



CHALLENGING HATE SPEECH
AGAINST LGBTQI*: A COUNTER-
NARRATIVE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE



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WHO

A GROUP OF YOUNG QUEERS
THAT LIVE IN BELGIUM, BRUSSEL

WHAT

INFORM AND EDUCATE ON LGBTQI*
IDENTITIES, ORIENTATIONS AND
EXPRESSIONS

HOW

TO COMBAT THE HATE, VIOLENCE AND
DISCRIMINATION
OUR COMMUNITY FACES



I. First things first: What does LGBTQI* mean?

In short, **LGBTQI*** is an umbrella term in which the letters stand for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning/queer and intersex people.

The asterisk (*) signifies all other non-heteronormative gender expressions, identities and orientations.

Non-heteronormative-what?



→ Well, to understand these terms a bit better, let's zoom out a bit and have a closer look at the basics: sex, gender and orientations



I. First things first: What does LGBTQI* mean?



i. Let's talk about sex... and gender

"Sex" does not only refer to "sexual intercourse", in which individuals have sexual contact,
as commonly used in everyday language.



The term "sex" also describes the differences in the anatomy of individuals' reproductive organs (genitalia), hormonal profiles and chromosomes. The most common distinction of sex in 'Western cultures' is binary, which means that sexes are divided into two categories: male and female ("binary" comes from Latin and means "consisting of two" or "pair").

However, some people are born with variations in sex characteristics that don't fit the typical "male" or "female" definitions. These individuals can be referred to as "intersex" people ("intersex" comes from Latin and means "between").

An intersex person may identify as female, male, or neither. In this way, a non-binary view on sex (that is beyond male and female) opens up opportunities for individuals to define their sexual identity.

It is important to know that intersex individuals suffer from institutionalized violence since their birth: when intersex kids are born, it's common for parents to be pressure by medical staff into "choosing" a gender for their children. Genital surgery is also common to correct a perceived medical mistake. The majority of these surgeries are not necessary for the health of intersex babies and can lead to physical and emotional trauma. It also deprives the child from making their own gender choice and deciding about future options.

Exe.: When Keen was born, he was born with variations in sex characteristics and couldn't be assigned one of the two established genders. The doctors pressured his parents into "choosing" the right gender for him - and they decided that Keen was going to be a female. Keens' parents never told him about this fact & he needed to take medication during his entire youth and childhood. When he turned 17, he watched a TV-show where intersexness was discussed, and he started to think about his gender identity and how he feels. He opened up to his parents and was told the truth. Keen was angry and shocked - but this break-through allowed him to express the identity he has always felt like.



I. First things first: What does LGBTQI* mean?



i. Let's talk about sex... and gender

While sex describes a person's biological anatomy, the term "gender" refers to "socially constructed and enacted roles and behaviors that vary across societies and over time".

Gender is often expressed in terms of masculinity and femininity and is assumed from the sex assigned at birth. In this sense, gender identity can be defined as "a person's internal sense of self as it relates to masculinity or femininity".

Gender expression describes "how a person chooses to express their gender, within the context of societal expectations of gender".



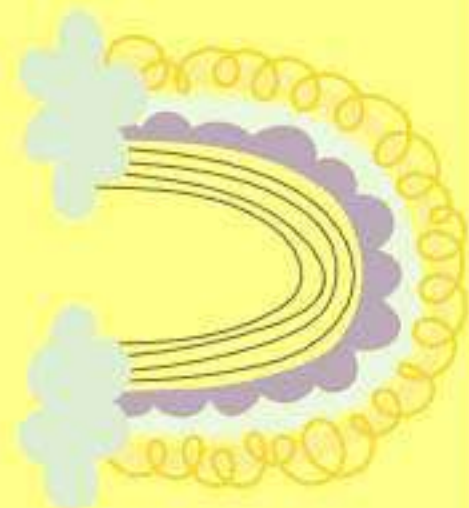
Exe.: When Sam was born, the doctors identified Sam's gender as male. Sam grew up as a boy and identifies as a man. However, Sam likes to wear not only clothes that are considered male but also female such as dress and skirts. Sam's gender expression is therefore fluid, even though Sam doesn't consider his gender identity as such.

A person whose gender identity corresponds with their assigned sex can be called **Cis** or **Cisgender** ("cis" comes from Latin and means "on this side of"), while a person who has a gender identity or gender expression that differs from their assigned sex may define themselves as **Trans** or **Transgender** (from Latin meaning "across"). Also in terms of gender, a **non-binary** view opens up more possibilities of defining one's identity. For instance, a person who identifies as "non-binary" usually refuses to define their gender identity as exclusively male or female. Going even further, a person "who does not identify themselves as having a fixed gender" can be called "genderfluid".

Exe.: Lala's doctor identified her as female when she was born. Lala grew up being considered as a female and she identifies with her assigned sex. Lala is a cisgender woman.

Exe.: However Max was assigned female when he was born. Since he was a child, he never felt comfortable with the gender identity: he always felt like a boy, trapped in the wrong body. His parents accept him as he is and encourage him to express his gender identity through clothes for example. When Max reached adulthood, he was able to legally change his gender: his identity cards now reflect his male gender identity. Max is trans: his gender identity differs from the one that was assigned to him at birth.

Exe.: Nina identifies themselves neither female or male: Nina wants to be called neither woman nor man. Nina sees themselves outside of the male / female. Therefore, Nina uses the pronouns "they" to talk about themselves. "They" is a plural form and neither he or she. Each non-binary person may use different pronouns.





i. Let's talk about sex... and gender

If this is confusing to you in the beginning, that's perfectly normal!

We are often taught that there are only men and women (in terms of sex) who identify as men and women, respectively (in terms of gender).

As we have seen above, there are also intersex people (in terms of sex) and individuals that identify as trans (in terms of gender). Unfortunately, these non-binary definitions of sex and gender have not fully arrived in everyday language, society and politics yet.

Breaking up expectations and structures related to sex and gender can be disruptive both for society at large as well as for individuals confronted with them.

Until now, we have only talked about topics that touch upon each person individually.

This is already very interesting and perhaps even complicated.

But what happens when we talk about **sexuality** in relation to and with another person?



I. First things first: What does LGBTQI* mean?



ii. Love & sexuality

This is where it gets exciting, as we enter the topic of “orientation”. We often hear the term “**sexual orientation**”, which describes a person’s sexual or erotic attraction to other people.

But there can also be a **romantic orientation**, describing a person’s romantic, perhaps non-sexual attraction to others. These terms refer to a person’s “sense of identity based on their attractions, or lack of” to other sexes or gender identities and expressions.

If a person feels attracted to the opposite sex or gender (a man attracted to women or a woman attracted to men), they can usually be referred to as **heterosexual or straight** (“hetero” comes from Ancient Greek and means “different”). Someone who has a sexual and/or romantic orientation towards someone of the same sex or gender (a man attracted to men or a woman attracted to women) usually identifies as **homosexual** (“homo” comes from Ancient Greek and means “same”).

However, the term “homosexual” might be considered as too “medical”, which is why many homosexual men refer to themselves as gay, while many homosexual women would say that they are lesbian (some women also use the term gay themselves).



But there is more!

As we have seen before, we should be open to non-binary definitions of sex and gender. The same applies to orientation: **Bisexuality** (“bi” comes from Latin and means “twice” or “double”) is the potential to be attracted — romantically and/or sexually — to people of more than one gender, not necessarily at the same time, not necessarily in the same way, and not necessarily to the same degree - or to any gender/regardless of gender which is called “**pansexuality**” (“pan” comes from Ancient Greek and means “all”).

At the same time, there are also people who don’t feel any attraction to others (**asexuality** - “a” comes from Ancient Greek and means “without”) or who only feel sexually attraction when they have a strong emotional bond to the other person (**demisexuality** - “demi” comes from Latin and means “divided in half”).

I. First things first: What does LGBTQI* mean?



ii. Love & sexuality

There are many more kinds of sexualities and orientations.

Many members of the LGBTQI* community use the term "queer" as a "self-affirming, self-descriptive umbrella term". Those individuals who are in a process of exploration and who may be unsure, still exploring, and concerned about applying a label to their sexuality or gender identity can be referred to as "questioning".

As we have seen, many people still think in binary terms when it comes to sex and gender (male and female). Something similar can be said about sexuality and orientation: Many people still believe that men should be attracted to women and vice versa.

Considering this heterosexuality as the way things should be is called "heteronormativity" ("hetero" = "different" + "norm" = "standard"). With the basics covered, we can finally have a closer look at what LGBTQI* means.

iii. What does it mean to be L-G-B-T-Q-I*?

As mentioned in the beginning, the term LGBTQI* is an umbrella term in which the letters stand for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning/queer and intersex people. The asterisk (*) covers all other non-heteronormative gender expressions, identities and orientations.

As you may have noticed, the letters cover very different aspects of sex, gender and orientation, while the L, G, and B refer to orientation, the T refers to gender identity. The Q refers to all topics related to sexuality, but it also represents a critical view of existing norms. And finally, I refers to the reproductive and physical anatomy.

Even though very different people are united under the term LGBTQI*, it is important to remember that they all face similar struggles and kinds of discrimination. The idea that each element of someone's identity (such as gender identity and sexuality but also ethnicity, disability, age and class) interact with each other to create new level of discrimination or privilege is called "intersectionality".

For example, a white working-class person may simultaneously not be discriminated against due to their ethnicity but may face disadvantages due to their class.

In this toolbox, we will have a closer look at one particular kind of discrimination, namely hate speech. In the following sections, we will first define what discrimination and hate speech are before we move on to analyse concrete examples of hate speech and provide tools and methodologies to combat them.

II. All good? Not yet: what is hate speech against LGBTQI*?



i. What is discrimination and hate speech?

Life would be easier if everyone accepted each other and tolerated the different ways people lead their lives. Unfortunately, this is not (yet) reality. The LGBTQI* community and its members are often confronted with discrimination and hate speech.

Perhaps you have noticed this yourself - if not, believe us. Discrimination occurs when a person or a group of people are treated unfairly or disfavorably based on certain characteristics. These characteristics can be race, gender, age or sexual orientation but also language, class, disability and,, many other things.

Discrimination can be

- direct (when a distinction is made between groups, so that individuals from some groups are less able than others to exercise their rights),
- indirect (when there is no explicit distinction made but a specific group or groups are disproportionately disadvantaged)
- intersectional (as mentioned above, when several forms of discrimination combine to leave a particular group or groups at an even greater disadvantage).

Psychology helps us to understand:




"The human brain naturally puts things in categories to make sense of the world. Very young children quickly learn the difference between boys and girls, for instance. But the values we place on different categories are learned - from our parents, our peers and the observations we make about how the world works. Often, discrimination stems from fear and misunderstanding."

There is no single definition for hate speech, but the "No Hate Speech Movement" defines hate speech as "when you knowingly and deliberately use words and images as weapons like a punch to the face. When people are attacked, devalued or when hate or violence is called for against them, that's what we call hate speech. Often they are racist, anti-Semitic or sexist comments that target specific people or groups" or based in other innate characteristics such as sex, race, religion, ethnicity, colour, national origin, disability, sexual orientation, or other".

It often expresses attitudes that are:

- discriminatory
- intimidating
- disapproving
- antagonistic
- and/or prejudicial






II. All good? Not yet: what is hate speech against LGBTQI*?

i. What is discrimination and hate speech?

The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) adds that hate speech is based on the thought that someone is better than others.

Hate speech can also come in different degrees of intensity. For instance, so-called "microaggressions" (a subtle slight or snub as well as illintended statements and actions) are sometimes difficult to understand, while an open insult can more easily be identified as hate speech. When hate turns to violence or even crime, we speak of hate crime.



So, where does hate speech happen?

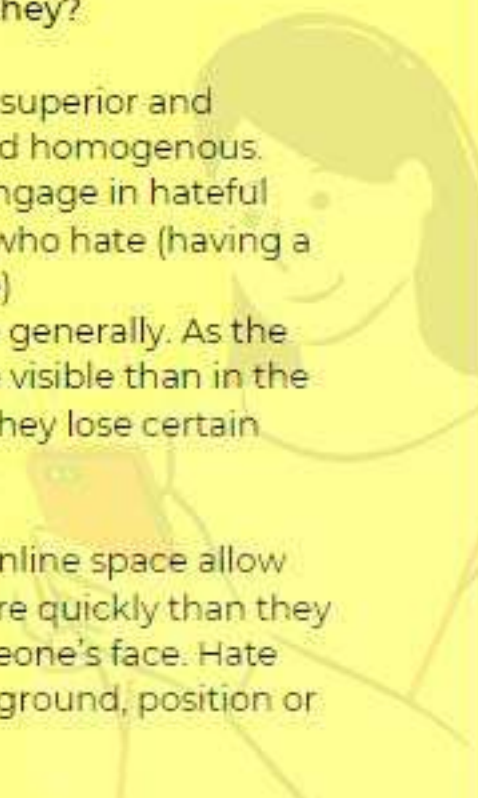
Basically, everywhere. Hate speech is done both online and offline, indoors and outdoors. It can appear in private or close circles, in public on the street or in the bus and in the media but also in institutions you are part of (school, work, hobbies) as well as larger systems within society and politics. Hate speech can be found in pretty much any way, shape or form: it can be written or oral, verbal or non-verbal, explicit or implicit, including symbols. The three main targets of hate comments are young people within the LGBTQI* community, Muslims and women (No Hate Speech Movement 2020).

It goes without saying that no person has the right to insult people or incite to hate and violence against them. On the contrary, hate speech violates human rights, as every person has the right to not be discriminated against (Article 7 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948). It needs to be clear that hate speech is not just "the expression of an opinion", but that it has serious consequences on the people who are affected by it.

But why do people still use hate speech and who are they?

- Humans tend to think of the groups that they belong to as superior and heterogenous, while other groups are perceived as inferior and homogenous.
- People may want a scapegoat. It can be that the people who engage in hateful language are lonely and seeking connections with other people who hate (having a common enemy can be a reason for an alliance)
- A person may fear the other, the unknown and/or change more generally. As the struggle for equality of LGBTQI* individuals has been much more visible than in the past, these people might not be familiar with it and fear that they lose certain privileges in society.

These factors are reinforced by the fact that social media and the online space allow individuals to act anonymously and engage in hate speech much more quickly than they would in real life, when they would have to say it straight into someone's face. Hate speech is intentionally performed by people, regardless of their background, position or characteristics.



II. All good? Not yet: what is hate speech against LGBTQI*?



ii. Hate speech against LGBTQI*

A study from 2015 found that young people within the LGBTQI* community, Muslims and women were the three main groups targeted by hate comments (No Hate Speech Movement 2020).

We have seen that hate speech is usually directed against individuals or groups with actual or perceived characteristics such as sex, race, sexual orientation and so on. Just as diverse as the LGBTQI* community is, hate speech directed against it can take different concrete forms.

For example, homophobia is the dislike of or prejudice against homosexuals and homosexuality while gayphobia and lesbophobia is the dislike and prejudice against gays and lesbians in particular.

However, when talking about homophobia, it is important to note that this sounds as if it is just a matter of an individual to be hateful towards homosexuality or not. It is also often anchored in a political or cultural setting. There's a tendency to label homophobia acted by members of minority groups (e.g. religious or social classes) as cultural or 'backwardness', but it's equally wrong.

Homophobia is just as diverse as the aspects of homosexuality that rejects. It does not necessarily comprise hostility against sexual relations between individuals of the same sex as much as against the presence of "feminine" features of men and "masculine" features of women.

Some say that homophobic people might be afraid of either admitting their own homosexuality or of being turned homosexual themselves, as if sexual orientation was a "contagious disease" or people could be "recruited" or "seduced" to become homosexual.

The underlying logic of this is, of course, that homosexuality is seen as something "unnatural". Now, let's have a closer look at how to identify and deconstruct hate speech.



II. All good? Not yet: what is hate speech against LGBTQI*?



iii. How to identify and tackle hate speech

The point of the following examples is to show that hate speech can be found everywhere.

No matter where you live, no matter your age, no matter your religion or whatsoever. You can be confronted to hate speech on every step of the road. Analysing them will teach you how to deconstruct and recognize hate speech and to answer it when you face it, in real life or on the Internet.



Context : A casual text message

I support gay marriage but I wouldn't want it on TV because my kids would see it, and I don't want them to be gay or something 🤔

Why is this hate speech ? Firstly, because they wouldn't want their children to be gay. Which is clearly homophobic. But there's also the idea that people can be « contaminated », that « if you see it, you can become it ». That let us see the homosexuality as a disease. Let's deconstruct it: Homosexuality is not a choice nor a disease. It is something that you are born with and seeing LGBTQI* people on media won't make you queer. The only thing it can do is helping you feel seen and understood.

Context : In Poland, the current president is targeting LGBTQI* people as a threat to the nation. There have been massive arrests of pacifist protestants and hate speech and violence against LGBTQIA+ people clearly stay unpunished. You can see those trucks in the street of Warsaw.

On this one, for example, it says that homosexual are 20 times more likely to be pedophiles. The driver uses speakers as well.



Why is this hate speech?

Because, in this optic, they show homosexuality as a crime, a deviance. They let people think that homosexuality is a « sin ». And no, using fake statistics doesn't make it true.

Let's deconstruct it: Pretty easy to say that we know homosexuality isn't a crime nor a deviance. And there's absolutely no studies that shows more pedophiles in the LGBTQI* community. Clearly, it's just propaganda to scare people of.



II. All good? Not yet: what is hate speech against LGBTQI*?



iii. How to identify and tackle hate speech



Context : Already known for some other transphobic tweets, saying that « sex is real », the author posted this one because she didn't agree with the expression « people who menstruate ».



Why is this hate speech?

Because by using the term « women » instead of « people who menstruate » she invisibilizes lots of people (for example trans men) who don't recognize themselves in the word « women ». And by stating again that « sex is real » even after being told that her first tweet was transphobic, she refuses to acknowledge the experiences of other people. And invisibilization is hate speech.

Let's deconstruct it: As mentioned just before, people who menstruate are not only women. Lots of people have feminine genitals but not describe themselves as women. In a world of acceptance, when some people tell others that they don't feel included in their speech, other people try to understand and include them.

Qatari sociologist says Beirut explosion is "divine punishment" for blasphemy, plastic surgery and homosexuality

Context: Explosion in Beirut 4th August 2020

Why is this hate speech?



When you mention an explosion that killed people and hurt hundreds of others as a « divine punishment », it's clearly hate speech because you tell people that homosexuality is a crime people must be punished for.

Let's deconstruct it: No big news but homosexuality is not a sin nor a crime. It does not demand any kind of punishment. Love never requires punishment.



II. All good? Not yet: what is hate speech against LGBTQI*?

iii. How to identify and tackle hate speech

Here are some other examples of hate speech you may easily (unfortunately) hear from people around you (tv, family, friends, and so on) that can happen in different places and contexts.

Some common examples of hate speech that can be classified as homophobic are

- "If one of my son is gay, all my children will be."
- "If children see gay people on TV, they'll become gay."
- "You're a faggot!"

We can also come across biphobia, where the perpetrators usually invisibilize bisexuality or sexualise it:

- "You must get laid so often if you can sleep with men and women" (binary speech)"
- It's just a phase. You're gay but you just don't entirely admit it yet"
- "So you want a threesome?"

And we can also see transphobic comments where people refuse transgender people access to the public sphere and don't accept that they are not in the binary system (men and women) as we know it in the Western cultures:

- "If you have a penis, you're a guy."
- "A guy in a dress, it's not natural"
- "You're a nature's mistake"

Additionally, many people often mistake gender and sex, which can result in involuntary offences and a lack of understanding. This are often not motivated by hate or made with intention, so we don't call them hate speech. It is also why education is crucial to stop this kind of phobia.



III. Why young people are vulnerable



When you are young, you are going through your most important transformative years, where you try to find your sense of self.

This is not always easy, with most youngsters looking for communities, media representation and now, using social media to find others with whom they identify. Young people who might be questioning about their sexual orientation and tending to identify as LGBTQI* can face an even harder time and process.

This is normal, as our society still doesn't offer LGBTQI* identifying people the same representation, openness and support as to heterosexual people.

So, why am I, as a young person, more vulnerable to hate speech?

The answer is not easy, but it's connected with this sense of belonging that most of us - and especially young people - look for.

In your life, being in the real world or online, you can find situations where you, or someone you know, might be more vulnerable to be the target of hate speech due to what the aggressor perceives of you - as for example being LGBTQI*.

This doesn't actually need to be true:
remember that it's not your fault being targeted,
it's the aggressor's!

Social media and the online interactions allowed many young people to express their true selves, find role models and LGBTQI* representativity that they don't find in their real world.

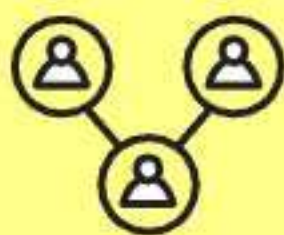
This is a positive thing, but it can also expose you to bad intentioned people who can try to attack you for being yourself or what they perceive you are.



III. Why young people are vulnerable



Being young also means that your support network is still not established or can be changing, leading you to feel that you are alone to deal with these negative situations. This is rarely true.



Being a victim of bullying or hate speech is not something anyone needs to endure alone.

As a young person the best you can do is to go talk with someone you trust: a parent, teacher, friend or even associations.

Often hate speech is based on misconceptions and stereotypes that are so ingrained in our society that we don't immediately identify it as hate speech, but we still know they are not correct and we still get hurt by it. Hate speech can take many forms from direct insults, insinuations, threats, mean comments or even physical violence.



The important thing as a young person is to understand if what you or someone else is experiencing is hate speech and how to deal with it without putting yourself at physical and mental risk.

Your safety and the safety of your friends is crucial.



IV. What can be the consequences?

On the internet, in the workplace, on the bus and in the neighbourhood.

LGBTQI* people are victims of hate speech much more frequently than the rest of the population. Too many worry about being the victim of crime and feel at risk.

Both the experience and fear of homophobic hate crimes and incidents have a dramatic impact on the quality of life of millions of LGBTQI* people.

Many take steps to avoid victimisation including hiding their identity and changing their behaviour.

Young LGBTQI+ people and ethnic minority LGBTQI* individuals feel even more at risk: be it the public space, when partying, when displaying queer affection or getting bullied at school.



The effects of hate speech are serious:

- psychological suffering: constant fear & feeling at risk
- physical suffering: when hate speech turns into hate crime but psychological mental health can also impact the physical well-being
- denigration of identity: LGBTQI+ may feel the need to invisibilize their "queerness" to avoid hate speech
- greater risk of isolation, solitude, homelessness, addictions & suicide
- 'dehumanization effect': hate speech dehumanizes the individuals it attacks and makes it easier for to justify suffering and harm caused to another human being



V. How to react to hate speech as young queers



Recognising and dealing with hate speech, either directly targeting you, your friends or any community you identify with it's not easy.

The first step to start dealing and deconstructing hate speech is to understand what it is and what it's not.

Legally hate speech can be very tricky to identify and often needs to be very bold and open to be described as such and punished.

We like this definition of hate speech that the No Hate Speech Movement created. It understands that more than the illegal side of it, hate speech has a real impact in the victims lives, emotions, self-perception and opportunities in society: Hate speech is "when you knowingly and deliberately use words and images as weapons like a punch to the face. When people are attacked, devalued or when hate or violence is called for against them, that's what we call hate speech".

Here are 5 tips to identify and react to hate speech



Tip #1. Reflect on what you are hearing/reading. What is the apparent motivation of the attacker and what they are doing. Hate speech can take many forms and is not always subtle.

Tip #2. Identify the target of the hate speech. Being others, a group/community or even yourself, it's important to

Tip #3. Evaluate the situation, the potential danger and don't react if your safety might be at risk. Not engaging is also a form of resistance, and being aware of hate speech is already a long step.

Tip #4. If you experience or see hate speech in a public space, make yourself aware of your surroundings and call for the attention of people in the street. Try not to engage in discussion if you perceive it can escalate to violence. If possible, document the situation with your phone and report it to the authorities. If you can't record, try to take notes of what you saw, that can be useful for future investigation.

Tip #5. Hate speech isn't always coming from strangers. It can happen inside family circle or within peers. Reacting in a private space is not the same as reacting in public, often there's no safe place to go. Remember that your safety and the safety of others is the most important. When you can, talk with someone you trust, an adult, a colleague - you don't need to be alone.

If you don't find anyone you trust, there are several LGBTQI* organisations that can help.

V. How to react to hate speech as young queers

Dealing with microaggressions:

Microaggressions are subtle and everyday intentional or unintentional actions or comments that transmit a negative and hostile attitude towards someone or a community.

Examples of common microaggressions against LGBTQI people can go from comments such as 'That's so gay!' or using homophobic slur; to more general behaviour like assuming all LGBTQI* lives and experiences are the same.*

Microaggressions are more complicated to identify as they are anchored in our society.

But there are three simple actions that you can take to fight it:



- 1 - Listen and Observe: actively listen to the interactions around you and think about the meaning of the words heard/said. This will help identify microaggressions.
- 2 - Call them out: If you feel safe, call others on their wrongdoing. Tell them that this kind of comments are not acceptable.
- 3 - Be an example: admit when you commit microaggressions and bring others along in your journey.

Whatever the way you choose to deal with hate speech, always make sure to be safe: If you don't feel comfortable, don't call others out. Always protect yourself first. This can go from ignoring to actively trying to correct others. But remember you make the choice, and that you are never alone.



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