

# DO WE DISCRIMINATE? ARE WE DISCRIMINATED AGAINST?



**A GUIDE  
TO LIVING DIVERSE  
LIVES TOGETHER**

# DO ANY OF THESE SITUATIONS SOUND FAMILIAR TO YOU?

- My cellmate finds out I have HIV and asks for a change
- My partner finds out that I have HIV and doesn't want to visit me anymore
- People look down on me and don't want me to participate in certain activities because I have HIV and/or because my partner is female
- My mother scolds me because I give my daughter kisses and tells me that I am going to give her AIDS
- I don't want people with HIV/AIDS to use the same clothes, towels or toilet as me
- I don't want to be seen with her, I'm not like that, I'm not attracted to women
- They call me a dyke when I dress the way I want
- They call me butch
- When I shower, they make fun of me because I don't wax

## THESE ARE ALL EXAMPLES OF DISCRIMINATION.

Some of them are related to experiences of living with HIV, others to having sexual relationships with other women, and others to not adhering to normative body stereotypes.



# WHAT IS DISCRIMINATION?

**Discrimination is a social phenomenon that occurs when we reject others for being different. It is shaped by what we are taught and learn to feel, to believe, to think and to do in the face of difference, and emerges in how we react to things that we do not understand or which challenge our beliefs. From the moment we are born, we are taught to live and see the world in a binary, heteronormative way, as if this were the only possible way to be part of a family, of our peer group at school or of our circle of friends and colleagues, or to identify romantically, professionally and socially with others and with ourselves.**

Discrimination is a manifestation of stigma. Discrimination is just one of the ways in which we treat and are treated unequally and unfairly. In situations of discrimination, **difference means rejection**, exclusion and ostracism. This can especially affect those of us who do not meet expected standards of femininity or gender imposed on our physical selves and our intimate and sexual relationships.

This sexist worldview shapes the things we believe we can want, desire, think and do. In short, it shapes how we lead our lives. It makes us develop ways of understanding the world through **rigid gender roles** which define us and give us a sense of identity as women yet which, in imposing the belief that identifying with one or another gender is obligatory, prevent us from living lives of our own. Having to put up with hostile attitudes and acts that have their root in rejection of difference can lead to isolation and distrust, as well as a lack of support and sense of belonging.

Discrimination against **people living with HIV** and/or **sexual discrimination** conditions our own outlook and how we relate to ourselves and to others based on what we have learned.

## WHAT HAPPENS WHEN DISCRIMINATION OCCURS IN PRISON?

When we discriminate against a fellow inmate, we **disrespect them** and **deny them the opportunity to be themselves**. When we discriminate, we reject lifestyles that exist outside of what the norm dictates is possible.

Discrimination against people living with HIV and discrimination against sexual and body diversity are barriers to our **Sexual Rights** and to building relationships based on affection, respect, trust and friendship.

When we discriminate against others, we pass up the opportunity to learn from other experiences and ways of seeing the world. When we discriminate against fellow inmates, we limit their chances of participating in activities and spaces both inside and outside the wing, and of being able **to be who they are, to enjoy themselves, and to receive the support they need**.

When we discriminate against others, we also limit our own chances of sharing our concerns, expressing our doubts, and talking about our experiences, feelings and desires. In short, we limit our ability to feel confident in the spaces we find ourselves in.

When we are discriminated against and/or discriminate against others, our Sexual Rights and how we express affection and our sexual identities are put in danger.

## WE CAN ALL ACT TO STOP DISCRIMINATION

We can take action to support one another physically and emotionally, listening to one another, and creating bonds of trust, support and mutual aid. We can learn from the skills and knowledge of our fellow inmates, from their insecurities and concerns, and from what they want to know and do, in order to create inclusive spaces for each and every one of us.

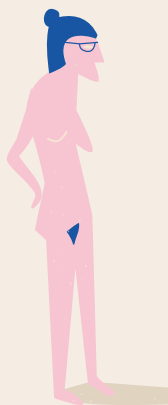
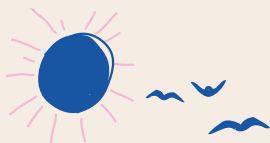
Here are some **strategies** we can use to prevent and deal with discrimination:

- Make contact **with the support and information services** offered by *Creación Positiva* and other organizations working in the prison.
- **Address gaps in our knowledge**, for example, about how HIV is transmitted, how to take care of ourselves in our relationships and sexual activity, etc. Having access to trustworthy information can help us improve our understanding and develop care strategies that make us feel comfortable and safer.
- **Share our concerns** with fellow inmates that we trust.
- **Share information** we already know with new inmates.
- **Report** any discrimination that we suffer to staff members that we trust (for example, if we want to change cell or cellmate(s)).
- Propose and **request activities** to raise awareness against stigma and discrimination on issues that are important to us.

A shared commitment to diversity, support and striving for collective wellbeing is a starting point for **building relationships** in which we can take care of others and feel cared for ourselves. It enables us to take medication in our cells without risking the rejection of others; to take a shower and not be afraid of our fellow inmates looking at us; to show affection towards others without receiving insults; to talk about ourselves without fear of us being insulted afterwards, and to participate calmly and confidently in prison activities, programmes and spaces.

**When we live together without discrimination, we open our lives up to diversity, and to being able to want more than just what we have been told or have learned to accept as women in a patriarchal society.**

Coexistence through sisterhood allows us to create alliances with each other and share moments of joy, learning, listening, friendship and mutual recognition. It helps us to construct more rewarding and diverse relationships in which we share our experiences as women, bringing meaningful change and the chance to build the lives we really want to live.



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MINISTERIO DE DERECHOS SOCIALES Y AGENDA 2030



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