

**INCLUSIVE  
CAMPUS PROJECT**

**JUNE 2021**



**VOICES OF N(US):  
OUR HOPES FOR GENDER  
AND SEXUALITY INCLUSION**

**DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION  
GRANT 2020**

**SUPPORTED BY THE  
OFFICE OF STUDENT AFFAIRS**

## **Content Warning**

Descriptions of homophobia,  
transphobia, and sexism.

### **Disclaimer**

The views and opinions expressed herein are those of the author(s) and do not represent the views and opinions of the National University of Singapore or any of its subsidiaries or affiliates.

## ABOUT US

The Inclusive Campus Project brings together collective voices in the NUS community to produce a series of publications. Through the process of narrating our experiences, we seek to encourage both the contributors and readers to reflect on our current state of inclusivity and inspire changes.

Each "Voices of N(US)" publication features:

- The personal experiences of students on campus
- The reflections of a student group after reading the personal stories
- A staff member's response to the students' perspectives

The title "Voices of N(US)" represents the project team's vision of inclusivity. We want to bring across the idea of inclusivity as a state where every individual is valued within the community. Additionally, the pronoun "us" was used intentionally to highlight that inclusivity is a collective effort from us, for us.

We hope that these entries will give you new insights and inspire you to contribute to the diversity and inclusion efforts.

**Xin Hui, Khye Bin, Wee Ling**

Inclusive Campus Project

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# Preface

By the Inclusive Campus Project Team

Life's hard. Finding your place in society is hard. Finding out who you are to yourself, to your family, to society, is a herculean task. Countless thoughts are invested in becoming yourself. This difficulty, however taxing, is what underpins our humanity.

For some, this self-actualisation is made even harder. Society has barriers in place, be they as informal as taboos or as explicit as laws, that tell us where we can tread to find ourselves. Most people eventually find themselves content on paved roads, built over centuries of human culture. However, some amongst us who are walking through these paths end up walking away from the person they truly are. Who we are may be beyond the boundaries set by society.

These things are “apparent” in the context of gender, sex, and sexuality. Though these are inter-related, sex refers to who you are based on your biological characteristics while gender refers to the ascribed status you receive based on your sex<sup>1</sup>. Meanwhile, sexuality refers to our sexual orientations, identities, feelings, and expressions<sup>1,2</sup>.

Nevertheless, these identity markers shape the level of acceptance people have for us and how we navigate the world. For instance, gender expectations in society affect

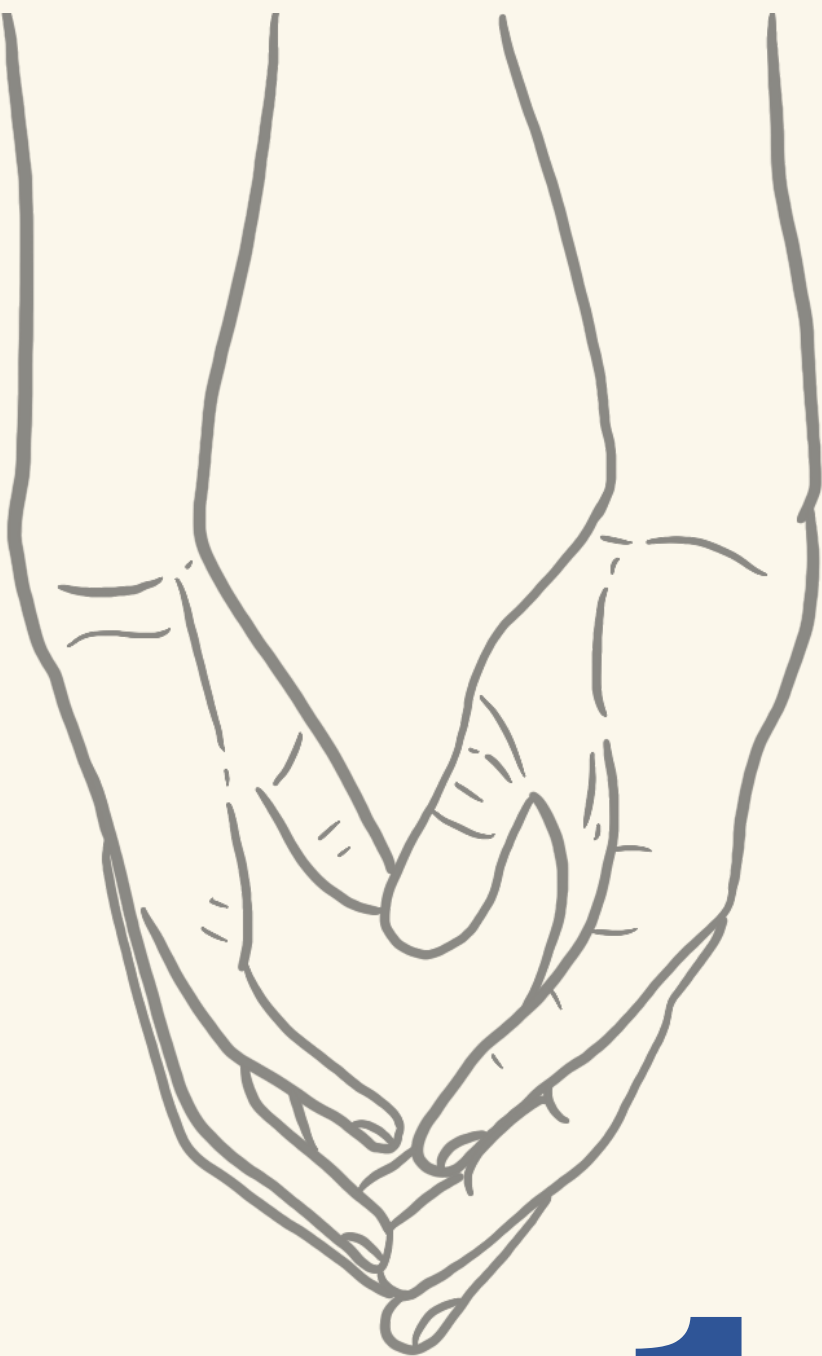
our roles at home, at work, and how we present ourselves<sup>3</sup>. Moreover, these ideals in turn can positively or negatively affect our job prospects and opportunities to succeed at work<sup>3,4</sup>. Particularly, individuals who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) experience these challenges acutely<sup>5</sup>. In addition, the discrimination and concurrent lack of support can negatively impact their mental health<sup>5</sup>.

In the context of universities, the absence of visible role models and resources is a familiar lived reality for LGBTQ students across various countries. To elaborate, most Asian universities have been described as ambivalent, where LGBTQ diversity is not explicitly affirmed<sup>6</sup>. Moreover, even though discrimination may be clearly prohibited in the university's code of conduct, students may not necessarily know of the process to seek recourse for any injustice they experienced<sup>6</sup>. Furthermore, imbalanced gender representation continues to be the trend in several disciplines. Quite apparently, female faculty members remain underrepresented in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics<sup>7</sup>. On the other hand, males are underrepresented in courses that are traditionally seen as "feminine", such as nursing<sup>8</sup>.

While perhaps to varying degrees, all these students share a common experience of invisibility. Is it possible for us to push the boundaries of what is acceptable? Beyond that, how can we value one another as equals? In the subsequent chapters on campus experiences related to gender and sexuality, we get a glimpse of our contributors' self-actualisation journeys in different environments, where they seek to carve their own paths

and destinies. An unofficial queer student group and staff contributor will also share their experiences in supporting gender and sexuality inclusion and their thoughts on how we can move forward.

*Read, reflect, respond.* Admittedly, meaningful change requires much more than our publication alone. As you read their entries, we encourage you to reflect on how you may play a role in this journey towards greater inclusivity. Most importantly, we hope that these perspectives can inspire you to respond in your various capacities.



# Section **1**:

**Searching for Acceptance**

# Being Transgender in University: An Unexpected Experience

By Nattie

How do you know whether you are left-handed or right-handed? Nobody tells you this information: You discover it yourself. When you try writing with a pencil, you use the hand that feels more comfortable to you, because it is naturally right. This is what gender is. When a transgender person has to be the gender that they are not, they start to feel uncomfortable, and they understand that it is wrong. When they transition, it becomes like picking up a pencil with the correct hand: It feels normal and comfortable, and it relieves countless amounts of stress and depression caused by being born the wrong gender.

I started to feel uncomfortable around puberty, when I was about 12 or 13 years old. A lack of knowledge of the concept of gender dysphoria forced me to repress my feelings, along with the high expectations to conform to traditional gender roles in Singapore. By the time I entered junior college, everything snapped, and I knew I was a girl, not a boy. However, without parental support at that time, there was nothing I could do. I fought my way to be able to express my identity, and finally gained my parents' support to help change my name and obtain medication for female hormones. By the time I entered university, I was able to fully represent myself as female, and few would be able to tell any discrepancy. I was able to make friends and socialize as a girl.

One of the first main concerns I had was how I would be perceived by the NUS admissions administration. When applying for NUS, I had yet to change my official name, and so had my male name displayed on the system along with my gender as "male". There was no option to provide an alternate name, nor was there any option to change my gender, as everything followed the official government records. I was eventually able to obtain a deed poll for an official name change before making my student matriculation card. However, for many others who could not change their name, having their official name registered in the NUS system can put them in danger when the professor addresses them by their birth name in class, which can expose a transgender student who has an obviously gendered name.

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**T h e r e w a s n o o p t i o n t o p r o v i d e  
a n a l t e r n a t e n a m e , n o r w a s  
t h e r e a n y o p t i o n t o c h a n g e m y  
g e n d e r , a s e v e r y t h i n g f o l l o w e d  
t h e o f f i c i a l g o v e r n m e n t r e c o r d s .**

As an avid lover of Japanese culture, I joined the Japanese Studies Society (JSS) freshman orientation camp. As this would be the first time socializing in a large group as a girl, I was terrified at being exposed and fearful of the reactions by my fellow freshmen. Luckily, the camp director understood the situation and made sure everything about my identity was anonymous, and that I

would be seen as female. I had a fantastic time in the camp, and went on to make many friends in JSS, whom I continued to treasure even until today. Some of them became my closest friends, and I felt comfortable enough to reveal my transgender identity to them. Most, if not all of them expressed full support and did not change their opinions of me. JSS has been one of the most inclusive homes for me, and I never fail to feel safe around its members.

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Even within the Japanese Studies department, the professors do not fail to ensure inclusiveness. There have been times when I have applied for overseas programmes and had to provide official identification. The professors took the effort to ensure that I would be safe on these trips, and that any arrangements concerning gender would be able to accommodate me, such as the assignment of roommates for lodging. These are professors that I will continue to respect and cherish their support and concern.

In the end, my experience is one that is privileged and does not fully represent the transgender community. I am able to live somewhat of a “stealth” life, where my birth gender is concealed and I am able to live a relatively safe life. Many others continue to face discrimination due to their physical appearance, official name and many other reasons. Inclusiveness is being able to accept anyone for who they are, regardless of how far they are able to progress in their transition journey. It is where any person can talk about their feelings, and not be judged, or have to worry about reactions by fellow students, professors and staff. Clubs and societies such as JSS have proven that it is possible to create an inclusive space, and there is hope that many others are able to do the same. I have been able to avoid any significant discriminative experience so far, but I hope that other transgender people would continue to be able to meet groups of friends who can support the LGBT community and make us feel safe.



**In the end, my experience is  
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transgender community.**

# Included.

By K.

Inclusivity is not a state. Inclusivity is the act of inclusion of all members of society in all spaces in said society. To be inclusive is to include every single person, regardless of race, religion, mother tongue, sexual orientation, physical ability, mental ability, gender expression, and background. Inclusivity is the practice of the belief that every single human life matters. We must give every single person a seat at the table, and give every single person seated at said table the space and time to speak for themselves. Inclusivity is empathy turned into action. We, as individuals in a society, exist in a complex matrix of relationships, leaning on and supporting each other, moving life forward. We, as individuals, should feel a responsibility to reduce harm and promote good.

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**A sense of belonging should be acknowledged as a fundamental human need.**

I am a Year One undergraduate. I only have had one semester's worth of experience in NUS. I recall one tutor declaring his pronouns when he introduced himself to us at the start of the term. Asking for pronouns is an act of empathy. These questions probe into how we wish to be perceived by others, and what words we need to be affirmed and to feel at home. These tiny acts of kindness and inclusivity will build a more inclusive campus.

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**We also need to recognise  
as individuals that we  
have the power in our  
voices and in our actions.**

Another positive experience that I've had in my faculty was when my yearmate listened to my feedback about using the word "gay," in the sentence, "that's damn gay, bro," implying that being gay is a negative. I told him that saying that felt hurtful. I was surprised when he listened to me, and acknowledged his fault. That acknowledgement validated my feelings of hurt and discomfort, and made me feel comfortable whenever he was around.

There is a certain hardship that comes about from feeling lonely. A sense of belonging should be acknowledged as a fundamental human need. We also need to recognise as

individuals that we have the power in our voices and in our actions to fulfill this fundamental need for each other. We need lasting support systems that affirm and acknowledge our identities as people, spaces where we can say what we feel without fearing judgement. With empathy, the communities we build can be lasting and stable.



**We need to start  
listening, and take action.**

Building a sense of belonging and community in NUS is the first step to a successful education. When our minds are free from fear of judgement, and our unique perspectives are affirmed and acknowledged, each person in our community can contribute well to society in our own unique ways.

We need to feel included.

We need to feel safe.

We need to be heard.

We need space to learn.

We need to start listening, and take action.

# Inclusion vs Exclusion: LGBT Student Experiences in NUS

By Douglas

When I was first invited to write this piece, I was extremely hesitant. A lingering fear gripped me, what if people found out who I was? What if my friends suddenly realised I was gay? "What if", an elusive question that many like myself have to tackle in university, where varied experiences of coming out to friends never quite gives you a sense of certainty on what the response or consequences would be.

I once grew close to a friend from NUS and we hung out quite a lot, so I decided to interview him for a research project regarding the LGBT and faith experience. As a straight man, his perspective was important too. But as the interview wore on, he started describing LGBT people in extremely hateful and derogatory terms based on his interpretation of religion. I sat there feeling increasingly uncomfortable hearing these words from a friend who probably assumed I was not gay, as is the general assumption in our heteronormative society. Had he known this at the time, he probably would have kept his tone more "politically correct" to avoid offending me. His was certainly not an isolated case, and I know others who've endured homophobic comments from unknowing friends. Here lies a perfect example of the fear that people like myself go through every day, you never quite know what your peers think of you as a gay person. They may not explicitly voice their prejudices in your face if they knew

you were gay, but may nonetheless be silently harbouring judgemental and sometimes shockingly ignorant perceptions of you, all the while behaving as if nothing was amiss. Most people do not openly attack us for being queer, and those who harbour homophobic attitudes at least try to be cordial if they were aware. But it nonetheless creates a deeply unsettling sense of insecurity for deciding who to trust with our hidden identities, precluding full inclusion into the social fabric of student life.

Revealing one's sexual identity to friends isn't as explicit as saying "hey I'm gay". It's the little things from the type of content we post on social media (hmm isn't he oddly supportive of LGBT rights/events?), to the choice of gender pronouns (often kept neutral or avoided) used when relating our romantic experiences to friends. I know a gay friend who intentionally avoids making friends with other LGBT folks in school, simply because he's afraid that others might become suspicious of his sexuality by association. It does not help that he has friends with homophobic sentiments staying with him on campus that he has to see every other day, whose interactions with him reinforce his fear of being outed. This is not to say that all LGBT students are closeted. Some choose to come out only to a close circle of trusted friends. Others more fortunate can afford not to care; perhaps they already have parents who accept them, or career prospects that aren't threatened by the knowledge of one's sexuality. But given the current social climate, having to heavily curate the small details that we present to others for fear of the wrong people finding out is often a very suffocating experience for many LGBT students here.

However, not all is doom and gloom for inclusivity in NUS. I was happily surprised to find that the NUS Code of Student Conduct specifically includes a policy of zero tolerance against harassment and bullying of students for their gender and sexuality. They could easily have had a general policy covering harassment of any student, but specifically mentioning that students could be harassed for their gender and sexuality makes us feel that the school recognises our existence, that the issues we face as a vulnerable group are just as pressing and deserving of protection. In addition, many groups such as QueerNUS exist to provide crucial safe spaces and social opportunities to LGBT students on campus. I went for a baking event organised by them once in a pantry in Yale-NUS. As we all pulled out an overcooked rainbow cake from the oven that had turned black and burst into peals of laughter, I remember thinking to myself, "Wow, there are so many other people like myself here, I'm not alone in this". Support groups like QueerNUS and other Residential College (RC) specific groups provide an intangible but crucial sense of inclusion for LGBT students in the wider NUS community.



Burnt or not, the fruits of our labour  
still tasted ✨ fabulous ✨

Inclusion or exclusion is not as explicit as merely being accepted or ostracised by a group. It is also about the type of subtle signals we receive and how strongly it makes us feel that we actually have a place in the NUS community as students of this university. These signals come primarily from two fronts, the NUS administration and our peers. While including an LGBT specific clause in their non-harassment policy is commendable, the administration must do more to tackle this issue. Many parallels can be drawn between sexual harassment and LGBT harassment. Just as the compulsory Respect and Consent workshops are aimed to educate students on its importance and alleviate such cases in NUS, I believe that similar programs can be conducted with regards to the treatment of LGBT students.

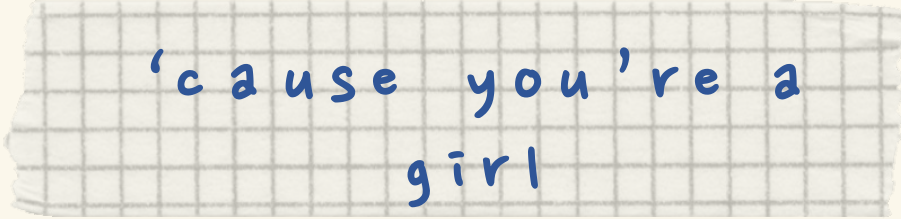
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**...we are not some distant group  
with a mysterious agenda or  
weird fetishes, but everyday  
friends that you see in your  
classrooms, in your group  
projects, and in your CCAs.**

The problem isn't so much about overt violence as it is about subtle aggressions, ranging from anonymous online hate comments to snide homophobic remarks. Sometimes these statements are not intentionally hurtful, or if they are, at least stem from a place of ignorance. To alleviate

this lack of awareness, there should be increased opportunities for students to learn about and interact with our community themselves. For instance, one of my friends in NUS initially held many negative misperceptions of LGBT people, and often unknowingly expressed her highly prejudiced opinions to me. But after one of her General Education modules required her to do her own research for a group project on the LGBT community in Singapore by talking to many interview subjects, she has broadened her horizons and become a much more accepting person. Today we are close friends after I finally felt comfortable coming out to her, and she even volunteered for Pink Dot as a straight ally. This humanises LGBT students as individuals, that we are not some distant group with a mysterious agenda or weird fetishes, but everyday friends that you see in your classrooms, in your group projects, and in your CCAs. NUS should increase these educational opportunities if it seeks to create a more inclusive campus within its student population.

As I began this writing with the question of “what if people found out who I was?”, I shall end it with another. What if people saw my anonymity as just another faceless, soulless, meaningless rant like those on NUSwhispers? So here it is, my name is Douglas. I am a year 2 student in FASS trying to decide whether the Science canteen or Deck is better/ cheaper. I can’t wait for more face-to-face classes in the coming semester but lowkey enjoy listening to Zoom lectures in bed and falling back asleep straight after. These are my lived experience as a gay NUS student, and it is my sincere hope that sharing will increase the prospects of a more inclusive university.



'cause you're a  
girl

By Jolyn

It shouldn't come as a surprise that female representation is sorely lacking in Computing. What is interesting is knowing this wasn't always the case. For the good timespan between the 19th and 20th century, women dominated the then "soft work" of software engineering. Today, being a girl in STEM<sup>1</sup> means you could very well be the only female-identifying person in a meeting of 21 engineers. That ratio has become my norm, and anything different will always be a pleasant surprise.

So, what space can a female in tech make for herself, when none have been made for her? What do you do when you don't see anyone else you can look up to in your role? How do you figure out your career path, when you can't see anyone who looks like you climbing further?

I'm three years into my degree, and yet I have only had one female professor thus far. This will likely be the case for the remainder of my degree. What space then, can one see, to further their interest in Computer Science academically, or otherwise? When there is only one female professor, you ask yourself if Computing is really a woman's job. Maybe it's not, unless you prove your right to be there by being better than everyone else.

<sup>1</sup>STEM is an acronym for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics.

Unfortunately, representation is a circular problem—without seeing other females excel in fields they want to go into, other females may not see themselves as competent enough to participate in these fields, even as a token female. Oh, but what about all the girls in tech events, you ask? Well, gender quotas and affirmative action have also built a culture of inviting doubts about the true competency of female candidates. I have had many conversations with male colleagues about girls (like myself) only getting into top programmes because of the diversity quota—girls getting easier interview questions, having less competition, being prioritised unfairly. And we girls start to internalise this: did I really deserve the position I am in? Am I actually good enough? The self-doubt, lack of confidence and constant questioning this leaves in anyone’s mind is undoubtedly toxic, and painful.

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**... you’re invisible, to the point  
you start asking if you really  
serve a value and purpose there.**

Gender stereotypes are not just about being excluded or not being treated seriously. More than that, it’s about the inability to see yourself being represented in any way, shape, or form—you’re invisible, to the point you start asking if you really serve a value and purpose there. So, what kinds of stereotypes exist? Well, we cannot talk about gender stereotypes before first talking about the stereotype of a computing major, or more generally,

people in the STEM field. These include a lack of interpersonal skills and a singular focus on computers—the antisocial people who spend their days in the basement. It seems entirely socially acceptable for males to conform to such a stereotype. In fact, it's almost rewarded that a boy tinkers obsessively with electronics and items, a sign of his studiousness taking priority over "wasting time playing". However, young girls with similar interests may be seen as weird, unnurturing and unfeminine. Family first, right? If you don't like spending time with family, how do you become a mother in the future? Spend time learning to cook instead, or wash clothes! Or read books, and study harder. Don't play around! Sure, we get to vote equally now, but how far have we really gone from the kitchen?

Of course, this discussion should also include women in STEM who strive to achieve both building loving families, and developing their career. (Yes, both can be done at once, and it doesn't discount someone's capability to do their work with their womanly disposition!) While we have made great strides in providing institutional support for mothers to play maternal roles while holding their career, there is much to be desired regarding the mindset. A female engineer looking to start a family shouldn't be seen as any more "distracted" than her male counterparts. She has her own capacity to voice out her own unique struggles. To distil it into this generalised scope of "motherly struggles" that we presume to understand can be deeply condescending, and women, more than anyone else, tend to internalise these snubs and small comments. It chips away at your worth, your value and your pride for your own successes.

There often is limited space to hold on to multiple identities, as a STEM major, a minority race, a female in STEM, or any of the various categories we may very well fall under. We make up 50% of the population, but nevertheless, the struggles of being a female in STEM are not any less. Held together with numerous other minority identities, the space for us to fit into feels ever smaller.

Having been an academic mentor for some female peers in Computing, the question I hear most is never really how to seize opportunities, but rather, "How can I survive/catch up?" These are students with almost perfect scores, somehow internalising that they still lack value, "don't have sufficient internships", "study too much with no practical skills". Hearing these questions, I often wonder whose voice raises these questions, who doubted their abilities in an attempt to feel superior?

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**...I find it hard to tell how much this imposter syndrome comes from the gender stereotypes that I internalised, and how much of it is just a personal self-esteem issue I one day have to overcome. Maybe I'll never know for certain.**

Even if they have performed well, succeeded through their effort in attaining good internships or good grades, many times they attribute their success to “luck” or “they picked me because I was a girl” instead of their relentless effort. In such a skills-based field, they miss out on one of the greatest parts—being able to attribute your success to your own learning, growth, and effort to develop a skill. Without this sense of competence, many often try to relinquish opportunities for growth to others who are “better”. Of course, this anxiety is somewhat universal. But personally, I find it hard to tell how much this imposter syndrome comes from the gender stereotypes that I internalised, and how much of it is just a personal self-esteem issue I one day have to overcome. Maybe I’ll never know for certain.

Diversity and inclusion is not just about representation. The important question that I think we should be asking ourselves is:

**Why is there only one way of doing things? Who have we held back from being themselves?**

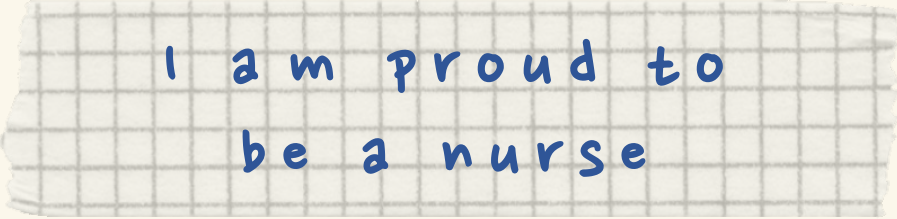
Males should be able to play roles in female-dominated fields without assumptions made of their sexuality or mannerisms. Females should be able to obsess and tinker as boys have been encouraged to. It worries me, to think about the lack of models young boys and girls grow up with, the lack of examples for how they can be their best selves. What have they given up on, because they were told it wasn’t for someone of their gender, of their identity?

Beyond gender diversity, beyond the empathy of creating a space for anyone to be themselves, diversity plays an important role in our society. People underestimate the powers given to us “code monkeys”—expert wielders of instruments to materialise technology that affects everyday lives. In this data-driven world, working in the tech industry confers a terrifying amount of power to an individual. Data drives our every decision these days, but what biases went into producing such seemingly objective data? Whose data did we collect, and who did we leave out? From marketing strategies to policy recommendations, such data is used to make many decisions. If we only have one kind of collator of a particular gender, race, nationality, sexuality, ability, and privilege, how could we expect to understand and account for minority experiences we have never ourselves experienced? Just to give an example, the QR code system for SafeEntry seems easy to use and convenient for most of our able selves. But what about the visually impaired, or the handicapped? Equality doesn't stop at equal pay, equal opportunity across genders. It's about accounting for everyone, not just those we think matter.

Within Computing, changes to promote greater gender diversity and inclusivity should happen in a few forms. Firstly, hiring more female professors. The gender divide and subtle messaging is quite clear when we walk into the admin office in Computing—most administrators are female, communicating with male professors. What does that tell us about our place as females? Secondly, I hope our male counterparts can be more aware of the struggles that are not necessarily evident. With more or less equal citizenship rights between males and females, the phenomenon of gender inequality becomes fuzzier—

females are not disenfranchised, enslaved, or in any position of such. However, it is precisely because gender inequalities are less institutional and more invisibly hidden within our biases now that we need to listen to the female experience to understand with empathy. Thirdly, I think such discussions about gender diversity ought to happen more often in the Computing community. Plenty of global tech companies do this. Why don't we? It is no doubt the elephant in the room, with far more work to be done, and regarding starting a conversation, there's no better time than now.

Despite what may seem like my incessant whining and whinging, I'll likely still remain in the field. My love for the creativity and flexibility that the tech industry offers as well as our culture of constant improvement, far exceeds any negative experiences I've felt. While I am still in the process of carving out the journey that I want to take, one thing I know is that being a Computing student does not define me. I allow myself to be in a space of many intersections, similar to the intersections between technology and many aspects of our lives. Unfortunately, there is much lacking in working towards a gender-and-sexuality-inclusive safe space in the field of technology. All I can hope is to hold optimism that we all empathise with the same fundamental needs, the basic needs minority groups ask for, to simply find a place where they belong.



I am proud to  
be a nurse

By Zam A.

Working in a healthcare setting, I encounter a gendered stereotype that our society has on a regular basis. That is, males are more likely to be doctors while females are more likely to become nurses. As a male student in Nursing, I often encounter patients during my clinicals who assume that I am studying Medicine. When I share with my relatives and my peers about my profession, I regularly get asked:

**“Isn’t Nursing a women’s job?”**

**“Why don’t you do Medicine?”**

In my experiences, I noticed that male doctors are just called ‘doctors’, but female doctors are often addressed as... well, ‘female doctors’. Similarly, female nurses are just called ‘nurses’ while male nurses are likely to be identified as ‘male nurses’ instead of just ‘nurses’. I know, I am indeed a male and indeed a nurse, so you may ask, what’s wrong with being called a ‘male nurse’? There’s nothing factually wrong about that label. But I do wonder, when we constantly use ‘male’ as a qualifier, does it unknowingly reinforce our gender roles and treat men in Nursing as the exception? Nursing is a highly meaningful profession that anyone should be allowed to aspire towards regardless of their gender, without any societal pressures.

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**Nursing is a highly meaningful profession that anyone should be allowed to aspire towards regardless of their gender, without any societal pressures.**

My decision to join Nursing is motivated by my passion in healthcare since young. I've always admired those who go out of their way to help others, particularly professionals like paramedics and police officers. I am drawn to the idea of caring for people directly and improving their health outcomes. When I applied and was accepted into Nursing, my family had many mixed feelings. They kept asking me if I was sure that this was what I wanted, particularly because they seldom hear about male nurses. My father, in particular, had a strong negative opinion about it. He had a strong perception that Nursing was not a "man's job" and was strongly against my decision.

I'm glad that my father eventually supported my decision because my experience in Nursing has been extremely rewarding. One of the greatest feelings in Nursing is when I see my patients happily discharged from the ward and saying their 'thank yous' and 'goodbyes'. These are undoubtedly the best feelings I've ever felt during my time as a student. Even a simple 'thank you' from family members means a lot to me. Conversely, knowing that a patient has a bad prognosis and is suffering is a very

disconcerting and unsettling feeling. Regardless, we still have to do our best to ensure that patient's safety, comfort, and care comes first. No matter how many times we get yelled at by family members or the patients themselves, we don't take it personally. We need to understand that the patients' family members are also going through a hard time because the patient's diagnosis can be very disruptive to their family.

While society tends to see women as more in-touch with emotions and more suited to occupations related to caregiving, it is about time we challenge such outdated mindsets. Nursing requires professional training and skills; regardless of one's gender, we need to be equally competent. Men can also provide care. Besides, it is my privilege as a nurse to journey with my patients. Am I missing out from other more male-oriented occupations? I don't think so. Instead, I am deeply impacted by my patients' resilience even when they are at their frailest.

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**To me, gender inclusivity means  
that every person can aspire to  
be who they want to be  
regardless of their gender and  
they are not expected to be less  
or more because of their gender.**

To me, gender inclusivity means that every person can aspire to be who they want to be regardless of their gender and they are not expected to be less or more because of their gender. I am eager to see more males joining the Nursing profession. However, changing mindsets towards the dominant stereotypes is not just the work of NUS Nursing alone. We, as a society, need to unpack our gender stereotypes together. But one thing that I think my professors, clinical instructors, and peers could start doing is to change the way they refer to Nursing students. I find that there is a tendency to refer to the students using she/her pronouns and not he/him or or they/them pronouns. While I understand that it is easier to refer to nurses as she/her since females are the majority, I think changing the gender stereotype starts from changing our language as the words we use have an effect on shaping our thinking too.

All in all, I'm hopeful that we are moving towards greater gender inclusivity as a society and I look forward to the day where no one is bogged down by gender expectations. I am proud to be a nurse, who are you proud to be?

## Reflections

?

We need to give each other the space to grow, **to be ourselves**, to exercise our **diversity**. We need to give each other space so that we may both give and receive such beautiful things as ideas, **openness, dignity, joy, healing, and inclusion.**

MAX DE PREE

**What stood out for you as you read about the students' experiences?**



# Section 2:

**Student Group's  
Response**

# collective Action is Inclusive Action

By An Unofficial Queer  
Student Group in NUS

It has become something of a running joke that the LGBTQ+ acronym is ever-expanding and constantly changing. Over the course of the past few years, we've watched as our community fought for the right to define ourselves in our own terms so that we may speak for ourselves in public arenas. In a community as diverse as ours, this dynamism is our strength. Inclusivity must therefore encompass several different facets of campus life, addressing issues ranging from larger structural inequalities to smaller acts of compassion. These facets will, by the nature of the community it reflects, change and grow with time. It is therefore fortunate that our community has long been present to put in the work necessary to facilitate this growth.

“

**In a community as diverse as ours,  
this dynamism is our strength.**

The first official LGBTQ+ affirming student group was established in Cinnamon College in 2011. Even before the founding of the Gender Collective, NUS students have been voicing concerns for the wellbeing of the LGBTQ+

community and proposing solutions. Anti-discrimination policies, for example, are necessary in order to protect vulnerable students against unfair treatment. Clearly, more inclusive housing and bathroom access policies can go a long way towards ensuring the safety and health of transgender and non-binary students. Widely distributed educational materials can provide official support for LGBTQ+ students as well as raise awareness among non-LGBTQ+ students.

QueerNUS also aims to be an ally to other student movements that support inclusivity and anti-discrimination of students, regardless of their identities and background. We believe that gender equality is a necessary part of bringing about a more equitable future, and can only be achieved when we can deconstruct the existing constrained understandings of gender to recognise that people of ALL genders are deserving of equitable treatment. We hope to be a part of expanding the conversation on gender equality to include those who may not feel represented by the narratives that are currently prominent in the discussion, because we are committed to being in solidarity with the specificity of each person's lived experiences. We want to continue advocating for those whose experiences are often not accurately captured in the results of these conversations, which are often generalised to represent the "majority".

These policies are only a few of the many proposals presented by LGBTQ+ students over the years. Yet they are also representative of a few recurring concerns, namely: our safety, dignity, and right to self-actualisation. Access to sanitation facilities and housing addresses some

fairly basic human needs, but it also provides a sense of security for LGBTQ+ students, especially those who are transgender and non-binary. Further measures such as public statements of support or the display of pride flags may seem frivolous, but when coupled with concrete policy changes, they aid in the enrichment of campus culture by fostering an environment of inclusivity and consideration for all. The sheer range of these requests reflects the variety that inclusivity comes in, especially in the context of campus life.

“

**Inclusivity is not special treatment, but rather a method of levelling the playing field by improving on the systems that came before.**

While requests for inclusive changes may come across as demands for special treatment, these recommendations have been made in the context of a society in which LGBTQ+ people exist as a minority group. Campus policies and infrastructure were established years prior in a social landscape when LGBTQ+ people were less accepted by society than they are now. As a result, meeting the needs of our community will inevitably require constructive change and some alteration of the status quo.

Yet, we continue to live and study on campus, contributing to the vibrant student life in our own capacities as students, friends, leaders, and creators. If we are to ensure fair and equitable access to the quality education which NUS prides itself on, then it is of great importance that all students—regardless of gender or sexuality—are accounted for and protected by the administration and academic faculties. Inclusivity is not special treatment, but rather a method of levelling the playing field by improving on the systems that came before.

“

**Inclusivity lives here, too: in the kindness and solidarity of our fellow students and our professors. Progress cannot be achieved in isolation or in the abstract.**

On a more positive note, the experiences recounted in the reflections of the students are heartening in their account of the camaraderie and community that students can find among themselves and with sympathetic faculty members. Inclusivity lives here, too: in the kindness and solidarity of our fellow students and our professors. Progress cannot be achieved in isolation or in the abstract. While it may often seem as though the existence of our community presents an intimidating fount of controversy, the lived reality of our experiences as students is often a mundane but universal desire for connection, for honesty

without fear, and for the freedom to live authentically. As a student-run organisation, QueerNUS endeavours to honour this community spirit and continue to provide avenues for LGBTQ+ students to build a community within NUS. We recognize that inclusivity is not assimilation, but acceptance and celebration of diversity. Through student-run social gatherings, solidarity-building events, and educational talks, we hope to provide a conducive platform for LGBTQ+ students to speak up and connect with their peers. In the spirit of community building and raising awareness, several of our events—especially the educational and solidarity-driven ones—are also open to allies of the LGBTQ+ community.

Inclusivity also requires informed responses to gaps in policy and education. Through our Research and Literacy department, QueerNUS hopes to collect information on their first-hand experiences as LGBTQ+ students in NUS, in order to facilitate our own research on the issues faced uniquely by NUS students. At present, the ongoing QueerNUS research project investigates the experiences of LGBTQ+ students in NUS spaces and it is run entirely by students within our community. Even when organisations and faculty members are open to facilitating positive change, the absence of data presents a significant obstacle to formulating effective policy changes. We have also found that the lack of research often stymies education and further dialogue on the issues surrounding gender and sexuality, and we hope that our work can help address this gap in the conversation.

It is exceedingly important to us that these efforts are, by and large, initiated and led by students who identify as

members of the LGBTQ+ community. To us, the importance of our allies, without whom we cannot effect change, is in alignment with the need to amplify and support the direct voices of the LGBTQ+ community in NUS. Without the expertise and knowledge afforded by lived experiences, attempts at outreach or advocacy will inevitably contain distance, misunderstandings or inaccuracies. Furthermore, other members of the community may view such projects with mistrust or trepidation. Instead, inclusivity must be achieved with respect and recognition of our bodily autonomy, lived experiences, and intellectual capacities, and consequently our ability to advocate for ourselves.

In the future, QueerNUS hopes to continue our ongoing work in establishing support networks, providing educational outreach, and conducting research on LGBTQ+ issues. While we would like to acknowledge the existence of unofficial avenues of support for our work within NUS, we ultimately hope that we can be given the opportunity to work directly with NUS in a collaborative effort to improve the lives of LGBTQ+ students through positive, inclusive change.

# Reflections

?

I know that you cannot live on **hope** alone, but **without it, life is not worth living**. And you...And you...And you...Gotta give 'em hope.

HARVEY MILK

**What can you do to make your community more inclusive?**



# Section 3:

**NUS Staff's Response**

# Inclusion as Perpetual Motion

By Haizuruldin Gimin

The definition of inclusivity is often too general. The Cambridge Dictionary defines it as the “quality of trying to include many different types of people and to treat them fairly and equally”. If we are to ask different groups of people, inclusivity can be interpreted very differently, ranging from:

- Teamwork;
- Voices being heard/ Being valued & respected;
- Leaving rooms for opinions that one can disagree with;
- Everyone’s ideas matter, everyone’s presence matters, and everyone’s work matters and
- Being judged by one’s opinion and experience.

Reading through the various authors’ submissions, one thing which stood out for me is that inclusion is seen as a human right, its aim to embrace all persons—irrespective of race, gender, disability, medical or other traits/identity markers. It is also about giving equal access and opportunities and removing discrimination and intolerance (removal of barriers), insofar as these affects public life.

One of the authors said that inclusivity is an act. By extension, inclusion creates engagement and a sense of belonging. To have an encompassing engagement, there is a need to define the level of supportive energy and commitment from our leaders, and students and others,

so that we individually and collectively can be at our best.

As an institution, we are still building a culture of inclusion and as individuals, we are still developing inclusive habits. We recognize that such a culture is valuable and as much as we can encourage it, it is up to the community at large because behavioural norms are cultivated on the ground.

After all, it is the sum of all our habits that leads to an inclusive culture.

It is also imperative that in the process of building a culture of inclusivity, it does not become a powerplay. This can lead to detrimental consequences. It is therefore essential that **both** the institution and the NUS community understand that all of us have a role to play:

- Creating a sense of “safety” for each other;
- Creating 360-degree vision by asking people to share their thoughts and experiences and accept their frame of reference as true for them;
- Speaking up when people are being excluded; and
- Continuing to build trust by being accountable to our words and actions.

In my personal life, I have enjoyed honest, barrier-free conversations with my LGBTQ mates. It is a privilege that neither my friends nor I take for granted. It is necessary to hear each other out, understand each other’s innate fears and discomforts and work towards a common good and shared success. Sometimes, it can be a tall order for

me to speak freely for I fear to step on someone's toes, but disagreement can be civil and respectful. One can share one's views without accusing or criticizing as it is simply presenting another way of thinking about the topic.

“

**Strip away our needs to “not lose ourselves”, and we are essentially human beings whose deep desires are to be accepted.**

Strip away our needs to “not lose ourselves”, and we are essentially human beings whose deep desires are to be accepted.

I must admit that, at the start, I struggled with the different pronouns as my first reaction was “Why make it so complicated?”. But respect is two ways, and empathy is not about agreeing with what the person feels. To me, it is more about having the humility to listen and try to understand, and I eventually did! Among other things, I understood that respect requires the willingness to struggle, learn and recognize others for who they are.

No one promised that respect is cognitively tax-free, but respect is what we need if we want to be more inclusive.

In reading the piece by the writer who was a nurse, I also recognized my privilege in knowing male family and friends who are nurses. We are all fighting our own set of prejudices and battles which sometimes make us forget, and a little empathy goes a long way. This is also a critical skill if we want to make progress towards a fair and equitable environment. Training opportunities which work on "dismantling" our implicit biases can lead to **less** unfair distribution of attention and resources.

Here, I would like to recognize the act of empowerment which happens when we all strive to be inclusive. The approach operates on the axiom that we all benefit when we acknowledge every person's rights and responsibilities to contribute to and receive from community participation in a reciprocal relationship. By focusing on competence rather than deficits in individual or social functioning, the Office of Student Affairs supports resourcefulness and the development of skills to remove social barriers for individuals and communities.

I believe that inclusion is always present as a spectrum rather than a static point - human individuals and social systems are in perpetual motion, either "getting better" or "getting worse" at any given moment.

As we continue to address misunderstandings and resolve disagreements, we should review our stereotyped instincts which primes us to think of "them" versus "us", which in turn blinds us from understanding the real needs of specific groups.

We need to strike a judicious balance between risk and certainty, between convention and innovation to meet real needs, instead of bureaucratic convenience. Combined with a desire to act and change, a small seed of empathy can grow into a powerful driver for change for the better.

# Reflections

?

You never completely have  
your rights, one person, **until**  
**you all have your rights.**

MARSHA P. JOHNSON

**What would you advocate for?**



# Section 4:

**Now What?**

## Now What?

By the Inclusive Campus Project Team

Putting together this publication was a journey of learning for us as much as it hopefully was for you, our readers. Indeed, this learning journey was what we set out to do – to use the process of bringing together the voices of the community to understand the state of inclusivity, what we are doing well, and what we can do better.

Now that you have read the perspectives of our contributors, what stood out to you? What stirred an emotion in your heart? What made you pause for another second to think? Sit with those thoughts and emotions.

Admittedly, meaningful change requires much more than our publication alone. We titled our project the “Inclusive Campus Project”, but it should not be the end all be all. Making the campus inclusive does not end with the release of our publications. Your actions matter as well, if not even more.

So... now what?

We leave you to answer.

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\* Names marked with asterisks are aliases to protect the identity of the contributors who wish to be anonymous.

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