

DETOX YOUR PROJECT

BE BRAVE *It's for the good*
BOYS DON'T CRY *BE STRONG*
you should not be afraid
BE A REAL MAN!



GUIDELINE



Erasmus+

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Introduction

These Guidelines are an outcome of “Detox your Project”, an international Training financed by Erasmus+ and it is an extension to the “Free to be you and me” toolkit. If you want to use these guidelines, it might help you to also have a look in the “Free to be me and you” Toolkit. You can find it here: <https://sci.ngo/resource/free-to-be-you-and-me/>.

- **What is the Free to be you and me Toolkit?**

The “Free to be you and me” toolkit has been developed by the SCI Gender Blenders working group and SCI International. It is based on the work of young people and youth workers who participated in a series of SCI international activities on the topic of gender. The toolkit aims to support non-formal education (NFE) trainers, youth workers and the coordinators of international volunteer projects/camps and exchanges to address gender and sexuality in their work. The content and workshops were selected to be applicable in international volunteer camps, the preparation of volunteers for such projects, Youth Exchanges and youth work in general.

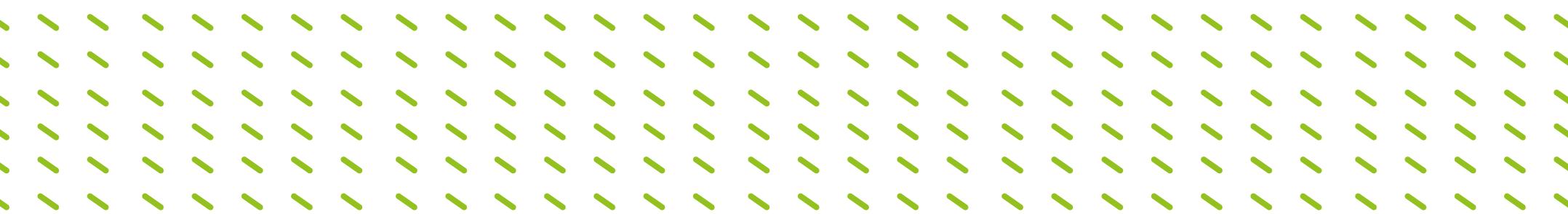
The “Free to be you and me” toolkit tries to provide comprehensive information on gender and sexuality along with step-by-step procedures and easy-to-use implementation tools to help educators engage in best practices when educating youth, and/or other groups.

- **What is SCI?**

Service Civil International, or short SCI, is an international peace movement. SCI is independent (meaning it is not a religious organization and is not affiliated with any political party). It’s a network of activist, who want to promote a culture of peace by organizing international volunteering projects and peace education.

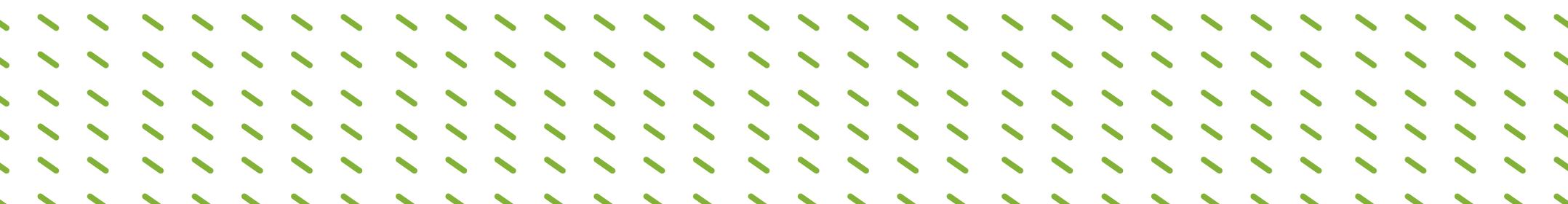
- **What was Detox your Project?**

In Mai 2022, 16 participants from international youth organizations met in Madrid for an international seminar. They discuss their experiences with challenging situations caused by male socialization. Men, that take up more space in plenaries, do less care work or make sexist jokes - These behaviors make seminars less comfortable for everybody and need to be addressed and reduced by the facilitators.



"*Toxic masculinity*" is the term coined for a harmful set of behaviors that some men still perpetuate. There is nothing toxic about being a man, but some men act in destructive ways based on the gender roles they think they need to fulfil: violence, intimidation aggression, hyper-competitiveness, sexual objectification, and emotional detachment. Misogyny, homophobia, and transphobia are often reinforced through these behaviors. Women, non-binary, and also other men are the targets of these behaviors. Men even direct these behaviors towards themselves because they feel that they do not meet what is required of "a man".

Addressing the topic during the seminar resulted in these introductory texts and guidelines. This booklet is a collection of texts, in which participants summarized their gained knowledge from the seminar. The guidelines are supposed to help facilitators to deal with and reduce toxic masculinity in their own projects.



Introduction to gender and discrimination

- **What you can expect on the following pages:**

To understand and respond to toxic masculinity, we first must put it in the context of patriarchy. A system that reaches back centuries in western societies.

That's why we start with a brief introduction to gender discrimination, before we deepen our understanding of masculinity and discover ways to oppose toxic masculine behaviors.

When talking about "masculine behavior", we must be very careful not to slip into binary patterns of explanation. Thus, you will also find an introduction to sex and gender in these guidelines to help us remember, that there is a lot more than male and female and that different gender identities and societal expectations influence people in various ways.

- **Gender discrimination:**

In our society we categorize people into different groups and treat these groups differently - this is called discrimination.

People can be discriminated against based on the social construct of race (racism), their sexuality (queer phobia/homophobia), (dis)ability (ableism), gender (sexism) etc.

On one hand, it is important to mention, that people can belong to different groups at the same time (this is part of the concept of intersectionality), and on the other hand, that discrimination can happen on different levels in our society: individual, institutional, structural. In the following part we are going to focus on discrimination based on gender through these different levels.

Structural discrimination refers to values, patterns, practices of societal structures, that give advantage to some and disadvantage to others based on their identity. This in turn affects their participation in society (economic, social, political life). It operates independently from the intentions of individuals. Individual and institutional discrimination are outcomes of structural discrimination.



Institutional discrimination refers to policies and practices within institutions (laws, organizational guidelines, prejudices and values of the institution), most seen in the educational, health and law enforcement system or the job market.

There is also an individual aspect of discrimination - individual discrimination. It is characterized by the specific actions and behaviors of an individual person. These are based on stereotypes and prejudices that a person holds, internalized through the process of socialization.

- **Sex and Gender:**

Let's start from the beginning, a moment that we come to this world from vagina or in case of the C section - directly from uterus/womb.

Usually, it is pretty easy to say if a baby is a "boy" or a "girl" simply because they have typical "female" or "male" external genitals, but in reality, things are not that simple.

1. What does that mean?

Let us introduce you to the term: "intersex". Some babies are born as intersex, which means that **their sex characteristics** (internal and external genitals, chromosomes and hormones) **do not match our definition of typical male or female bodies.**

There are numerous variations between typical male and female sex characteristics. They are not always visible at birth. Some people find out they have an intersex body when they are in puberty or try to have a baby and some also never find out.

Being intersex doesn't mean that something is wrong with your body, on the contrary, an intersex body is perfectly fine the way it is. The majority of intersex babies are completely healthy and can function as everyone else. This also means that even though their sex characteristics vary, they can experience sexual pleasures as many other people. According to UN experts, there are around 1,7% intersex people on planet Earth, but this is actually hard to know since most countries don't have official data or interest regarding intersex people. This is because we live in a binary world.

2. What does binary world mean?

It means that most societies legally and in all other ways recognize only males and females. In almost all countries, **you cannot officially exist as intersex or non-binary person** (meaning you can't get your ID card or a passport if it is not stated in your documents that you are neither male or female).

3. Does it all have to do with our sex or there is something else?

Regarding sex, we may say that our sex characteristics (internal and external genitals, chromosomes, and hormones) can be recognized on the scale of typical male, female to everything in between, which is intersex.

Besides sex, which refers to our biology and physiology, there is also gender which is more complex to explain. In contrary to sex, gender is less about body parts but describes the social aspect and role in society. Gender identity means a personal idea of one's own sex and gender role.

There are a lot of people that don't fit into typical male or female gender identities. People born with intersex variations just like people born with typical male or female sex characteristics can have many different gender identities.

4. What are examples for different gender identities?

- **Trans-gender:** People that define as trans don't feel comfortable with their sex assigned at birth. For example they may have a typical female anatomy but feel like a male. Some seek to become change their body by taking hormones or have sex reassignment surgeries. Some also define themselves in the non-binary spectrum.
- **Cis-gender:** As the opposite of transgender, cis- describes people that identify with the gender that was assigned to them at birth because of their external genitals.

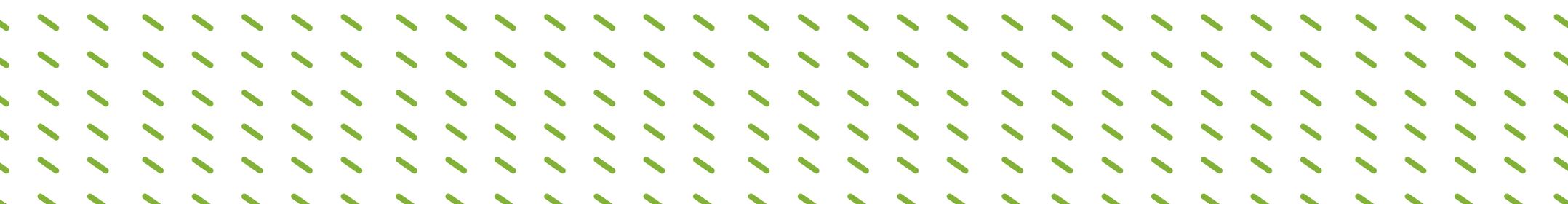
- **Non-Binary:** means that you don't fit into solely male or female gender identity.
- **Genderqueer:** is an umbrella term for people that don't fit into binary gender norms
- **Bigender:** means that a person has two different gender identities. For example, male and female or male and non-binary. They can occur at different times or simultaneously.

You can find explanations of many other gender and sexual identities here: <https://queerevents.ca/queer-resources/queer-dictionary>.

It is important to keep in mind, that people that define as men or are socialized as men actually have made vary different experiences. The reasons why they behave a certain way thus also differs a lot. Please **keep that in mind** when you react to problematic male behavior as the leader or facilitator of a youth project.

Sources:

- <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/gender-identity/sex-gender-identity>
- <https://kidshelpline.com.au/teens/issues/understanding-people-intersex-variations>
- <https://isna.org/faq/printable/>
- <https://queer-lexikon.net/>



Introduction to Masculinities

Masculinity and masculinities are a position in a binary gender system. There is not the one masculinity, because men and masculinities can be very diverse. Nor is masculinity simply what men do, but rather the ideas and images of how men are supposed to be, what is supposedly masculine and what is not.

As diverse as men and masculinities are, the vast majority of people, and thus the vast majority of men, have lived in a patriarchal binary social system since birth. In this system, men - as well as people of other gender identities - learn from an early age about images and ideas of how men should be, in order to be masculine - and how not to be.

These images shape and socialise many people with a certain social and behavioural component of gender (see the concept of “doing gender” by Judith Butler). Every "boys don't cry", "riding is a girl's sport", "dresses are not for boys" strongly shapes the life and image of a person and so parts of the diverse masculinities are nevertheless influenced by a strong socialisation and can therefore also have similar components.

Moreover, these masculine behaviours are rewarded with access to power and resources. Classic characteristics associated with masculinity, such as dominance, sovereignty or assertiveness, are often also preconditions or advantages for powerful positions in society.

In addition to socialisation, male privileges also play a major role for men and masculinities. Due to a patriarchal system that has shaped societies for centuries, men have many structural advantages that people with other gender identities do not have or have less. These advantages are called privileges. A detailed list of male privileges can be found [here](#) or [here](#). However, here is a small list to give you an idea of male privileges:

- The chances of men being hired for a job when competing against female* applicants are higher. The more prestigious the job, the more the chances are shifted.
- Men are much less likely to experience sexual harassment, rape or other forms of sexual violence from adolescence onwards.

- When men do the same job as a woman*, the job is more likely to be more highly valued and better paid.
- Men can be loud without fear of being called a 'priss'. Men can be aggressive without fear of being called a 'bitch'.
- It is not a problem for men to take over less care work in families, friendships or relationships. When men do it, they are much more likely to be praised for it.

All these privileges and gender socialisation thus contribute significantly to the images of masculinities that exist in society, but also to the (invisible) accesses and advantages men have over people with other gender identities. These advantages and images shape men to varying levels, but it is very difficult, if not impossible, to shape and view one's own behaviour and individual masculinity completely independently of them.

It is of course elementary that not all men have the same experiences, are exposed to the same socialisation processes and have the same privileges. Especially men who are affected by structural forms of discrimination, such as black men by racism, men of the poverty and working class by classism or also trans men by transphobia. Other socialisation processes and privileges are active here, but male socialisation and privileges play a certain role for almost everyone, even if they are not white, cisgender, heterosexual, from the global north, healthy, wealthy, educated, Christian, etc.

And they are almost always superior to women and other non-male gender identities in our gender system.

It is also important to note that while men enjoy structural advantages and privileges through patriarchy, men can equally suffer from patriarchy and binary - heteronormative gender role expectations.

So what do we mean by masculinity? In summary, masculinity is:

1. **A position in a hierarchical and binary gender system;**
2. **images and ideas of what men are supposed to be like and,**
3. **the actions of men.**

and masculinity is always depending on different socialisations and positions in social power relations. Thus, masculinity cannot simply be equated with men and in the same way, individual men cannot simply change masculinity and it cannot be minimised that the ideas of masculinity and expectations towards men usually have a strong influence on the individual development of boys* and men. In many forms of masculinities, men hurt themselves and each other first and foremost. But especially women and non-binary, trans* and inter* persons suffer from these images of masculinity and the resulting actions.

- **Hegemonic masculinity after Connell:**

Since we are writing about masculinity here, we cannot avoid introducing the concept of hegemonic masculinity according to Raewyn Connell. It is considered one of the central works in the scientific discussion of masculinity. We will briefly outline this here:

Connell divides masculinities into four different masculinities: Hegemonic masculinity, complicit masculinity, marginalised masculinity and subordinate masculinity. These masculinities are largely hierarchical and all have in common that they are superior to women and other gender identities. This is called the patriarchal dividend.

Hegemonic masculinity is the term used to describe masculinity that is characterised by many privileges and power. Even if only relatively few men combine all the elements of this hegemonic masculinity, it also serves as a model for other masculinities to follow.

Connell counts the majority of all men as complicit masculinity. These benefit from hegemonic masculinity because they profit strongly from the patriarchal dividend and participate in it, thus supporting hegemonic masculinity without fully achieving it themselves.

Marginalised masculinities, on the other hand, are generally understood to be masculinities that belong to socially oppressed groups, such as Black men of the poverty and working classes.

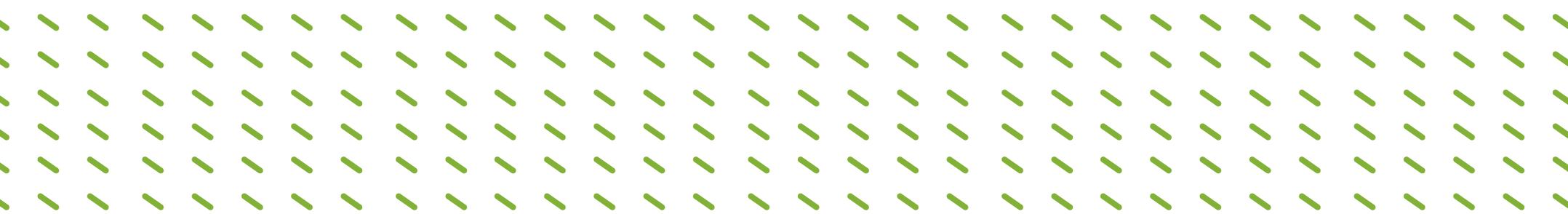
This subordination and marginalisation of certain groups of men further ensures the production and maintenance of the hegemony of other men.

Subordinate masculinity means masculinities that could undermine hegemonic masculinity with its patriarchal privileges through their "dangerous proximity to femininity". Connell specifically names non-heterosexual men as part of this group. Trans men or even strong pro-feminist men can be seen as part of this group too.

With this concept, Connell thus creates a model that can not only analyse and view men in relation to other genders, but also enables the analysis of different masculinities.

- **Toxic Masculinity:**

A term that has been read and heard a lot in recent years in the discussion of gender and gender-specific behaviour is the term toxic masculinity. There is often a lot of resistance to the term, because people frequently interpret it in the sense that everything masculine is toxic. But here it is worth taking a closer look. Because the concept of toxic masculinity does not mean that everything masculine is toxic, but rather that it refers to the masculinity requirements and images as well as the behaviours of men that often result from them, which are problematic.



We are therefore talking about behaviour patterns that do not arise from a "male biology", but which boys learn from an early age. These patterns harm both them and the people around them.

Here is a list of possible toxic male behavioural demands and behaviours.

- A man should be able to bear physical and emotional pain without talking about it.
 - This makes it more difficult to perceive one's own pain
 - Physical violence must be endured and handed out
 - This also encourages an unhealthy lifestyle through less physical activity and an unhealthy diet.
- A man should not seek closeness, tenderness or warmth.
 - This makes it difficult to build close relationships with other people. Both romantic and friendship.
- A man should only have the emotions **bravery and anger**. All other emotions are weaknesses. Weakness is unacceptable. Men should not learn Emotional Intelligence and should not be dependent on anyone. Asking for help is weakness.
- For many men it is therefore difficult to seek to get help themselves or to start therapy.
- A significantly higher suicide rate among men can also be interpreted as a result of this.
- Behaviours that are considered to be effeminate or feminine (crying, shyness, fear, affectionate or tender gestures, etc.) are not appropriate for a real man.
- Men whose bodies do not conform to the masculine ideal (broad-shouldered, muscular, tall, resistant to pain) are not taken seriously or are ridiculed.
- A real man always wants sex and is always ready for it.
- A man must be present and take up a lot of verbal space.
 - Always want to have the first and last word.
 - Explain things without being asked, especially to people of other genders, often things that the other person knows much better (mansplaining).
 - Not listening.
 - Not letting others finish, talking over them.
 - Talking about things that are not really a topic at the moment, but showing that they know a lot about a topic.

- A man must also take up a lot of space physically.
 - Spreading legs and thus blocking other places, e.g. on couches or in public transport (manspreading).
 - Appearing dominant with a lot of body language.
 - Showing oneself topless without asking if it is okay for everyone and without awareness that it is a privilege, because not all people can just be topless, no matter how hot it is.
 - Emphasising physical strength and athleticism.

All these behaviours not only lead to hurtful behaviour towards oneself (with long-term effects e.g. in later health care or in terms of the ability to form deep emotional bonds), but are also often accompanied by unlearning the boundaries and vulnerability of others. These intrusive behaviours do not always have to be intentional but can also occur through subconsciously learned socialisation. Often, however, a strong dominance (especially towards people of other genders) is acted out.

Masculinity and its characteristics have to be proven again and again, for example through tests of courage, drinking games, physical strength tests or humiliation rituals towards others.

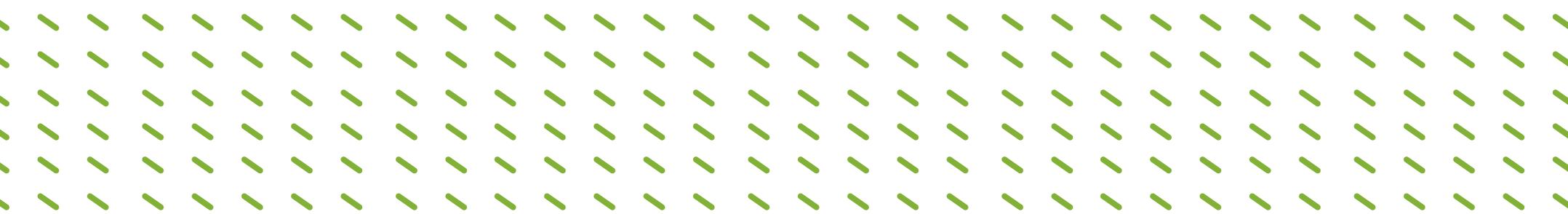
These forms of behaviour of toxic masculinity are demanded and forced by a social presence and socialisation. They include, for example, laughing at, belittling, judging, hurting, exposing, insulting and calling names of men who do not correspond to the idea of being a true man.

The possible consequences of toxic masculinity include riskier and more violent behaviour, but also loneliness and social isolation, depression and a higher suicide rate, especially since those affected do not seek therapy because of the perceived stigma. It is also assumed that there is a higher risk of work addiction (up to burn-out), alcohol addiction and drug abuse.

One of the central concerns of gender research dealing with toxic masculinity is therefore to show that men can also suffer from the power structures of patriarchy, i.e. the images of masculinity and role clichés propagated in this way.

- **Critical Masculinity**

The above-mentioned demands and resulting behaviours on and by men are problematic in many ways. Many people suffer as a result.



The hierarchical supremacy of masculinity over femininity, of men over women, trans* and inter* persons, leads to oppression, exploitation and violence, to a skewed distribution of power and access to resources. So this has little to do with a good life for all. In extreme cases, toxic male behaviour ends in femicide: the murder of women by men because of their positioning as women. Every day, 200-300 women worldwide are murdered by men, the majority of them by their partner or ex-partner. The number of attempted murders is many times higher.

So there are many important reasons to critically engage with masculinity. A critical engagement with masculinity therefore means recognising the role expectations, privileges and sexist-patriarchal structures. In order to achieve a better life, a life free of domination for all people, men (and others) have to critically deal with gender relations. For men, this means on the one hand looking at their own problematic behaviours, recognising privileges and positions of power and trying to learn a behaviour far from violence and exploitation (as far as this is individually possible). On the other hand, and very centrally, this means supporting other genders in their struggle.

Often, the critical examination of one's own masculinity turns into an exaggerated portrayal of one's own degree of reflection, which understands one's own suffering, one's own costs and the problematic nature of images of masculinity, but at the same time forgets the suffering of others. Therefore, it is elementary that youth and peace organisations critically engage with gender and masculinities and empower young people to develop themselves individually without having to conform to gender role expectations and without oppressing other people, other gender identities.

Sources:

- Boykott Magazine (2021), Edition 1: <https://www.boykott-magazin.de/ausgaben/>
- R.W. Connell (2005): Masculinities
- <https://theconversation.com/toxic-masculinity-what-does-it-mean-where-did-it-come-from-and-is-the-term-useful-or-harmful-189298>

Guidelines: How to deal with toxic masculinities

We all grew up in a patriarchal system and as a result have internalized patriarchal beliefs and behaviors. For people with male socialization, this can show as toxic male behavior at seminars or other youth work projects. It is the task of the trainers or facilitators to react to such behavior, to initiate a reflection in the participants and to support those affected. Leaders can also try to design the frame of a project in a way that prevents toxic masculinity in the first place. This includes showing boys and men alternative forms of masculine behavior and creating a space in which they can free themselves from internalized demands of masculinity. In the following pages you will find an (incomplete) collection of ideas and suggestions to create a seminar that is as safe as possible for all participants.

Four Examples of toxic masculinities in projects and how to avoid them:

1. *Taking a lot of space, for example speaking loud and long in comparison to other participants, or interrupting others*

How to avoid this:

- Make sure that every person of the project can talk and share. Methods like a “talking circle” or a “silent discussion” can help to make sure everyone gets the space they want (in a talking circle is only the person holding an object is allowed to talk. The object circulates in the group)
- Provide space especially for marginalized or discriminated groups (LGBTQI+; BIPOC, People with disabilities)
- Give people time to think about questions and to answer them (don't always take the first person that raises their hands).

2. *Challenging each other in “who is the greater/ the boss”*

How to avoid this:

- Pay attention what kind of games you play! They shouldn't be too competitive and avoids individual winners and loser as. It might be better to compete within groups.

3. *Sexist/Homophobic/Transphobic defamations/statements*

How to avoid /react to this:

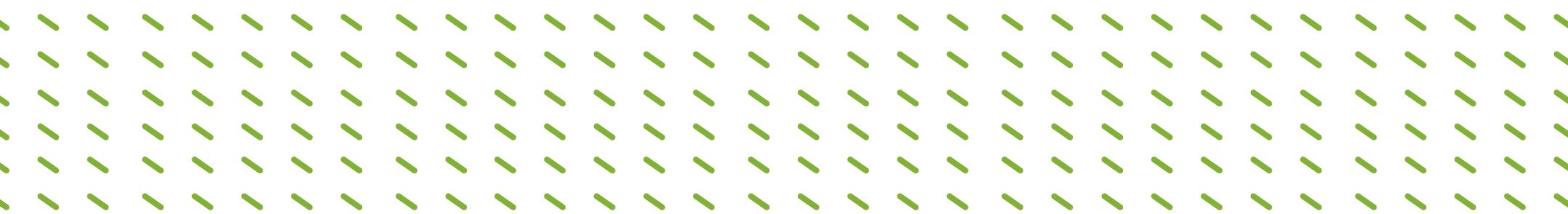
- Make a group agreement in the beginning of a project that lasts several days. This way, you can set roles for the interactions during the seminar and refer to these roles when people don't follow them and make others feel uncomfortable.
- It's important that everybody in the group speaks up when discrimination/violent behaviour happens, to avoid a "silent majority" that allows therefore discriminating behaviour. This way, the affected person feels the support from the group. In the best case, the person that said something discriminatory, will get an immediately feedback and maybe reflect on their behaviour.
- Make sure your reaction is orientated on the needs of the person affected by the sexist action/ comment. The wellbeing of the person affected is in that moment more important than the learning process of the perpetrator and the whole group.

4. *Difficulties to talk about emotions and articulate feelings*

How to avoid this:

- Smaller groups can make it easier for people to open up. You can provide these in every evening evaluations (the participants meet in small groups every evening to reflect on the day and the group) or in reflection walks.

- Sometimes it can help to divide the group depending on different experiences with sexism or toxic masculinity (for example in people socialised as men and people not socialised as men – be ware to not just offer the options men and women, there are diverse sexes and gender identities!). This can help people to open and share their hesitations, fears, questions or feelings. Even sharing "problematic" thoughts and getting feedback on them can be a first step to changing these beliefs.
- Use creative methods like theatre, drawing or making collages to start a personal reflection on a topic
- Talk about why it is so hard and painful to accept to have privileges that others don't have.



Games and methods to start a reflection

Invites to reflection

Send people in little groups on reflection walks with questions on their own experiences with patriarchy and toxic masculinity.

Use games

Use pantomime-Games to show how people take space in a room or situation privilege walk/step forward (Every participant gets a “role”. The facilitator reads out different situations. Depending on weather the role is privileged in the situation the participants moves one step forward).

1

2

3

4

Use a method

Use the power flower method to start a individual reflection on different dimension of discrimination their own participants therein.

Other practices

Buying privileges (Each group gets a certain same amount of money. They have to choose which privilege they going to buy and which they have to leave out).

General tips for trainers to reduce toxic masculinity and create a diverse and safe group

ENCOURAGE PARTICIPANTS TO LEARN STEP BY STEP!

We must allow mistakes and learn out of it. This means creating an open and safe atmosphere in which people aren't judged if they hesitate or make mistakes. Address mistakes without judgement or "calling people out"



ANALYZES THE DIVERSITY

People come from very different backgrounds. Make sure you use diverse methods to reach different people.



DEFINES THE TASKS

Create groups for care work with specific tasks, so that everyone must participate in cleaning, tidying up, cooking, etc.



HAVE A DIVERSE GROUP

You can use quotas and especially invite less privileged people to join the seminar.



PLAN AHEAD

Have a concept on how this seminar should be a safer space and advertise this in advance so potential participants feel "safer" to apply. Such a concept could include specific rooms that are only open to marginalised groups (for example only women or only FLINTA persons) and having contact persons for people that feel affected by toxic masculinity



DEFINE YOUR COMMUNICATION

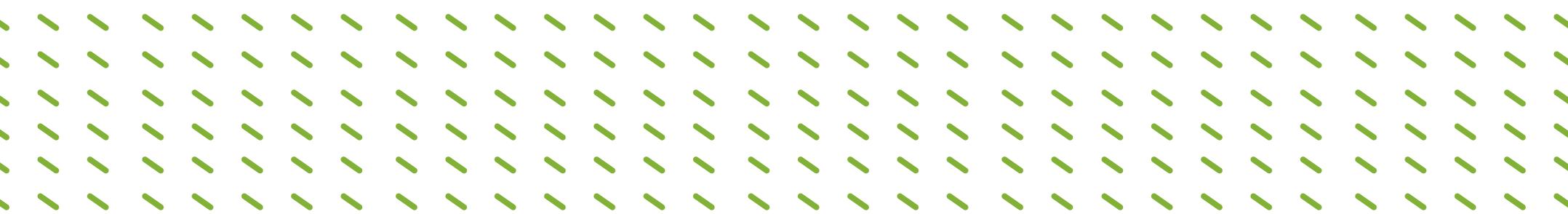
Introduce and practice communication strategies everyone can use to communicate their needs and how they feel (without making others feel attacked by this)



BE FLEXIBLE

Some societies or governments don't support projects that deal with topics like sexism or patriarchy. You could still include some topics by framing them as "peace work" or generally regarding equality.





Conclusion

We hope these guidelines can be an inspiration for other and our own organizations in organising gender inclusive and less toxic projects. This manual was just an starting point and one collection of texts of different people. The topic still needs more Attention in the non formal education setting. We are looking forward to more projects on this topic and wish everyone good success in dealing with this huge problem to increase the chances to reach a good life for all!



The seminar and the manual were financed by:



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Voluntariado por la paz desde 1920