



# DOING PHILOSOPHY BETTER

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SW\*IP CH  
GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE

SWIP

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# Society for Women\* in Philosophy Switzerland

Founded as a non-profit in 2017 to combat gender based discrimination.



# Our Mission



- combat gender based discrimination for all persons in the field of philosophy
- create inclusive and safe spaces for all persons working in philosophy, specifically persons who are marginalized on the basis of gender
- facilitate and promote cooperations to support women\* in philosophy
- increasing the visibility and reception of philosophical works of women\*


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# OUR GOALS

- Create awareness about widespread structural and institutional problems in Swiss institutes of Philosophy that contribute to gender-based discrimination such as:
    - underrepresentation
    - marginalization
    - exclusion
    - mechanisms through which these structural and institutional problems are perpetuated, e.g., implicit bias, stereotype threat, and sexual and moral harassment.
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# OUR GOALS

- Provide concrete suggestions for all members of institutes of philosophy in order to create a better, i.e. more inclusive and safe, climate for all persons -  
- particularly those who are marginalized, underrepresented, or excluded from the academic field of philosophy on the basis of gender.
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## THE PROBLEMS



# UNDERREPRESENTATION

- Underrepresentation is when certain social groups or persons belonging to those groups are not represented at proportional rates due to structural or institutional problems.
- It is often related to and perpetuates marginalization and exclusion.

## THE PROBLEMS



# UNDERREPRESENTATION

- Philosophy, unlike many other disciplines in the humanities, has a major problem concerning the underrepresentation of women on all levels. It is comparable to STEM disciplines.
- In Switzerland, although women and men begin and continue studying philosophy at similar rates during their bachelor's and master's, this drops massively to between 20-35 percent in doctoral studies and continues to decline the higher one goes in the academic hierarchy.



## THE PROBLEMS



### MARGINALIZATION

- Marginalization refers to the systemic diminishment or relegation of certain social groups or persons and their contributions.
- Marginalization can result from and lead to underrepresentation and exclusion.

## THE PROBLEMS

# MARGINALIZATION

- Often due to institutional structures and academic standards that deem certain kinds of philosophical discussions as good (i.e., aggressive or confrontational), as well as kinds of work (methods, schools of thought, approaches, etc.) as rigorous or "real" philosophy as well as certain kinds of persons or personalities as innately brilliant, as opposed to others.
- Marginalization is deeply tied to the failure to create institutions in which all persons can access and make use of opportunities to succeed as well as be recognized for their contributions; therefore, hindering their advancement and creating unsafe or toxic environments.

## THE PROBLEMS



### EXCLUSION

- Exclusion is when certain social groups, persons, and their contributions or specific concerns are structurally or systemically ignored or excluded.
- It is often the result of continued underrepresentation and marginalization as well as a source thereof.

## THE PROBLEMS



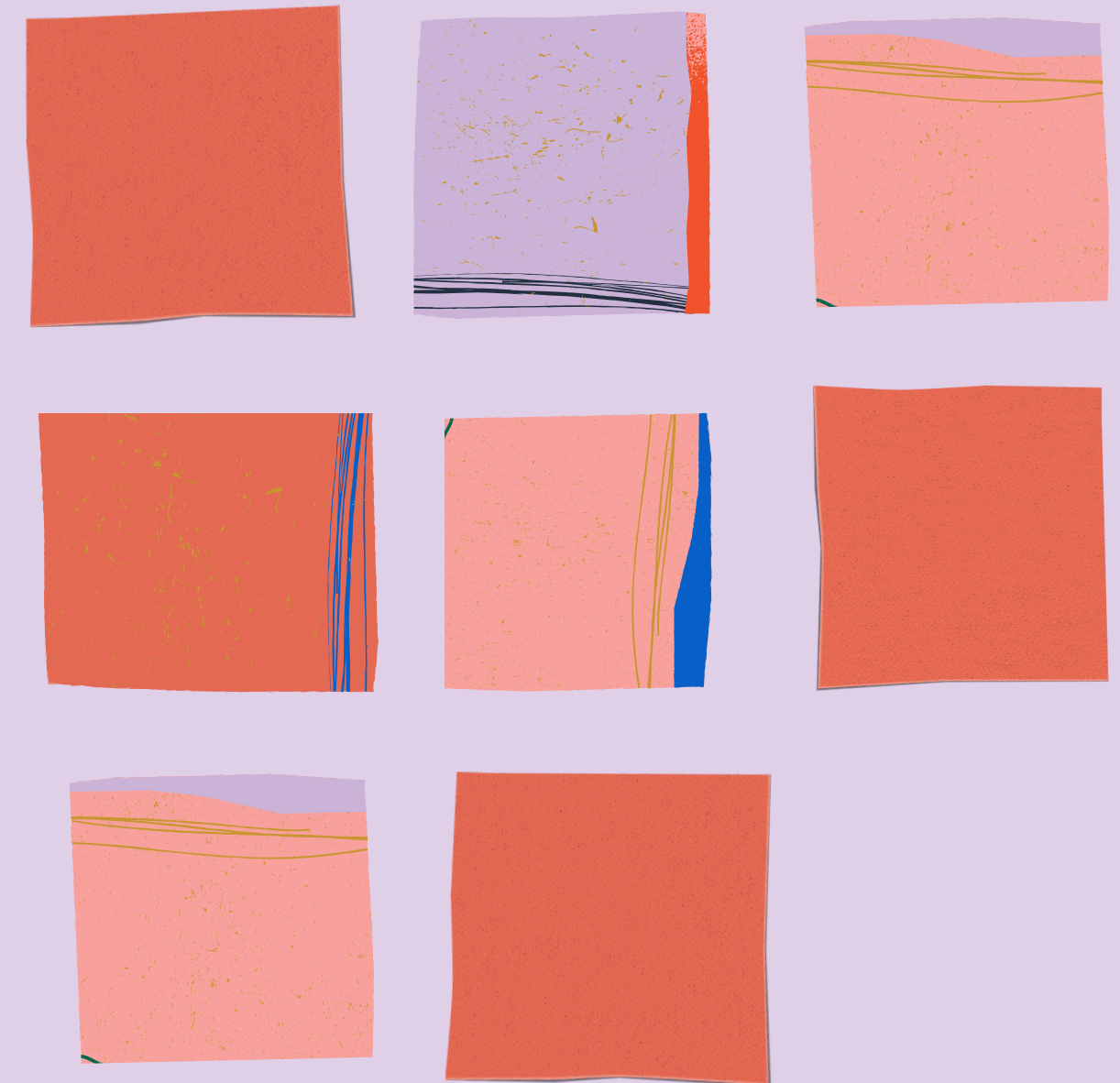
### EXCLUSION

- Exclusion, similar to marginalization, perpetuates structural conditions that create barriers to the participation and recognition of excluded persons or groups.
- It contributes to and enacts epistemic exploitation as well as toxic or unsafe environments.
- For example, not accomodating for care obligations, failing to provide gender-neutral bathroom facilities, or failing to create learning environments where persons with disabilities can participate are forms of exclusion.

# THE PROBLEMS IMPLICIT BIAS

- Implicit biases are largely unconscious assumptions, associations, schemas, and expectations that help us order our impressions and make sense of the world and are not per se bad.
- Underrepresented, marginalized or excluded persons or social groups often are harmed because such biases influence how their performance is evaluated and assessed.

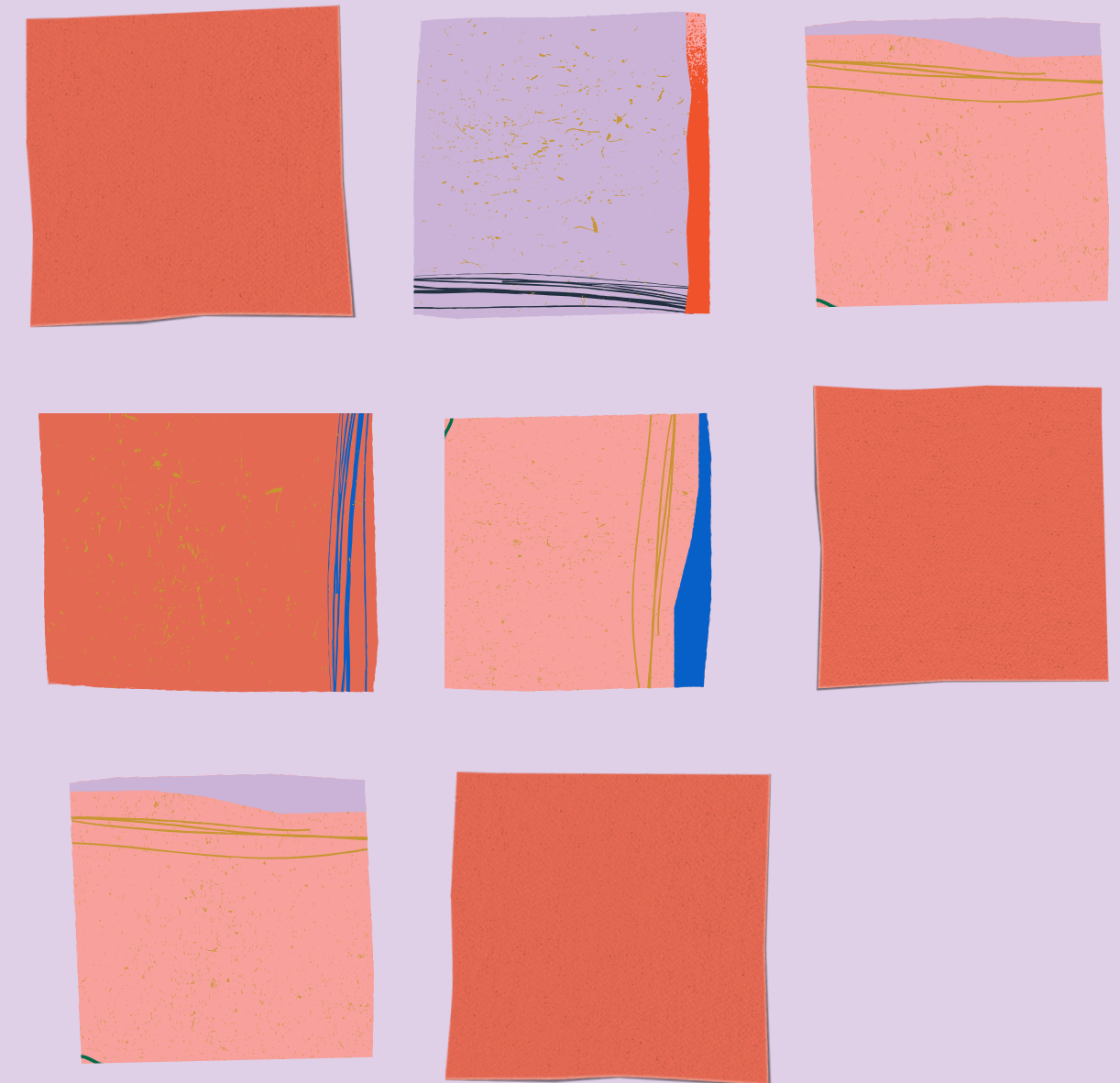
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# THE PROBLEMS IMPLICIT BIAS

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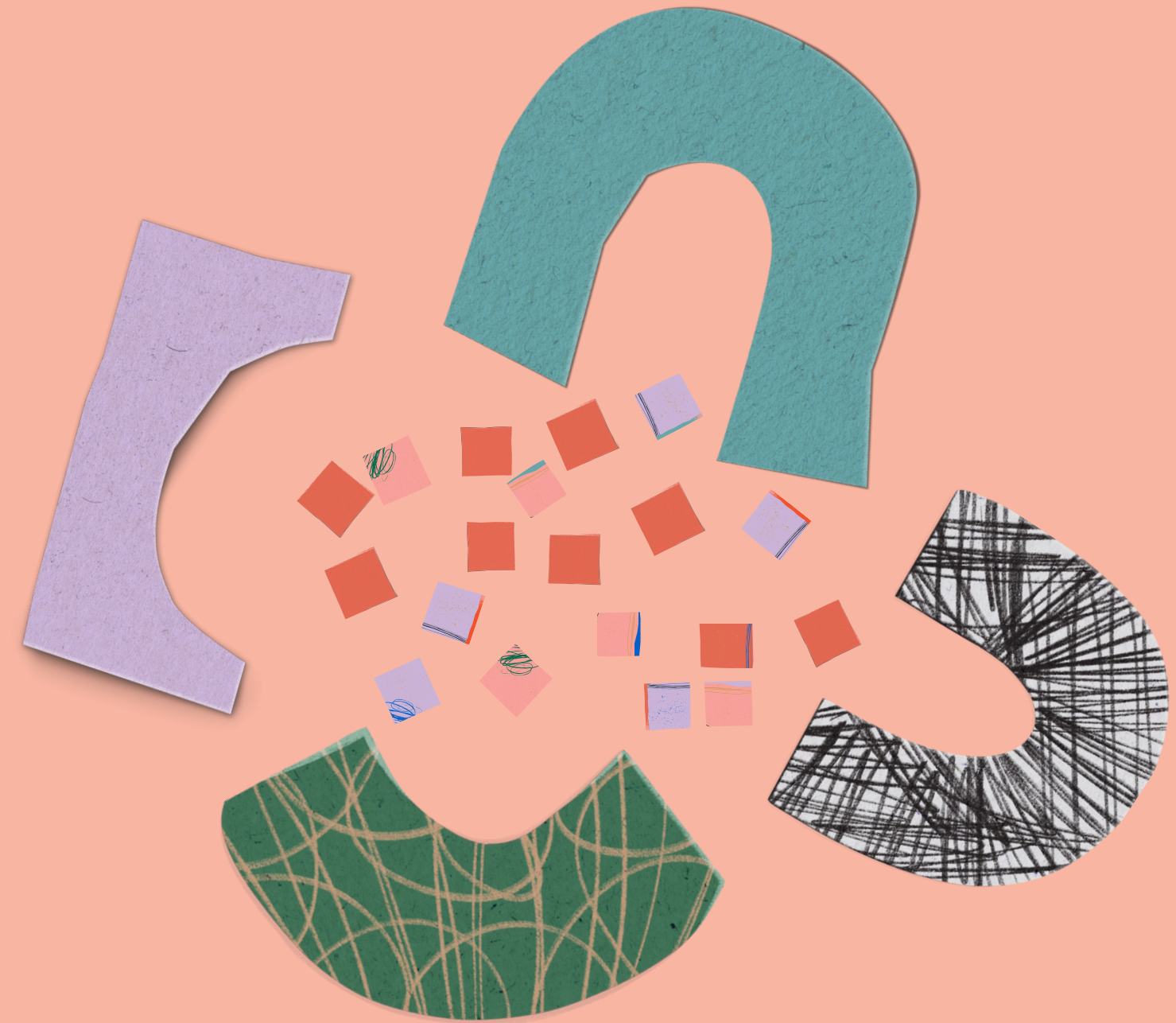
- One example of implicit bias that we identify in the guide is the idea that cis-men are more likely to be perceived as innately brilliant in the discipline of philosophy.
- A study from 2005 showed that the more innate brilliance is perceived to be necessary to succeed in a specific discipline, the more likely it is that women\* and minorities will be underrepresented.
- In this study philosophy (even in comparison to STEM fields) was considered to have the strongest demand for innate brilliance.



# THE PROBLEMS STEREOTYPE THREAT

- Stereotype threat is a phenomenon in which stereotypes influence the performance of individual members of a stereotyped group.
- It occurs when a member of a stereotyped group is reminded of their membership in the stereotyped group before undertaking a task (e.g., an exam or a presentation) and their performance worsens.

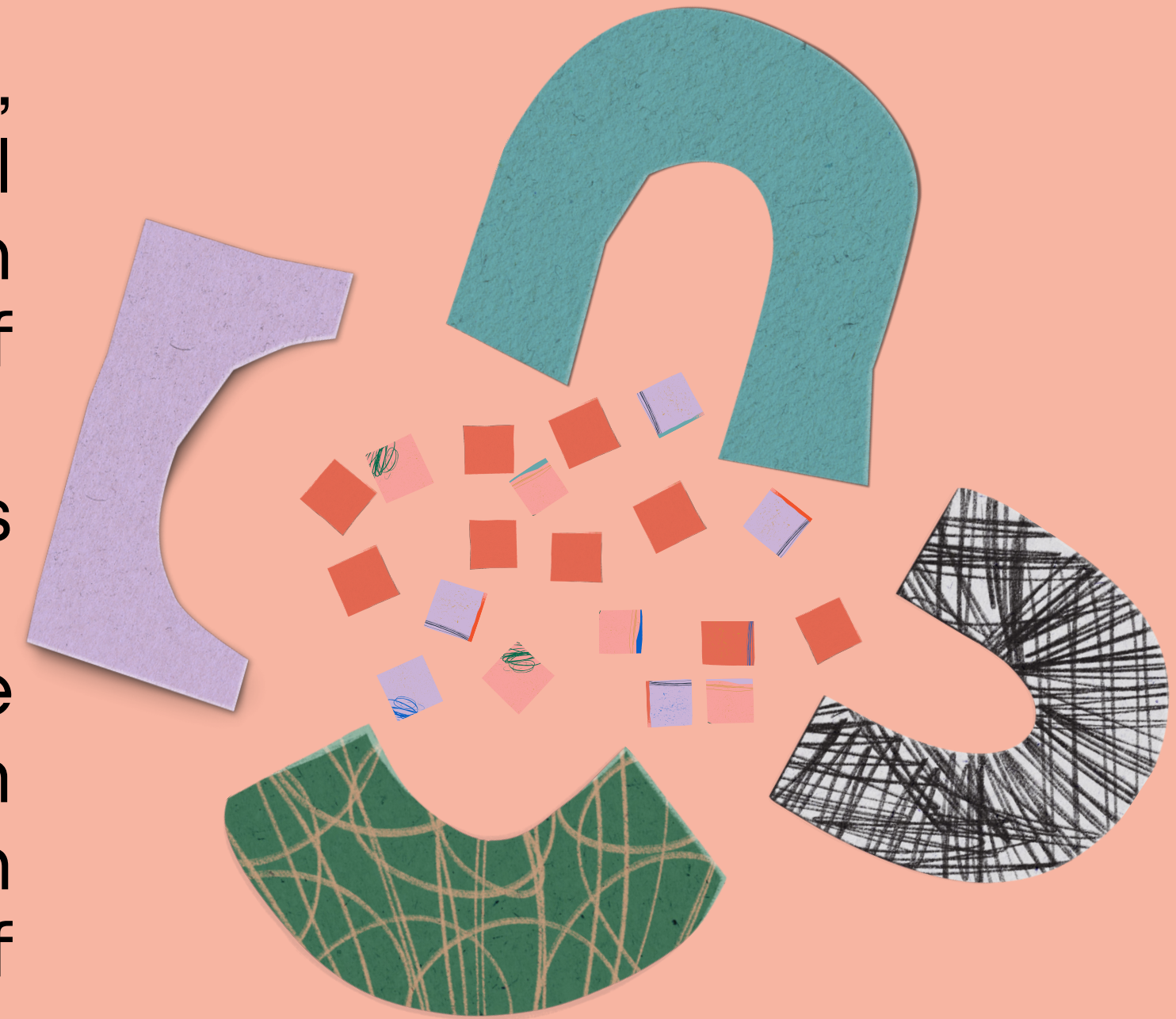
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# THE PROBLEMS STEREOTYPE THREAT

- Stereotype threat impacts underrepresented, marginalized, or excluded persons or social groups due to the negative impact it has on their performance as well as their view of their own abilities.
- This can reinforce implicit biases as well as marginalization and exclusion.
- One example of a stereotype threat we identify in the guide comes from a study from the Free University of Berlin (2014) in which female students report a high feeling of insecurity in philosophy seminars, due to the impression that the contributions of their male peers were better received.

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# THE PROBLEMS SEXUAL HARASSMENT



The term sexual harassment refers to derogatory, defamatory, or coercive behaviour, which is related to one's gender or gender identity such as:

- Defamatory language
- Unwanted comments of a sexual nature
- Degrading personal remarks about one's appearance, physicality, behaviour, or intimate life
- Sexual gestures and non-verbal comments
- Discussing, showing, or displaying verbal, visual, or electronic images that are sexist or pornographic
- Unwanted physical contact and unsolicited invitations to engage in sexual acts
- Any form of sexual assault

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# THE PROBLEMS SEXUAL HARASSMENT



- Sexual harassment can be instigated by persons of any gender or sex, just as persons of any gender or sex can be affected by it.
- It can occur between all members of all groups at the institute, i.e., lecturers, students, and administrative staff, with equal seriousness.
- Power asymmetries due to hierarchical relationships often play an aggravating role.
- Sexual harassment is often related to and influenced not only by a person's gender identity, but also by their background, religion, class, or cognitive/physical disabilities.



# THE PROBLEMS SEXUAL HARASSMENT



- Sexual harassment is legally understood to constitute workplace discrimination, as defined in Art. 4 of the Swiss Gender Equality Act (GEA).
- Each university has a different definition of what constitutes sexual harassment and therefore all persons in institutes of philosophy should be aware of the definition that applies and should inform themselves about resources that exist at their university.
- Sexual harassment is often too narrowly understood or equated with sexual coercion or assault. This often prevents the discussions and denouncement of it as well as the implementation of preventative measures.

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# THE PROBLEMS MORAL HARASSMENT

- Moral harassment is a form of degrading and compromising treatment of a person with the aim of destabilizing them mentally. It also often occurs as a result of sexual harassment.
- Examples of moral harassment include intentional misgendering, intrusive questions (epistemic exploitation), and as well as ostracizing, bullying, or abuse of power in an asymmetrical hierarchical relationship to create insecurity or threat.

# SITES OF INTERVENTION LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

- Address and eliminate factors that create barriers in learning environments or unsafe climates such as lack of respect for one's gender expression or identity (e.g., misgendering), use of gendered language, work to normalize providing pronouns (or the wish to use none).
- Do not force anyone to "out" themselves (gender identity, disability, etc.)
- Implement teaching methods that foster engagement, participation, and inclusion of all persons and combat stereotype threat and implicit bias.

# SITES OF INTERVENTION LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

- Create learning resources that provide a wide variety of examples of what good philosophical work is, who does it, and what a philosopher does or can do.
- Provide resources and information about sexual and moral harassment as well as discrimination and resources for support.
- Provide resources and training to educate about supervisory relationships and resources for support.
- Call out inappropriate behavior in a way that does not alienate the person who is experiencing it - there are no uninvolved bystanders.
- Provide solidarity.

# SITES OF INTERVENTION ACADEMIC EVENTS

- Make sure academic events are accessible for all persons with disabilities and be well informed about resources for persons with disabilities, e.g, booking facilities that are physically accessible as well as using all tools such as subtitles during online meetings.
- As a general rule: all academic events should take place during regular working hours, childcare services should be made available, and dinners or social events should be accessible to all persons well in advance.
- The distribution of labor among organizers, particularly more junior academics, should be equal.

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# SITES OF INTERVENTION ACADEMIC EVENTS

- Questions should be taken from junior academics first during plenary discussions.
- Invited scholars should be selected based on their work rather than their name recognition. Efforts should be made to invite a diverse range of speakers.
- Call out inappropriate behavior in a way that does not alienate the person who is experiencing it.
- Provide solidarity.

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# SITES OF INTERVENTION INSTITUTES OF PHILOSOPHY



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- Address and eliminate institutional structures that create barriers, and contribute to underrepresentation, marginalization, or exclusion, e.g., failure to accommodate for care obligations in the distribution of teaching assignments or the evaluation of or course load as well as the evaluation of academic qualifications.
- Restructure recruitment, hiring, and selection commissions and processes to reduce forms of implicit bias and stereotype threat.

# SITES OF INTERVENTION INSTITUTES OF PHILOSOPHY



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- All persons working in institutes of philosophy, particularly, those who stand in relative positions of power, have a responsibility to learn about their responsibility and role in combatting abusive behaviors such as sexual harassment and what resources are available to do so.
- They should use this knowledge to set the tone by actively calling out inappropriate behavior when it occurs and showing solidarity.

# SITES OF INTERVENTION

## INSTITUTES OF PHILOSOPHY

- All persons in institutes of philosophy should learn about ways to make teaching environments more inclusive and safe for example by working to combat implicit bias and stereotype threat in institutional structures such as sites of learning as well as academic events or conferences.



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# NEXT STEPS

- Create executive summaries of the Good Practice Guide
- Officially circulate the Good Practice Guide to all institutes of philosophy and department heads in Switzerland
- Ask for institutes to subscribe to the guide within the year i.e., that they support the proposals within and agree to take all appropriate measures to implement them.
- Host a series of further Doing Philosophy Better workshops introducing the guides and the proposals across Switzerland for students and professionals

# INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION

- What topic or suggestion in the guide has resonated the most with you? Why?
- What, if any topics are missing from the guide for you?
- Or what would you change in the guide as it currently is?

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**THANK YOU!**

