in lower pay scale positions, and there is no one from different communities who have higher positions where they are included in decision making, this could fall under tokenism.

Tokenism can also look like:

- Only engaging with the LGBTQIA+ community during Pride month
- Creating an 'inclusive image' without challenging any internal issues relating to LGBTQIA+ inclusivity.
- Using one candidate from a community as a representative for all the voices in their wider community.

Inclusion is not about filling a diversity quota; it is about making sure that a diverse range of voices are heard and included in important decisions and conversations in the workplace. Inclusion should be facilitated throughout the organisation and services should have a welcoming and inclusive environment, where people from all backgrounds feel valued.

Promoting an anti-discriminatory environment



There are a number of ways that you can promote an anti-discriminatory environment in your organisation/service. This section will introduce you to the different ways you can do this.

Being an active bystander

An active bystander recognises when someone's behaviour is inappropriate and challenges it. Being an active bystander is important to being an ally to marginalised groups. It helps people feel more

supported and can help to change public perceptions of what behaviour is acceptable.

Actions you can take could be as simple as not laughing at an inappropriate joke, challenging a comment someone makes about a certain community or offering someone support after an incident. You can directly call out someone's behaviour by telling the person that what they said was inappropriate- if it is safe to do so.

How to challenge problematic behaviour:



Responding with disapproving body language can also be effective, when appropriate. A silent stare or a disapproving look in response to a comment made can be just as powerful as a verbal response.

If you feel like the situation could escalate, you can redirect the conversation by interrupting and changing the subject.

Always make sure to check-in with the victim of the behaviour and ask if they are ok and if they need help as the minimum. Recognise that the situation was inappropriate, even if they brush it off, and offer support if they would like. Reporting the incident to the relevant body on behalf on

the person, if they want to, can also help. When someone has repeatedly behaved inappropriately, after previous intervention, you should also report this. If there are multiple witnesses, it is best to file the report as a group.

Other ways to challenge behaviour:

Engage empathy with the person behaving inappropriately:

“I hope no one ever talks about you like that”

“How would you feel if someone said that about you/your partner?”

“I wonder if you realise how that comes across?”

Call on your relationship with the person:

“As your friend, I’ve got to tell you that lots of people find your jokes about X hurtful.”

“I hope that you respect me enough to consider that your views are hurtful to me and understand where I am coming from.”

“I know that you don’t mean to offend anyone but using that word is not appropriate’.

Promoting diversity and inclusion in your service

Another way of promoting an anti-discriminatory environment in your organisation is by promoting diversity and inclusion. Creating spaces for open dialogue and providing staff training on inclusion and LGBTQIA+ awareness will help to set expectations of what is appropriate. These conversations also make it easier for inappropriate behaviour to be challenged, as there is evidence of what has been communicated as acceptable and not.

You can create an inclusive environment by:

- Educating staff about LGBTQIA+ discrimination
- Encouraging staff and people accessing services to respect difference
- Responding promptly and confidentially to any evidence or complaints of inappropriate behaviour
- Developing a policy that prohibits discrimination from staff and people accessing services
- Training supervisors and managers on how to respond to discrimination in the workplace
- Demonstrate LGBTQIA+ inclusivity externally also - displaying physical signs of inclusivity, e.g., using rainbow lanyards, pins, visible stickers at service entrances/reception, also leaflets and materials which include LGBTQIA+ people.
- Promote services that are specifically for LGBTQIA+ people so that they can be easily found
- Ensuring that the workplace policy is properly enforced and review the policy regularly to ensure its effectiveness.

Another way of being anti-discriminatory is acknowledging the needs of people from marginalised communities and making it easier for people from these communities to meet their needs in your service. You can do this by ensuring you provide multiple support options, considering intersectionality. You can find out more information about considering intersectionality in your service from our **intersectionality resource**.

Many people do not know what help is available to access. Therefore, if there is a specific service that someone can benefit from, i.e., if there is

an LGBTQIA+ therapist in your service, you should offer this to all people accessing services- not just those who have openly expressed interest- as they do not always know to ask.

There may be people accessing services who identify as LGBTQIA+, who have not disclosed this. You should also be mindful of their needs when promoting LGBTQIA+ services and being inclusive. Promoting specific services more widely will also help with signposting others to the service. **Giving everyone as many options and treating everyone with the same courtesy will help to promote an inclusive environment.**

CAPS



LGBTQI+ Advocacy

Celebrate, promote and showcase your good practice!

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