

## About these cards

I developed this card deck as part of my master's thesis at TU Wien. It is based on a literature review which I completed for the project GEECCO\* as well as a conference paper for „Mensch und Computer 2020“ which I co-authored with Katta Spiel. The paper can be accessed via the ACM Digital Library.†

Each card describes an approach to develop (gender) sensitivity in research and practice in HCI (Human Computer Interaction). On each card I suggest some questions to discuss and give a brief explanation of important terms.

\* <https://www.geecco-project.eu/> This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 741128.

† <https://dl.acm.org/doi/10.1145/3404983.3405510>

## Categories on the cards

The different categories by project phases are marked on the cards using color. However, there are other ways to group the approaches presented. I visualised some of them using icons on each card. This is what they mean:



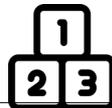
Pay attention to language  
by bqlqn, Flaticon

Level of detail of explanation  
by bqlqn, Flaticon



Reflection  
by Freepik, Flaticon

include other domains,  
leave "your box"  
by bqlqn, Flaticon



learn about/apply theories  
by bqlqn, Flaticon

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## Talk Explicitly about Gender.

What do we mean when talking about gender in the scope of this project? What are the implications of this understanding of gender?

There are different ways of understanding gender. The most widely used are essentialist<sup>\*</sup>, performative<sup>†</sup> and identity-based<sup>‡</sup> models. Researchers should make their understanding of gender clear as soon as possible. That way, it will be easier to communicate implications resulting from this understanding. It will also allow the team to reflect on conclusions which might otherwise have stayed implicit.

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\* ... assumes that there is a strictly binary, immutable, complementary and fixed set of genitalia which neatly aligns with gender, learned behaviour, and social roles.

† ... distinguishes between biological (assigned at birth) and social gender, with the latter being affirmed through repeated behaviours.

‡ ... understands gender as a social construct outside a binary. Consciously assuming a gendered identity is seen as an act of self-determination.



## Reflect on Individual & Collective Positionality.

What is the attitude of individual team members and the team as a whole towards the research topic and the research subjects? How do issues such as the team members' age, gender, education and socio-economic background influence the group itself, or the project as a whole?

Who we are impacts what we are able to see, learn and understand. Our position in society thus also affects our work. In order to identify our position and the resulting impact on the project, we should start to reflect on our own perspectives early on. Plans for this reflection can be made in a "living" document that can be adapted to emerging needs, changing circumstances, and new practices.

Some examples for ongoing reflection are: personal or shared research diaries, regular meetings or informal check-ups with some sort of documentation and/or accountability structure. Different people will prefer different modes, mix-and-match might be appropriate.



## Check Methods for Accessibility and Sensitivity.

Which methods do we use in the project? What was the context in which they were developed, by whom, for whom? How were they tested? Which possible exclusions can this signify?

Researchers often base their work on existing concepts and research. These, however, were usually developed for and in specific contexts and purposes, so that some adjustments may be necessary. Changes may relate to the language used, to modes of execution, or the materials used in order to improve comprehensibility or to reduce barriers.

Reflecting on the (in)accessibility of methods in certain contexts enables researchers to understand more about the limitations of their work.



## Consider and Assess Exclusions.

Who can, may or should (not) participate in the project? Why?

Every research will include some, and exclude other participants. Deliberately assessing exclusions upfront can reduce situations where this may happen inadvertently, and possibly even contrary to a research question.

It is important to acknowledge that e.g. talking about topics associated with stigma may only be possible if the participants feel safe and secure enough to do so. Such participants may be privileged\* in certain ways. Being aware of such exclusions also enables researchers to attend to unmarked norms, e.g. *Whiteness*† in the context of tech.

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\* Being privileged means to have advantages in certain contexts (or not being at a disadvantage), without having actively done something to achieve that status: easily finding - and keeping - a job; being heard in meetings; feeling safe while walking outdoors at night. Of course, privileged people can have difficult times and lives, too - but their difficulties are usually not systemic.

† Especially in IT, the unmarked norm consists of able-bodied, white cis men, usually with higher than average socio-economic status.



## Learn and Teach about Intersectionality.

What dimensions of identity shape our participants? How does that affect the project?

Gender is often neither the only, nor the best explanation for differences e.g. in the use of technologies. Education, choice of profession, but also factors like stereotype threat\* influence which technologies people use and which technologies they can learn to work with. People from rural areas may have different opinions and experiences regarding gender issues than city dwellers.

Discussing a project's context through the lens of intersectionality† helps to better understand developments, chances and limitations.

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\* ... describes the fear that one's behaviour might confirm a negative stereotype about one's own (marginalised) group, and can cause self-fulfilling prophecies, e.g. when participants are reminded about gender disparities in mathematics just before starting on a math exam.

† Marginalisation based on multiple dimensions of discrimination is not "just" the "sum" of experiences of single-dimension discrimination, but causes new kinds of discrimination. Black women, for example, are discriminated against in other ways than *white* women, but also in other ways than Black men.



## Check and Extend Expectations.

How do funding bodies define gender? Which areas of life (work, health, family, ...) are looked at in what way(s)? Which other marginalised groups or dimensions of discrimination could be included here?

When calling for submissions, funding bodies often include requests to attend to gender issues - but most often based on stereotypical, binary concepts of gender. Too often, gender research still means looking at "women's topics" based on essentialist‡ viewpoints - although there are many other gendered issues to be addressed.

Viewing calls through the lens of intersectionality§ and equity could, for example, enable researchers to research concepts of masculinity and their apparent incompatibility with emotional/medical/mental health, or with specific professions and other topics.

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‡ Essentialism assumes that there is a strictly binary, immutable, complementary set of genitalia that neatly aligns with gender, learned behaviour and social roles.

§ Multidimensional marginalisation causes new forms of discrimination. Black women, for example, experience different kinds of discrimination than *white* women, but are also discriminated against differently than Black men.



## Understand Proposal Writing as a Teaching Opportunity.

Which assumptions and values can be found in calls? How can these assumptions be challenged in a proposal? What are our own assumptions, and which of those should we communicate clearly?

Proposal reviewers might not be entirely familiar with gender as a self-determined identity\*. Thus, such approaches need to be communicated accessibly across disciplines. That way, proposal writing becomes an opportunity for educating on these topics by providing a good example. In explaining our assumptions on gender and equity, clarifying specifically why and where this matters within the proposal constitutes best practice. Being precise in language use from the outset and acknowledging potential biases in data sets (whether pre-existing or newly created) can help to guide reviewers' understanding of the subject matter.

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\* A person's gender is determined only by themselves, not by upbringing, behaviour, or genitals.



## Follow Participants' Choices In Identifying Them.

How do our participants describe themselves? What is the appropriate vocabulary to use when talking about them and their experiences and in which contexts? What are their pronouns?

It is a sign of respect to ask our participants explicitly for their pronouns - and to use them, even if we are not directly interacting with them.

In order to do this, it is necessary we give our participants the space and freedom to express themselves. In interviews, we can do this during conversation. In small scale studies we could use free form fields for them to disclose their gender (or tell us they would rather not). In large scale studies, it is important to know beforehand what the primary view of the target group on gender is. Only then can we ask the right questions.

There should always be an explicit option for the participants not to have to disclose their gender or pronouns.



## Attend to Different Needs and Preferences.

Which needs are already being considered in our project? Who do these considerations apply to? Who has been looked over or left out until now? How can we change that?

It is understandable that team members are focused on their own questions and tasks within the project. However, it is important that we keep in mind that everybody has a life outside the project which influences how (or if at all) they can participate.

We can start by actively including members of marginalised groups already during recruitment (e.g. via peer groups or community-based platforms). Offering meals during workshop days, adapting the project schedule to accommodate care responsibilities (e.g. if participants care for school children), as well as making counselling available will help more people participate in the project. Being flexible with regard to research modes (e.g. conducting interviews in person, via telephone, or through chat) creates more inclusivity. In order to create a safe environment, one should refrain from probing for information when participants are reluctant to share.



## Seek Critical Feedback.

Who can possibly take a fresh look at our work and our project? How can we empower participants and external experts to point out where we can do better?

In order for participants to feel safe in offering critique on our methods and ideas, we need to build long lasting connections and careful relationships with them. Collaboration with professionals from the same field can be another way to see our work from a different angle. Finally, it is important to actively disclose our own perspective(s) and motivations to participants so that they understand what we want to do, how and why. This openness is fundamental for fruitful dialogue.

These measures, of course, take time to plan, implement, and apply-- the knowledge and connections we gain through this deep engagement, however, are particularly valuable.



## Actively Look for What's Missing.

What are we doing with this project? To what extent is gender part of that? Which other dimensions of identity or discrimination might play into it?

Being aware of the gaps in the ideas, data and plans that we have developed ourselves or worked with for quite some time already, is one of the hardest things. In order to find those gaps, and bridge them, it is helpful to engage with experts outside our own domains. Instead of or in addition to this critical feedback, we can try and attune ourselves to what is missing in our own work. It is comparable to finding a bug in a software project.

Sometimes the result of this search may be that instead of using gender as a variable or focus, we should consider a more nuanced view of people or their bodies.



## Provide Appropriate Context Information.

Which data is being used in the project? From which (social, local, temporal) context did these emerge? Why are we using this data? Which alternatives are there? Which role do gender identities have in the project? Why and in which form are we using gender as a factor?

Documenting and explaining choices is important for building a knowledge base and providing appropriate context. This includes questions about why and how gender was used and included in the research.

The origin of pre-collected data and the (in-)completeness of data sets are important aspects. For example, local and temporal origin of data lead to different outcomes.

Our position\* as and within a project team can also be relevant. Describing (and accepting) identities allows the viewpoint of the work to gain context.

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\* Who we are impacts what we may see, learn, understand. Our position in society thus also affects our work (hence, the term "positionality").



## Reflect on Representation and Prior Work.

Which pictures and examples do we use in our project? From which local, social, temporal context did these emerge? Why do we use these particular pictures, examples, ...?

Representation also includes examples, pictures and imagery. Here, researchers can reflect on unmarked norms embedded in their visualisations and textual examples, and find more diversity where possible.

As most prior work operates from a binary, essentialist understanding of gender<sup>\*</sup>, denaturalising prior work<sup>†</sup> can also mean broadening representation and attending to cultural differences where appropriate.

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\* Essentialist understanding of gender assumes the existence of a strict, unchangeable, complementary set of genitalia which correlates with assigned gender, learned behaviour, and social roles.

† ... making explicit that prior work is a product of its context, and not a „given“.



## Choose Mindful Language.

Which words do we use to describe something? Why do we use these words? From which context do they emerge? What alternatives are there?

The use of inclusive and precise language may avoid perpetuating exclusionary stereotypes. For example, in an English text when writing about people without knowing the pronouns, singular "they" can be used. When presenting statistical results all options should be listed, for example: "45% of the participants identified as female, 44% identified as male, 7% identified as non-binary<sup>‡</sup>, 4% left the option blank; selecting multiple options was possible."

A general recommendation is to ask participants which self-descriptions and pronouns they use, and use these when talking and referring to them. It is also important to gather feedback regarding language used by representatives of the target population.

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‡ ... describes a person not identifying with binary male or female categories. Their identities may lie somewhere in-between or they may embrace an entirely different identity.



## Work with communities.

How can we involve (future) users and people concerned with our work? Which communities are affected by our work? How can we get in touch and improve the contact?

Designing **for** target groups often leads to solutions that miss the actual problem or task they were supposed to solve/improve. Thus, it often creates unsatisfying solutions.

In contrast, designing **with** target group members can mean including people from marginalized groups into the design process. This gives them opportunities to increase their self-confidence, to gain knowledge, and offers possibilities to form networks.

Working **with** target group members gives researchers deeper insights into, and a better understanding of, participants' daily lives and struggles, instead of working based on assumptions and second-hand information from other sources.

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