

Because equal opportunities are important to us!



MEDIZINISCHE  
UNIVERSITÄT  
INNSBRUCK

## Fact Sheet: Language and Discrimination

### 1. Introduction

The MUI is committed to the equality, equity and equal opportunities of its employees, students and patients. The university's gender equality work includes people of different ages, genders, ethnicities, religions, sexual orientation, capacities and social classes in its inclusive approach. Achieving this goal of equality is not a matter of course – exclusion, unequal treatment, devaluation and the associated discrimination are usually subtle and often unconscious. All employees are therefore called upon to contribute to respectful interaction with one another in their field of work.

### 2. Language and discrimination ...

Language is not neutral. The way we name something can be motivating and positive, neutral, or degrading and discriminatory. Language is constantly changing. Terms undergo semantic change and people's awareness and sensitivity grows. Words often come out thoughtlessly. They can degrade, insult, and hurt other people – often people of other ethnicities, women, older people, people with disabilities, people of different sexual or religious orientation. What is meant and what is understood often differ in interaction. The meaning that is understood by the listeners is the priority.

### 3. ... a subtle matter: suggestions on the topic

- ✓ Address groups in the way they want to be addressed: black/African Americans, Sinti and Roma, diverse individuals, etc.
- ✓ Use female and male personal descriptions and make it clear that you also include diverse people: \*, :
- ✓ Avoid generalisations: use specific personal designations before general or imprecise ones: there is no such thing as 'Austrians', 'Germans', 'Turks', ...
- ✓ Be as precise and clear as possible in your definitions and restrictions of meaning.
- ✓ Note which information is necessary for your message and which is superfluous;
- ✓ Reflect on your own language use, get feedback;
- ✓ Ask how something is meant – give feedback on how you have understood something.
- ✓ Avoid devaluation and discriminatory terms in your statements.

#### 4. Further information

- Further information on the topic: Handout for the workshop 'Language & Discrimination' (New Leadership Curriculum, elective module, 07.11.2024)
- [Guidelines for diversity- and gender-sensitive language use](#)
- [On problematic terms such as 'race' and 'ethnicity' and how to deal with them sensitively in medical research](#)
- [Guidelines for speakers on gender equality at the Medical University of Innsbruck](#)

*"Language is nowhere and at no time an apolitical enclosure, for it cannot be separated from what one does with the other. It always lives in the individual case, one must listen to it each time anew to hear what it has in mind. In the inseparability of action, it becomes legitimate or unacceptable, beautiful or ugly, one could also say good or evil. In every language, that is to say in every type of language, there are different eyes."*

Extract from the novel „The King Bows and Kills“ by Herta Müller (Carl Hanser 2003:39)



#### Information and advice:

Coordination Office for Gender Equality, Advancement of Women, Diversity

Gender Mainstreaming and Diversity Unit

E-mail: [diversitaet-gleichstellung@i-med.ac.at](mailto:diversitaet-gleichstellung@i-med.ac.at)