

Awareness - what is that?



to be aware = having or showing realization, perception, or knowledge, being sensitized to certain issues

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„Awareness“ is a behavioral concept where people reflect on treating each other with mutual respect, and work on putting this into practice. Theoretically and practically this means looking into the disregard of physical,

mental and personal boundaries, or even acts of violence in public spaces. The lack of critical confrontation in society with issues of sexual, racial and handicapped assault and other forms of discrimination have lead to the development of structures of awareness. This discrimination can also occur in (supposedly) politicized forums. This is why there is a great need for structures that can actively counteract this.

We want to support each other by acknowledging, labeling and learning how to change hurtful and invasive behavior and discrimination.

It's important to take affected individuals seriously, and to listen to them. They are the only ones who know what is going on inside of them, and it is up to them to decide what is intrusive and discriminatory to them.

CONSENSUS-PRINCIPLE

We have tried to the best of our abilities to create a principle of consensus. This means that actions and conversations happen in mutual agreement, instead of assuming that without resistance any given action is ok. Please be aware of signals your counterpart is sending - including nonverbal communication - that might indicate if this person actually wants to be a part of this interaction, and in what capacity. An example of this could be a personal conversation a person might not want to have, or might not want to have with you. Touching a person - for example their hair - without asking, is just as inappropriate as taking pictures or video without permission. Respect each others boundaries, only yes means yes, and no means no.



In addition to the consensus-principle, our awareness-concept rests upon two further principles:

DEFINATORY POWER

Reclaiming definatory power means that the affected person can define for themselves what they would call discrimination, when and where their boundaries have been crossed, and their point of view should not be doubted by others. This acknowledges that we all have different boundaries and experiences - what might hurt and be offensive to one person could be ok for another. It creates space for affected people to formulate their experiences in their words, without being questioned. For instance, this could mean that the terms they choose to use are accepted and not replaced with seemingly more appropriate terms.

PARTISANSHIP

Partisanship builds on the concept of definatory power: In the context of awareness, it means that invasion of boundaries be accepted as such, and not to doubt the perception of the affected person. This also means choosing to take a side, and support the view point and demands of the affected person, without questioning. Even taking a seemingly neutral position often ends in forcing the affected person to justify themselves.



ASSUMPTIONS/STEREOTYPES

We have a tendency to consciously or subconsciously categorize and judge the people and environment around us. An example is that often we assume to know, without asking, what the gender of a person is, because we believe this can be determined by looking at physical appearance. However, because this is often not the case, this can lead to misjudging and thus the discrimination of the person in question. In contrast, societal norms can force people to assume a certain behavior or appearance in order to be recognized, say as a woman, even though they have always identified as such.



Social norms play a major role in how we categorize. By following these constructs, we learn to expect typical appearance and behavior in people. Often this devalues some lifestyles; in this way, being overweight is opposed being normatively good-looking, and is seen as a less desirable way of living. We often assume that we are able to judge if a person is „from here“ or not - people are categorized into race by using racial norms that define what someone „from here“ should look like. Additionally, classifications such as „healthy“/“sick“ are subject to implied norms that can cause a person who does not fit into societal standards to be labeled as „sick“.

We constantly categorize people into what we define as „normal“ or „abnormal“, be this consciously or unconsciously. Our perception of normality is a social construct, that has been shaped and disseminated by our society. Depending on our environment (social class, urban/rural, nationality...) while growing up, some things, such

as body type, etc., seem more normal than others. We make assumptions about other people based on their outer appearance, and project our stereotypes onto them. Stereotypes are closely linked to discrimination and by uncritically applying them, we solidify their use.

PRIVILEGES

Being privileged means not having to deal with certain issues of discrimination in every day life. A privilege could be: having a Swiss passport; being seen as Caucasian; being a cis man; identifying as heterosexual and/or cis; having a middle-class background; not being affected by mental illness; having money; not having a disability; having gone to college; being healthy; being skinny; having time; having a network...

Different people have different privileges and are affected to different degrees by forms of discrimination. Reflect on what your privileges are, and acknowledge how you profit off of them. Also be aware that you can't know of the privileges or discrimination other people might be experiencing.

DISCRIMINATION

Discrimination is treating people who have been classified into certain groups inequally. This classification is often done by other people and is based upon physical features; this often happens against the will of the affected person. Examples of groupings that lead to discrimination can be gender identity, sexual orientation, social or ethnical backgrounds, language, religion, politics, age, disability, weight, etc.

Deviations from the socially constructed norm lead to discrimination.

Examples for discrimination are:

RACISM

Racism is a specific form of discrimination, at the center of which lies a historically constructed power dynamic. In the context of racism, white people first invented themselves and then „the others“, and proceeded to devalue and alienate who they considered different. Racisms means discriminating against someone because they are seen as lesser based upon their ethnic category. There are different forms of racism, such as everyday racism, for example: asking „Where are you actually from?“, other forms are institutionalized or deeply entrenched in social structure.

SLUTSHAMING

Monogamy is a social norm that pertains to romantic relationships and deviations are often misunderstood. It can be discriminatory to assume the nature of the relationship between people, and this strengthens toxic categorization. When FTIQ* take pleasure in sex, and do it often, they are quickly labeled as „sluts“, etc. Each and every person can decide for themselves when, how often and with whom they have sex. Slutshaming is a form of discrimination.

CULTURAL APPROPRIATION

This is the appropriation of, and financial gain through, forms of cultural expression by the dominant culture which hasn't experienced the the history of slavery and oppression. Many people see this as unfair, especially when society leaves little or no room for the people the culture originated from.

HIERARCHIES

In groups and coalitions that try to work against hierarchies, it is especially important to think about more subtle forms of hierarchy than obvious positions of power (for example, appointments, bosses, etc.) Each group has members who are very knowledgeable, have been longtime participants, are seen as „cool“, as well as members who are new and insecure, etc. This leads to different (temporary) power dynamics. Societal norms and privileges extend even into emancipated coalitions. Try your best to destabilize hierarchies. For example, when different levels of knowledge are observed, try to equalize this by skill-sharing or by rotating tasks..

ACTIVISM AND RESOURCES

The assumption that all people share the same opportunities and resources causes people with less resources (money, health, connections...) to have reduced access to different forms of activism. We can only solve this problem together, for example by communicating and sharing resources.

POSITION AND EMPOWERMENT

What empowers one person might not do the same for someone else. While walking around naked might empower one person affected by sexism, another person might feel empowered by covering their body. A feminist reclaiming the word „slut“, doesn't mean that all people threatened by misogyny see this as a tool of empowerment. In the context of your privilege, it is important to think about the things that empower you, but how these same things might not be appropriate in certain situations.



SAFER/BRAVER SPACES

Safer/Braver space is a concept used at events intending to raise awareness of the fact that left-wing spaces are not automatically free of discrimination. The concept further proposes concrete actions as how to change this situation. At events an awareness team is present and provides support for persons who became subject to transgressions, sexualized violence and other forms of discrimination. Rooms designated as Safer/Braver Spaces can be used to move affected persons out of the centre of attention, giving them rest, protection and an open ear, and discuss further steps. Conflicts should be addressed always as constructive and consequent as possible. Supporters will become active when being demanded by guests. Supporters are always marked as such; they're sober, responsive, present and accessible to people of all identities. Safer/Braver spaces concept aims at creating and fostering a space where we can take responsibility for ourselves and our fellows so that everyone feels comfortable and that there's no need for the awareness team to become active. People present at events are called upon to show solidarity with these measures – and thus with those affected by transgressions of every kind.

The feminist Streikhaus provides a Safer Space for FLINT* people on the ground floor, next to the library and the community room. A second Safer Space, which is open to all people, is located on the first floor next to the gym. Safer Spaces are clearly marked as such and serve as a retreat for persons that were affected by intrusive behaviours. These spaces should be as tranquil as possible and provide seating, blankets, drinks and snacks as well as supporters willing to assist you if required.



Why not “safe” but “safer”? Since we’re all part of society, we can’t be “external” to it. We’re taking part in the construction/reproduction of present conditions. In other words, we’ve all learned and internalised being sexist, racist, discriminating. There’s no such thing as a “safe” space, and even less so there’s a safe space for all different kinds of positions. What we can do, however, is fostering temporarily protected spaces for diverse positions by learning what it means to act “braver”.



Learning how to act Safer/Braver: concrete steps

PRONOUNS/FORM OF ADDRESS

Ask for the pronouns that persons would like to be addressed (particularly when talking about a person). In many languages pronouns have a grammatical gender; by choosing and respecting this pronoun, people can be addressed in ways they feel most comfortable with. There is a wide range of different pronouns that people like to use for themselves: er, sie, sie_r, they, hen, xier, iel, x, none, just using the first name, amongst others.

However, pronouns do not reveal someone's gender (gender identity)! Just because you're assuming someone is female and, for instance, she's using the pronoun she to refer to herself, does not necessarily mean that this person is a cis woman (she could identify differently). For this reason, it is important not to make assumptions and to actively unlearn our categories.



When doing an introduction of participants, we suggest that you include your preferred pronoun as well. All participants can and should decide by themselves whether or not to mention their pronoun. If you introduce yourself to someone, make sure you tell your pronoun. This encourages and helps other people doing it as well. Particularly cis people are asked to do so because for people not identifying as cis (but as trans or non-binary, for instance) it is more comfortable not always having to be the first one to disclose their pronoun.

WORDS MATTER

Besides gesture and facial expressions, language is an important way of communicating vis-à-vis other people. Our everyday speech is unconsciously characterized by social constructs that reproduce unequal power relations. We want to counteract this and speak as inclusively as possible. Take your time to carefully choose your words and do not let it go unnoticed when other people reproduce discriminations by using inappropriate language.

E.g.: talking trans*inter_genderqueer-inclusive...

... talk inclusively! Not only women* should be addressed when talking inclusively. Patriarchy does also suppress trans*-, inter_- and non-binary/genderqueer people. To make more visible those who are not included in the category “women” you could, for example, use expressions such as FTIQ* (German for Frauen*, Trans*, Inter*, Genderqueer people) or FLINT* (German for Frauen*, Lesben, Inter*, Non-binär, Trans*).

E.g.: making visible diverse positions...

...by using examples that include different identities, diverse forms of relationships, different assumptions about origin, educational background, experiences with discrimination.

E.g.: avoiding racist expressions...

...in German language, many words and expressions were established in a colonial, racist context and are still prevalent in our everyday vocabulary, too often in unquestioned ways. Try and become aware of the words you choose and tolerate if people ask you to renounce on certain expressions.

Language and expressions are always-in-the-making. Trying means also making mistakes and learning from those mistakes.

IMAGES DEPICTING VIOLENCE/TRIGGER WARNINGS

Bilder, Berichte und Diskussionen können Auslöser ungewollter Erinnerungen, reports and discussions can trigger unwanted memories of stressful situations and fear responses, and thus can put a lot of strain on individuals. Usually voiced before an explanation or a narration, trigger warnings are warnings that point to an imminent cue that might affect someone. Similarly, trigger warnings can be useful for publications portraying violent content in the internet or in other medias and should be placed – in reasonable distance – before the relevant section. Violent content could be, for instance, reports on sexualised violence, physical/psychological violence, racism, transphobia. Also, nudity or images depicting naked bodies could be triggering. Please bear this in mind when walking around topless, for instance.

PROTECTING PRIVACY AND SECURITY

The Streikhaus should be a place where people can feel safe. For this reason, we don't want photos being taken or films being made without consent. Thus if you're taking a photo or if you want to film, please ask respective persons for permission. Always ask permission before sharing content on social media. If you learn about something in the Streikhaus or if you're listening to someone, please be careful and respectful. Be aware of how you're talking about things and what you tell others. We don't want to bring people into situations that might be discomforting for them.



HOW TO SUPPORT PEOPLE?

In case we take notice that a situation is not okay for one or several persons, we will ask whether support is needed and if so, in what ways.

If a person is not doing fine: “Being there” for someone also means together figuring out ways to cope with a particular situation, finding out what would be helpful at the moment and how to become or remain empowered. You should take persons always seriously in regards to their concerns; wishes and concrete actions have to be accepted. If a person asks you to go away, please take this seriously and follow this request.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU NEED SUPPORT?

The Streikhaus provides two Safer Spaces. You’re welcome to always retreat to those spaces in case everything gets too much and you need a minute of rest. Also, you can always approach our awareness team in case you need support. What if you’ve got a concern that should be addressed by the awareness team but you don’t want to get involved personally? Write us a letter and throw it into the awareness mailbox in the reception area of the Streikhaus. If you like, we’ll get in touch with you (if so, please indicate email address or phone number) or just take care of your request.

HOW TO MAKE PEOPLE AWARE OF THEIR TRANSGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR?

If people do not want to speak in an inclusive way, for instance, or if they behave in a discriminatory way, always approach the person in a constructive manner. You don’t have to do it immediately. Perhaps you can assess whether the setting allows an immediate intervention. You can adjust your reaction depending on whether it is a meeting, an event or a cosy get-together, and depending on your relationship with the concerned person. “Calling out” can make people feel badly or “unwanted” because they did something wrong. For this reason, it might be helpful to explain to the person that we’ve all been socialised in a sexist, racist and homophobic... world and that even the most

sensible person still gets it wrong sometimes, but that we can only change things if we become aware of the fact that we're reproducing "isms" (that is, forms of discrimination). Mistakes might happen, yet often it is the way how we're dealing with mistakes (or rather: not dealing with mistakes) that causes trauma. If you don't know how to go about this, ask others how they point out other people's offensive behaviours. If awareness team staff is present, you can also approach them.

Sometimes it is difficult or impossible to intervene in case of discriminatory incidents, particularly when you are the affected person. That's totally okay. But this requires that people noticing such incidents but being less affected by diverse forms of discrimination take action and confront respective persons.

TERMINOLOGY

* indicates that a term is socially constructed by society and that its uses and definitions are entrenched and normalised by power structures.

_ the underscore and asterisk indicate inclusive ways of writing in German language (for instance, “Feministin_nen”, “Feminist*innen”), signalling that not only do exist male and female, but also other gender identities such as trans*-, inter_ and genderqueer/non-binary, agender persons which should be included and addressed as well. While the underscore symbolizes diverse identities beyond male/female, the asterisk stands for the possibility to grind down binary gender relations.

ableist, ableism (ab-list, able-ism): is the discrimination based on different capabilities and possibilities of people. Often used by able-bodied persons or persons not suffering from mental illness, ableist attributions are, for instance, “sick”, “incapable”, “unfit”.

ageism: prejudice or discrimination on the grounds of a person’s age.

agender: People that do not align with any gender and/or do not have a gender identity. They do not share the distinction between (physical) sex and gender as a social construct.

asexual: a person who does not experience sexual attraction.

aromantic: a person who experiences no romantic attraction to others.



Becoming_disabled/disability: Disabilities are valued on the grounds of societal factors as well. The status of the “carrier” is thus co-constructed. Disability is determined by institutions with defining powers as well as by structures of demand and supply. Persons with disabilities are often denied participation and, in doing so, directly or indirectly discriminated and excluded.

Black: is the correct term to refer to Black People, that is, people with afro-diasporic backgrounds. “Afrodiasporic” means that in people’s biographies or histories there are familial ties to the African continent. To highlight the term’s resistant character “Black” begins with a capital letter.

cis women/cis men (cis = lat. on this side): terms used to describe women/men who have a gender that society considers appropriate for the one assigned at birth (usually based on their physical sex). By using the terms cis men/cis women, we are trying to deconstruct the idea that cis men/cis women are considered as the norm (just being considered as women/men), and that trans*women/trans*men are considered as an abnormality. Just like cis women, trans*women are women as well.

Classism: Discrimination based upon social “class” (education, property, social status of birth family).

flint*: Frauen*Lesben*Inter*Nicht-binär*genderqueer*Trans (German for women*lesbians*inter*non-binary*genderqueer*trans)

ftiq*: Frauen*Trans*Inter*Queer* (German for women*trans*inter*queer*)

genderqueer: is an umbrella term for people that do not fit under the male or female gender binary. It can be a gender identity as well.

inter_: is a term describing a person whose physical sex is neither male nor female. Inter_persons could, for example, identify both as trans* and queer. Many inter_persons reject the term “intersexual” since it carries a pathological undertone (defining people as being “sick” or “ill”). On the other side, intersexuality does not have anything to do with sexuality, which is why the term “inter_” is preferred.

Lookism: Discrimination on the grounds of not fitting into mainstream beauty standards (looking lean, slim, white, “fit”, wearing a certain clothing style).

Misogyny: dislike of, contempt for, or ingrained prejudice against women*; hostility towards women, often by hetero-sexist persons. Misogyny is grounded in societal structures as well.

non-binary: While binary literally means “two-parted”, non-binary designates something that is not “two-parted”. Non-binary gender describes any gender identity which does not fit to and/or does reject these binaries.

neuro-diversity: living a life with diverse neurological preconditions, often resulting in not being considered as “normal” in terms of behaving, thinking and acting.

PoC: abbreviation for person/people of color. Self-designating term used by people that have experienced racism. The term emerged in the context of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States and aims to include different groups that experience racism in order to join forces in the fight against racism. The term PoC unifies all non-white identities. There is, however, more specific terms for certain groups such as BIPoc (Black and Indigenous People of Color), Black (see above) or QPoC (Queer Person of Color).

queer: first being used as an insult for homosexual persons, the movement has appropriated and reinterpreted this term. Nowadays, queer is a positive self-designation and used as a term to describe personal sexuality and/or gender identity.

sex/gender: A distinction between physical sex and gender identity as a social construct.

transgender, transident, trans* (trans = lat. on the other side, through): terms used by trans*persons as self-designations, challenging and problematizing in various ways the concept of gender binary. Having a gender (identity) which is different from the sex one was assigned at birth. Important is the self-definition and not an external assessment.

The term transsexual is rejected by most trans*persons because of its pathological content, on one side. On the other side, being*trans has nothing to do with sexuality but is often equated/confused as such.

Trans* is also an umbrella term for all persons not being cis. Yet it is common that people not being cis do not identify as trans*.

trans-women*: women that are trans* (being assigned a male sex in the first place, dyadic or inter_).

trans-men*: men that are trans* (being assigned a female sex in the first place, dyadic or inter_).

white: In contrast to “Black” and PoC, “white” is not a term used for self-designation purposes. Being white means being privileged and being in power, for instance, possessing the privilege not having to deal with racism. Because of them being white, white people benefit from easier access to labour markets, housing markets, health care and political participation than Black People. Of course, there are factors that exclude white people and complicate access as well, such as class affiliation. This becomes particularly obvious if, for instance, the Müller family and the Yilmaz family both apply for a flat in an old building in Wiedikon. Given that both families can afford the place, we can still assume that renters prefer family names that sound more “swiss”. Being white is established as a norm but not voiced as such. In this example, it is not only skin color that describe access to power but also political terminologies and terms.

Do you have questions, ideas, criticism, do you feel uncomfortable, do you want to talk more about awareness? We've installed an awareness mailbox in the foyer of the strikehouse, where you can send us (anonymous) letters. Otherwise feel free to mail us with questions and requests! awareness@streikhaus.ch

Our meetings are also open for all interested people and can be joined anytime!

This awareness brochure is a first draft, and we are no professionals - we would be glad to hear your comments, critique, additions etc.

We would like to thank FemWo and awarenetz for being an inspiration for our awareness concept. More information: www.awarenetz.ch.

BE CAREFUL
WITH EACH
OTHER SO WE
CAN BE DANGER-
OUS TOGETHER

