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GENDER IDEOLOGY AND INFLUENCING SOCIETY:
DESTABILIZING THE NORMALIZATION OF
GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE
THROUGH INFOGRAPHICS

by

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MASTER'S PROJECT
Presented to the Faculty of
The University of Houston-Clear Lake
In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements
For the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS
in Behavioral Sciences

THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON-CLEAR LAKE

MAY, 2022

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Dedication

I would first like to dedicate this project to those who have survived domestic violence, sexual assault, and rape. For those who cannot come forward, say their name aloud, or must constantly be in the presence of fear, there is a way out for you, and there is always someone to help.

I would also like to dedicate this work to those who do not know who they are yet and who have yet to discover themselves and/or are on their way to finding their truest self. Keep searching and discovering new things that make you happy. Do not let others dictate your path.

Acknowledgments

To start, I want to thank my advisors, Dr. Christine Walther and Dr. Amy Lucas. They both delivered an excellent education through their coursework along with a tremendous amount of support for me and this project. I would also like to thank my committee member, Dr. Helen Jin, for making me think critically throughout this process.

To my friends that have picked me up when I was down and held me up when I could not stand. Thank you. You will always be my friends. Always. To my siblings, you are all strong and resilient. I know wherever we are, we will fight for each other. For my sisters, thank you for listening to me and believing me. I trust you most in this world. *Te amo hermanas.*

To my husband, thank you for always making me feel comfortable when I have never felt so. It took me a long time to be open with anyone, especially romantically. As we sit in the same room as I am writing this, I feel at ease knowing that you only want to comfort me and protect me. You are constantly bringing a smile to my face and making me laugh, helping heal my wounds that lay hidden beneath unwanted memories. I am so happy we found each other, and I cannot wait to spend what time we have in this life together. I love you, Dylan.

ABSTRACT

GENDER IDEOLOGY AND INFLUENCING SOCIETY:
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THROUGH INFOGRAPHICS

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University of Houston-Clear Lake, 2022

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Informing individuals about how gender ideology influences society is vital in today's world. Changing the conversations about sexual assault and rape can help destabilize the normalization of gender-based violence. It is important to foster a safe environment for individuals to share and to allow people to learn about these topics to make them less taboo or controversial. The project discussed is intended to assist in talking about gender, sexuality, consent, and domestic violence more openly. As a result of this project, topics could be expanded in the future to include bodily autonomy, sex, equal rights, racism, misogyny, and bigotry. Constructing an educational tool/database that could be shared through social media platforms might help break the stigma of gender-based violence.

This paper documents the progress of this project from idea to reality. The project created an educational tool/database that addresses myths, assumptions, and stereotypes people have about consent, gender, sexuality, and domestic violence. This project is not just a project for me; it holds personal meaning. In this paper, I give a glimpse of my life that I rarely share with the world, but I think it is important to share with others going through similar situations. I want others to feel comfortable and know they are safe with me. The more you read, the more you have a better understanding of the topic.

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Introduction

Gender is the focus of many laws and policies ranging from the workplace to public bathrooms. Historically and legally, gender has been used as a tool to maintain the expectations of those in power. Gender is a structure of society that dictates cultural and societal norms affecting every facet of life (Prismic, 2019; *Trans + Gender Identity*, 2021). Gender includes the roles and stereotypes that society uses to press people into particular identities that match the biological sex to which they were born, but it is more than just that. With this project, I hope to inform individuals to think about how gender ideology influences aspects of society that they might not think about. Sexual assault and rape are acts of violence that take away consent, autonomy, and power. The terms sexual assault and rape will be used separately and not interchangeably because they are different for each survivor and in the eyes of the law. Sexual assault refers to unwanted/without consent sexual contact, which includes rape and all forms of contact of a sexual nature (*Sexual Assault / RAINN*, n.d.). Rape is a specific type of sexual assault used more in the legal context; rape is defined as sexual penetration without consent. Changing the conversations about sexual assault and rape could help destabilize the normalization of gender-based violence.

Gender-Based Violence

Domestic violence (DV) is a social justice issue that entangles itself into every facet of society. Gender-based violence is intentionally directed toward people because of their gender identity or biological sex (Ott, 2021). The phenomena of sexual assault, harassment, and rape plague modern society. Women are more likely to see the effects of

DV than men, as 1 in 4 women and 1 in 9 men have experienced Intimate Partner Violence (NCADV / *National Coalition Against Domestic Violence*, n.d.). Despite these prevalence estimates, many assaults are unreported. Society uses gender to lay out strict roles and power dynamics that cause segregation between genders throughout society (Yodanis, 2004). Gender inequality within society plays a contributing factor in fabricating views of disbelief and creating blindness to violence against women (Grubb & Turner, 2012; Ott, 2021; Yodanis, 2004). Gender inequality intersects with reporting, prosecuting, and non-reporting of gender-based violence. Gender-based violence not only affects the wrongful treatment of women, but it also affects how children grow up and see the world (Hayes, Lorenz, & Bell, 2013; Meyer & Gelman, 2016). Women are a vital part of human existence, yet they are treated as less than human when they come forward about sexual assault. The treatment of survivors of DV often includes victim-blaming, disbelief, and even hostility from men, other women, and people who are not survivors of SA (Grubb & Turner, 2012; Hayes et al., 2013). It is no wonder why survivors do not come forward right away or feel the need to continually justify their reporting (Grubb & Turner, 2012). Therefore, the following questions continue to linger in our society and both theoretical and empirical gender-based violence research: what contributes to the ever-growing rape culture? Is it the fear of shame that society forces women to have about sexual assault? Is it the myths and misinformation about rape that are rampant in society? Or is it possibly a combination of both factors?

Gender Differences

With gender inequality comes gender-based violence. The idea of permission to act a certain way because society is accepting of that treatment is then used to justify the actions of violence against women (Hayes et al., 2013; Yodanis, 2004). Violence is ingrained into society through decades of gender role norms, culture, and more recently access to social media. The education of gender starts early and continues to control the conversation around social roles (Meyer & Gelman, 2016). Information about sexual assault and rape is not presented through comprehensive education, but through unwanted experiences, television shows, and Google searches. Rape and sexual assault are the norms of gender-based violence with little to no justice for survivors (Grubb & Turner, 2012). Gender stereotypes and gender roles contribute to the belief and acceptance of rape myths that continue to guide ideas of victim-blaming and victimization. Attributing blame to the survivor can make people feel less fearful of the world around them by using victim-blaming to cloak the violence. Hayes et al. (2013) observed a gender difference when it came to rape myth belief; males believed rape myths more than women while they also justified and normalized violence against women. This behavior perpetuates gender inequality through rape culture, which contributes to the normalization of sexual violence. Gender can assist in predicting acceptance of rape myths while also helping in understanding why these beliefs exist.

Gender has remained a controlling factor in society from every angle. Gender roles and stereotypes go hand-in-hand with the drive of conformity to fit the mold restricted to traditional social roles (Grubb & Turner, 2012). These rules created by

society stunt individual development of gender identity as discussed in Meyer and Gelman (2016). Formulating gender identity begins with social cognition while understanding the meaning of gender in the context of current society (Meyer & Gelman, 2016). Social cognition is important in understanding how people socially learn and achieve social status while maintaining the status quo. The justifications for normalizing gender-based violence can be attributed to socialization and acceptance of this violence through generational and social learning (Grubb & Turner, 2012; Meyer & Gelman, 2016). Gender is reinforced through social conditioning and continues to drive the context of rape and sexual assault. A society as driven by gender as ours should be better at conceptualizing gender cognition and the effects it has on social issues such as violence against women.

Prevention & Support

To help prevent violence against women, and all gender-based violence, a new attitude toward gender is required. By understanding the complexities of gender and how it is used throughout society, it becomes easier to see how it controls sexual violence. Like any subject, information about the topic is required to fully comprehend it. Research on sexual assault and rape has started to show that reinforcement of traditional gender roles and stereotypes can be used as a predictor of such violence (Grubb & Turner, 2012; Hayes et al., 2013). The current domestic violence movement highlights the unresolved issues from the first movement of the 1960s in terms of what is needed for survivors of DV. Current DV research is supporting the movement by helping thousands of women and men speak out against their abusers.

Resources, such as the internet, provide a new model of information sharing that does not hold constraints that other models do (Knauer & Rickard, 2001). Other channels of information have restrictions of resources through government agencies and companies that can regulate access to information to the consumer. The internet is used for instant access to information and gives millions of individuals greater access to see what is going on in the world. This downstream application allows users to access information at the click of a button about any given topic. With the increase of technology, access to information about different forms of DV is made available through internet resources. Information is shared through non-profit organizations, local governments, and personal blogs shared by survivors (*NCADV / National Coalition Against Domestic Violence*, n.d.; Noughani & Mohtashami, 2011). Even with all the available information, it is still important to provide more easily accessible and accurate information about gender-based violence to educate society. Noughani and Mohtashami (2011) conducted a study that asked women who had experienced DV to participate in a pre-test and post-test analysis following education material on DV between the tests. With the information provided, the participants indicated fewer new incidents of violence within the family after the educational material was presented. Information needs to be shared with people, and women especially, because of the impact it can have on preventing abuse. Information is power, and it can change minds while advancing the structure of communities.

For my master's project, I proposed constructing an educational tool/database that could be shared through social media platforms that would help break the stigma of

gender-based violence. The educational tool/database would address myths, assumptions, and stereotypes people have about consent, gender, sexuality, and DV. With the use of verified resources already available online, I developed an information hub that would be accessible in one central location and could be made accessible to more people. Using infographics and other visual aids, research and data could be illustrated for multiple age groups. The overall goal is to help people discover their voice by empowering them with knowledge and information to prevent all gender-based violence.

Framework

Planning

After coming up with the premises of my project, it became clear that there needed to be a resource available that connected already established and credible sources. I wanted to make sure that the sources I used were up-to-date and could provide my project with multiple resources. This information needed to be disseminated in a clear and organized method. In preparation for this project, I needed an understanding of sourcing reliable information and creating infographics. Infographics seemed to be both an informative and engaging source of visual information. I decided to use Adobe Illustrator to create the infographics since I had previous knowledge of this program. To start, I created an outline that focused on topics that could encompass multiple structures within our society. The four topics are gender, sexuality, consent, and DV. This outline served as the base on which I constructed the project. These four topics are all important in individual ways while also containing an intersectional lens that requires knowledge of more than one area. When one considers the ramifications of DV, people might also

wonder how it might have happened or what caused it to happen. An intersectional insight on gender, sexuality, and consent provides insight into societal standards of acceptance toward DV. While focusing on each topic individually is great, the better strategy relies on looking at multiple different perspectives and the connections that lead to solving systemic problems. Each topic is structured similarly; the topic starts by defining key terms associated with the topic and then the topic focuses on the information that could help support people in each of these groups. It is important to know that the information provided in these infographics is linked to the original resources found online. The infographics are meant to be informational tools that can be shared and lead to an individual's own personal research. The next step was to research the topics and provide resources for each infographic.

Research

Throughout my years of higher education, I was taught to gather information to use for research purposes that were accurate and credible. When I started looking at sources that were available online, I went to Google. Each topic is specific and had a lot of results. The resources available were scattered between different websites that focus on specific topics. I started with known sources that I have looked at or used before. Websites like Planned Parenthood, the Trevor Project, National Domestic Violence Hotline, and National Coalition Against Domestic Violence became vital resources. Each of these sources had either been recommended to me or found through my research. I then searched for other sites, including youth.gov, Harvard.edu, genderspectrum.org, to fill in the missing pieces of this project and to provide even more comprehensive

information. It was very important all of the sources be credible so I decided to check these sources with the CRAAP Test to help evaluate resources' credibility (Kurpiel, 2021). Most of my sources are non-profit, educational, or government sites with a few exceptions. Each of these sites provided additional resources within their own resources. The information on these sites provided knowledgeable definitions. Many of the sites are aimed toward younger groups, but most would reach a large target audience. The websites provide informative sources that could be used for different ages. It was important to collect enough sources that provided each topic with additional resources the reader could use. The audience I want to reach with these infographics ranges from pre-teens to adults. I think it is important that both children and parents have access to this information, which allows room for open conversations about these topics.

Over two months I collected the resources needed to start building each infographic. Within the four main topics, the focus was on presenting resources that would benefit the reader and spark inquiry into the topics further. For example, the topic of gender was arranged with two main topics: What is Gender and Societal Roles of Gender. Within these two main topics, there is information on multiple subtopics that revolve around understanding gender identity, expression, social constructs of gender, and the roles society gives gender. These subtopics shaped the infographics from being just a definition resource and instead are a deeper dive into each topic. Each subtopic used two to four resources to support the understanding of that subtopic. Before creating any infographics, I organized all the resources in the outline to give a visual representation of the sources being used for each topic. I added each link to the outline

under the specific topic and subtopics. After the list of topics and the coinciding resources were reviewed, I received approval to start creating the infographics.

Development

I developed the project from the outline I created in the planning stage. Adobe Illustrator had many templates to choose from, but there did not seem to be any that grabbed my attention. I decided to create my own template and design for each one. I started with picking a format that could be viewed through multiple screens. I went with the 1125 x 2436 pixel because it fit on a phone screen and could also adapt to a tablet or computer, as seen in Figure 1. I built the shell of the document by designing a block grid to help keep everything in line, as shown in Figure 2. Then I constructed the layers that help each aspect of the document (i.e. color format, text, images). Layers helped separate the format, content, and images from being muddled in the transitions of editing. Each layer stacked on top of each other leaving the reader unaware of the scaffolding required for the effortless look.

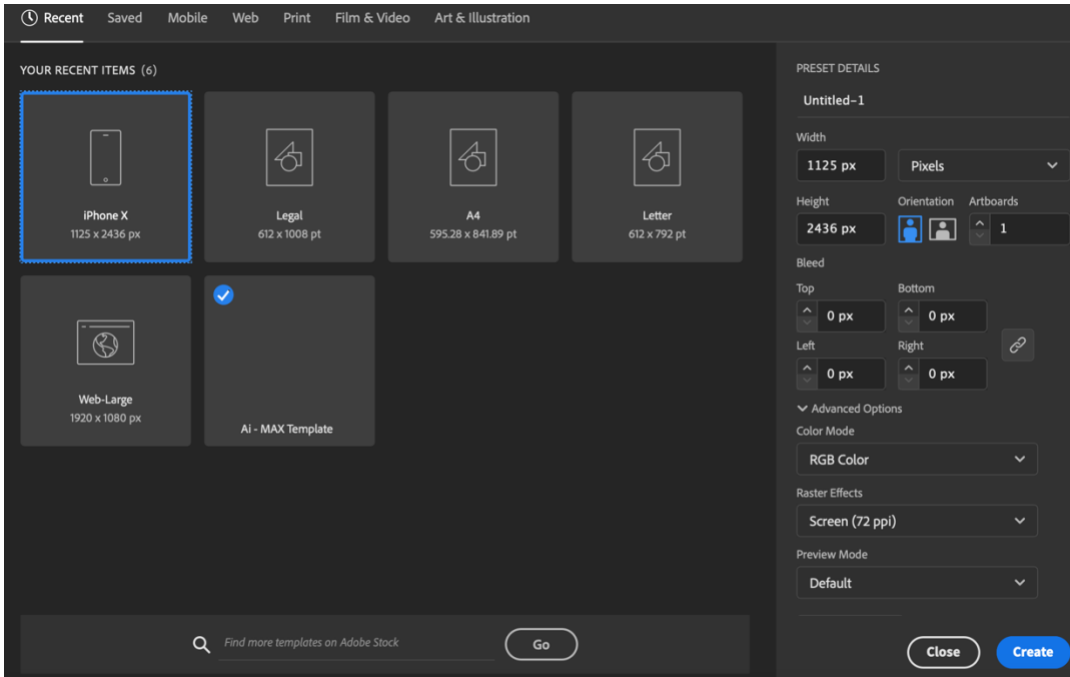


Figure 1. Adobe Illustrator Format Selection

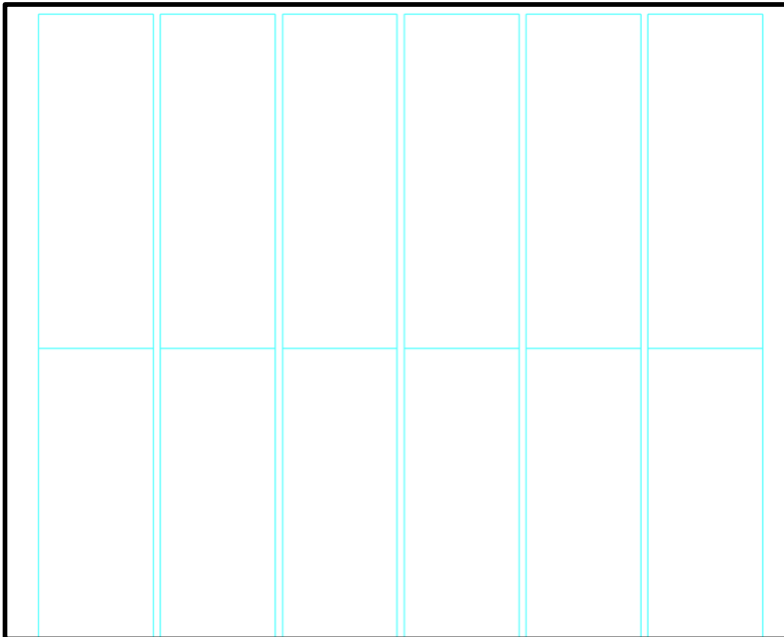


Figure 2. Grid Layer

For the color format, I tried to go with inviting colors that would grab the attention of those reading it. Each of the infographic colors holds some meaning to me, and it made it more exciting to make each one. In the color layout, different pride flag colors are represented, as shown in Figure 3. The LGBTQ+, bisexual, lesbian, and transgender pride flags are all present in my project. This project is about inclusivity and education so it was important to me to include marginalized groups that do not get adequate representation. Since I am a part of the LGBTQ+ community, I thought what better way to support and represent my community than to give a homage to the colors that fly as a symbol of pride. It was important for me to put a part of myself into the project and by adding the colors to my project I believe I did so.



Figure 3. Color Layer

The search for images to best fit the topics was more challenging. The images needed to be a representation of inclusion and illustrate that topic through the image. A few of the images include information sources like the Genderbread Person created by

Sam Killermann (see Figure 4), which helps people look at their gender identity and expression to see how they identify (Killermann, 2017). Other images are either cited or had free creative licenses, like the emoji images, that can be seen in Figure 5. The text used in the infographics paraphrased the resources and linked to each source with an invisible hyperlink that could be accessed by clicking the text.

For each topic, there was a wealth of information and much more information than could fit on just one infographic. I needed to critically analyze and decide what information to include on each infographic I created. To start, I decided to focus upon questions that people generally have about each topic and then I used that information to help me decide what should go in each infographic. The resources I collected also helped me narrow down the information for each infographic. For example, questions surrounding gender focused on defining gender and information on gender identity. The sexuality infographics include subtopics about relationships, dating, coming out, and LGBTQ+ terms. I chose to organize each infographic with the information that would best fit the subtopics in the detailed outlined I had created. I tried to fit as much information as I could without being overwhelming. I also added the links to each site for the reader to have further resources to examine and access to extended research content. I discovered that a lot of the infographics needed to be made into separate documents because of the amount of information I wanted to provide. I split gender into two documents, sexuality into two documents, and DV into three documents. Consent fit into one document. A title document or home page was created using Adobe Creative Cloud.

If this project were to be published, the home page PDF would be used as the first interaction (see Figure 6). In total, there are nine PDF files.

The Genderbread Person v4 by its pronounced METROsexual creator

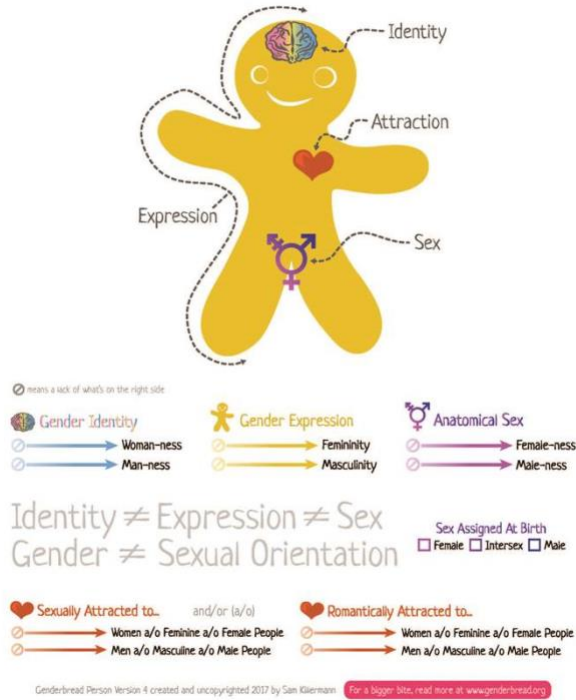


Figure 4. Genderbread Person by Killermann (2017)

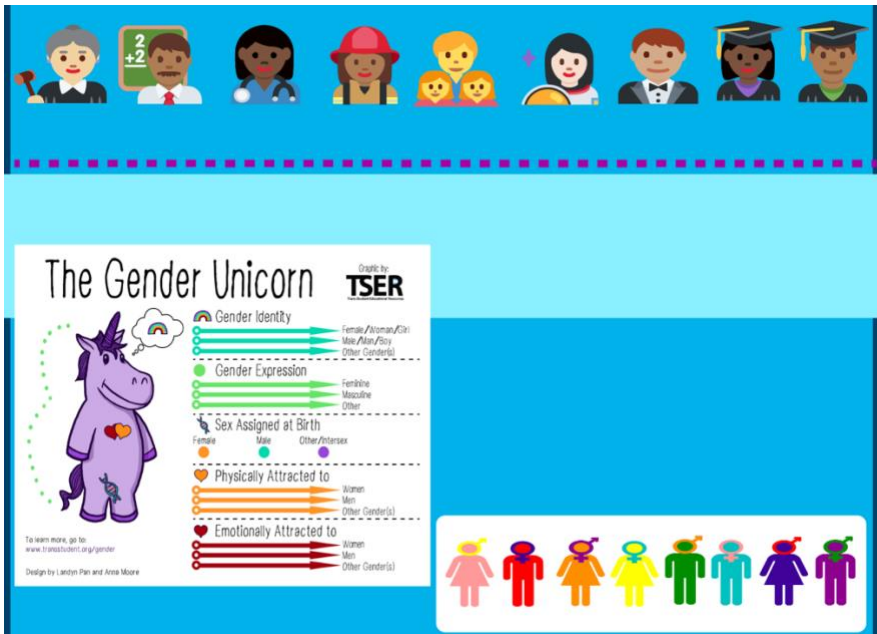


Figure 5. Image Layer



Figure 6. Project Home Page

After the infographics were finished, I sent them to my advisor for feedback. I received some feedback for edits and proceeded to make changes to the infographics. These edits gave me a chance to look at the project with a different set of eyes. I could adjust the infographics while still staying true to my original work. Once those edits were complete, I sent the project to my second reader. The second reader provided me with feedback on the infographics that helped me see changes that could better the whole project. I took the feedback and started to adjust the infographics. Then I began the process of editing each infographic. I worked on cleaning up and shifting some parts of the infographics. This took some time to go through and reorganize. Figures 7 through 10 are a few parts of my infographics I included to give a visual of the final product. Overall, I believe with the feedback I received I was able to build a strong informational tool that can be shared through different platforms.

Consent

What is Consent?

Permission for something to happen



Yes

Agreement to do something

NO



Knowing and **respecting** boundaries of others along with their **own**

Important to learn at an early age

Sexual Consent

All participants **agree** to the sexual contact

Consent must be **given** with **each** sexual activity, **every single time**



*Click here for more resources

Figure 7. Consent Infographic

Relationship Tips

Characteristics of Healthy Relationships



Mutual respect
Honesty
Individuality
Compromise
Understanding
Self-confidence

Trust
Good communication
Healthy sexual relationship
Being a role model
Problem solving
Anger control



*Click here for more resources on healthy relationships

Setting Boundaries



Setting and respecting boundaries is *essential*



Let your partner(s) know what you **DO** and **DO NOT** want

You can **set boundaries** at **any time!**



Emotional, physical, and digital boundaries can be used to help you heal from past trauma and protect your mental health



You **deserve** your boundaries to be respected!



*Click here for more resources

Figure 8. Relationship Tips Infographic

What is Domestic Violence?

Domestic Violence (DV)
 Violence that typically involves **abuse** of *spouse, partner, family member or friend*

Every minute, **20** people are **physically abused** by an **intimate partner**

Abuse can come in **different forms** that have **prolonged effects** on **survivors** of DV

Can happen **once** or **several times**

Forms of DV

*Click here for more resources

Figure 9. What is Domestic Violence

Preventing Suicide

Talk about it!
 Continue the **conversation**
Be aware of the signs
Show that you **care** and are there to **help**

Signs of Suicide

- Unimportant
- Trapped
- Hopeless
- Overwhelmed
- Unmotivated
- Alone
- Irritable
- Impulsive
- Suicidal

Suicide is the **2nd** leading cause of **death** among young people **ages 10 to 24**

*Click here for more resources

SOS

Figure 10. Preventing Suicide

Personal Connection

Throughout my master's degree, I was taking classes that challenged my ideals, confronted taboo topics, unmasked controversial issues layered with intersectional connections, and compelled an introspection of the experiences that lead me to where I am now. This project contributes to my knowledge by collectively utilizing the skills I have learned to develop a resource that can be shared to help educate and inform. I have not always wanted to share my own experiences with others. I did not believe people wanted to listen or cared. The more I educated myself, the more I realized that there are a lot more people who share similar experiences to those that I have had. People crave a connection to each other that allows for understanding and compassion. I am here to make those connections and be compassionate toward others. I am a part of something larger than myself. I am a part of a community that needs people to be active in advocating for those who are not heard and seen and needs people to support them by talking about distressing or controversial topics.

The best way to say anything is honestly and with confidence. I am going to share something that not everyone knows, but more people should. I am a woman. I am queer. I am a survivor of DV. I am a sexual assault survivor. I am a rape survivor. These things shape the way I walk through the world. I see and experience things differently than I did before.

Without the knowledge and resources I have now, I do not believe I would be in the same place, physically, mentally, or emotionally. I know how hard it can be to ask for help and be able to find resources that help. The intention behind this project was to make

something I wished I had when I was questioning my sexuality, experiencing DV, and grappling with self-blame when it came to the lines of consent. Each of these topics is relevant not only to my communities, but to society as a whole. In understanding topics that seem controversial, one might discover things about themselves, recognize shared experiences of groups, and learn to empathize with those who are excluded from normative conversation while also continuing on a path that makes topics like this one acceptable to talk about.

Every single day I am affected by the intersections of my life, including gender, sexuality, and the effects of surviving DV. As a woman, I face constant pressures to conform to ideal womanhood as deemed by society. This includes how I dress, act, and procreate. My worth is calculated by what I contribute with my uterus and not my brain. As a hetero passing queer woman, I confront societal standards and my queerness is questioned. Am I gay enough or straight enough to pass through different communities and/or to be accepted by either? As a survivor of sexual assault and rape, I understand that it is not my fault for the things that happened to me. I am stronger than those who hurt me. These identifiers are a part of me. I am a woman; I am queer; I am a survivor of DV, sexual assault, and rape. I am a person who has experienced horrendous things. I am also a wife, sister, friend, daughter, and student, and these identities also define me.

I did not believe I would ever talk about the things that had happened to me or the daily struggles with which I deal. I have a hard time talking to the closest people to me about what I experienced. However, it has become easier with time and therapy to be able to talk about it. If there is a chance where my experiences could help others feel heard

and acknowledged, I will gladly share my story. As individuals, we learn to cope with our problems. As a community, we should help others with their problems by lifting the burden society has left for those who do not fit into the default setting.

Conclusion

It took me a long time to find my path in life. It has taken me even longer to tell people about what has happened to me. As a woman, member of the LGBTQ+ community, and a survivor, there are limitations and restrictions that I must navigate to function in society. Teaching people to conform to the normative ideals of society does not allow room for creativity, self-expression, differences, or true agency. This project has given me the ability to bring together valuable resources that everyone should have access to. It has also given me an outlet to cope with my experiences with DV while continuing to challenge societal pressures to remain silent on topics that tend to be dismissed or ignored. I am very privileged to have this opportunity to share what I know and to contribute to a field that advocates for people.

I hope this project helps others feel more comfortable and confident to talk about gender, sexuality, consent, and DV more openly. It is important to foster a safe environment where individuals can share and to allow people to learn about topics to make them less taboo or controversial. Building from this project, I hope topics for future infographics could be expanded to include bodily autonomy, sex, equal rights, racism, misogyny, and bigotry. I also think it important to also focus upon topics that include a macro-level awareness of the effect society has on shaping the experiences of people. Collectively people experience how society pressures and conforms them; however,

people might not be aware of it if they fall into the brand of normality. The reality is people revolve around an idea of normal that only considers what society dictates as acceptable. It is our job to constantly question why and how society excludes those who do not fit their idea of normal.

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