

# 1. IDENTITY: SEXUAL DIVERSITY

## 1. KEY POINTS

- ✓ Sexual diversity is much more complex than just binary categories - such as male/female, straight/gay etc., it is more of a spectrum with various identities, affections, and behaviours.
- ✓ There are three dimensions of sexuality - sexual attraction, sexual behaviour, and sexual identity. These three are only partially overlapping.
- ✓ Sexuality is related to but different from gender. Sexual orientation is an important part of our social lives - it is far more than just sex.
- ✓ The ways of how sexuality and relationships are experienced and expressed by people are profoundly influenced by culture and societal norms.
- ✓ Sexuality is often discussed only from a cisheteronormative point of view, which makes all of the people who do not identify as cis and/or heteronormative left out of the conversation.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

**Sexuality** is a term applied to how people experience and express themselves as sexual beings. Sexual orientation may be broken down into at least three dimensions, including sexual attraction, sexual behaviour, and sexual identity. Sexuality as a broader term is related also to number of culture-related variables and sexual health is important part of overall health of a person (Pitoňák & Macháčková, 2022).

## 3. DEVELOPMENT OF THE TOPIC

### 3.1. Sexuality

“Sexuality is a central aspect of being human throughout life and encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy, and reproduction. Sexuality is experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviours, practices, roles, and relationships. While sexuality can include all of these dimensions, not all of them are always experienced or expressed. Sexuality is influenced by the interaction of biological, psychological, social, economic, political, cultural, ethical, legal, historical, and religious and spiritual factors” (WHO, 2006). Therefore, it is good to normalize talking about sexuality openly, because it can make great impact on lives of young people and their overall health and well-being.

Sexuality can be experienced and expressed in many different ways. Here are few points describing important parts of any safe and healthy sexual activities (Women, U. N., & UNICEF, 2018)

- The people involved in the performed activities are there **voluntarily** and are informed about what’s going to happen and are **consenting** to all of the suggested activities.
- The people involved are conscious and in state of mind in which they are able to give informed **consent**.
- Activities that are not considered harmful by either party involved in it (some sexual activities, which are called kink might include bonding, slapping, etc., which has to be always consensual, and wished for by all involved parties).
- People involved are legally competent to consent to sexual activities

### 3.2. Sexual orientation

**Sexual orientation** refers to an enduring pattern of emotional, romantic and/or sexual attractions to men, women or both sexes (APA, 2008). Sexuality has three main dimensions - sexual attraction, sexual behaviour and sexual identity.

- **Sexual attraction** describes interpersonal psychological dimension of sexuality, which refers to the romantic and sexual feelings we have for others. Sexual attraction can be related to the sex or gender of the people we are attracted to. Sexual attraction has been the main construct defining sexual orientation since the end of the 19th century (Sell, 1997).
- **Sexual behaviour** is the behaviour of an individual that can, but does not have to, be in line with their sexual orientation and identity. Some sexual behaviour can be described as related to a certain context and/or situation or as experimental and does not strictly express the sexual identity of a person. In a society, where being gay or queer is stigmatized and there is high prevalence of rejection and discrimination, people might have a harder time to accept their identity if it does not fit the norm.
- **Sexual orientation identity** is dependent on existence of available discourses within any given culture, language, and social categories (i.e., heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, etc.) that convey meanings to individuals who may assume them (Dillon et al., 2011; Morgan, 2013). Thus, a process or act of acceptance of such sexual orientation identity, or sexual identity label (Savin-Williams, 2011) represents a conscious acknowledgment and/or internalization of one's sexual orientation (Dillon, Worthington, & Moradi, 2011). Categories, names, and labels for sexual orientation identities can be very helpful for young people while figuring out how they feel, which can ease up the process of coming out. Within any given culture, there may be many sexual orientation identity labels such as gay/lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, demisexual, questioning and many more. Contemporary research shows that it is relatively common for individuals to change them during their life-course.

As you can see the three dimensions above, they are overlapping and interrelated, but they are not the same. Keeping this in mind when working with LGBTQ+ teenagers is beneficial, since they might be exploring different sexual activities (behaviours) and going through the process of forming their sexual orientation identity.

### 3.3. Asexuality

When defining sexuality, we could also split it into two dimensions - sexual attraction meant as **physical aspect of attraction** and **romantic dimension** seen as more psychosocial aspect. Therefore, **asexuality** can be defined as the lack of sexual inclinations directed towards any other person (not lack of sexual desire per se - asexual people might or might not enjoy for example masturbation). This lack of sexual inclinations directed towards any other person is of an enduring nature or implies an enduring disposition or orientation. Important aspect to be considered is the self-identification with asexuality as some people may experience lack of sexual desire towards others but not consider themselves to be asexual.

Asexuality is also not a result of celibacy or fear of intimacy, it is a sexual orientation identity or label. Being asexual does not mean that the person never engages in sexual activities - they can engage in sex if they wish to. However, nobody should ever be forced into having sexual contact and/or activities. Lack of sexual desire towards others also doesn't imply lack of romantic affection for others (Bogaert, 2015; Guz et al., 2022). Many asexual people want to have romantic relationships with others and can be romantically attracted to various genders, and therefore be considered for example lesbian, gay or bisexual (sometimes the term bi-romantic might be preferred) (Pitoňák & Macháčková, 2022). Then we can use terms romantic asexual and aromantic asexual who those who don't feel romantic attraction. It is important to keep in mind that there is great diversity in how people experience their asexuality (Antonsen et al., 2020). When talking with teenagers about

sexuality, don't forget to mention asexuality too and to normalize the discourse around it, because in general asexuality is represented in public space much less than other sexual identities which can lead to feelings of inappropriateness/being left out by asexual young people.

### **3.4. Hypersexuality (related to compulsive sexual behaviour and internalizing homonegativity)**

**Hypersexuality** is recurring and intensive sexual fantasies, urges and behaviours which are hard to control, usually present as a response to stressful events. Their character and/or intensity can cause physical and emotional distress to the person. Hypersexuality can be expressed in many different ways, for example by compulsive masturbation, excessive pornography consumption, intensive sexual behaviour with other consenting adults, etc. (Kaplan, 2010). When defining hypersexuality, societal context needs to be considered since norms of various societies are controlling and restricting a person's sexuality.

A key vulnerability factor for compulsive sexual behaviour among LGBTQ+ people is **minority stress** and related processes. **Distal minority stress** processes (prejudice and discrimination from peers and societal structures) confer risk for **proximal minority stress** (internalized homonegativity) and emotion dysregulation which can lead to compulsive sexual behaviour (Pachankis et al., 2015). Other vulnerability factors for hypersexual behaviour for all youth regardless their sexual orientation and gender identity can be maltreatment, trauma, and depression (Fontanesi, et al, 2021). As hypersexuality can be caused by these factors, putting it into big picture while talking about sexuality might be beneficial for all. Since compulsive hypersexuality is harmful for people, distinction between compulsive hypersexuality and healthy rich sexual life should be made.

### **3.5. Involuntary celibate (Incels)**

**Incels** are young men who lack sexual activity despite their desire to be in sexual relationship. The term originated from online groups on Reddit, where men discuss difficulties in seeking and succeeding in sexual relationships. Multiple core elements of the incel culture are highly misogynistic and favourable toward violence against women. People in these communities adhere to a "red-pill" philosophy (referencing to Matrix movie, symbolizing discovering of how world truly works) which in their view is a realization that we live under a feminist, far-left constructed delusion, and need to take steps to revolt against it (O'Malley, Holt, & Holt, 2020). The rise of incel groups and in general misogynistic ideas among young boys mean you might encounter this topic in your classroom and will have to address it. The best prevention is challenging gender stereotypes and stating clear rules on what happens when hate and violence occurs.

**Gender identity** is the inner personal perception of one's identity, related to social and cultural definitions of gender. The gender identity of a person can be congruent with their sex assigned at birth (cisgender) or differ from it in various ways. For most people, gender identity is congruent with sex assigned; for trans, nonbinary and other gender diverse individuals, gender identity differs in varying degrees from sex assigned at birth (APA, 2015).

For more information see the [topic about gender](#)

### **3.6. Assigned sex**

**Assigned sex** is a term that typically concerns legal sex category derived from medical examination of a new-born child following the birth. Assignment is usually based on the appearance of external genitalia of the child. Yet, sex is a more complex characteristic consisting not only of external genitalia, but also of internal genitalia, chromosomes, and hormonal functioning. When the sex characteristics as stated above are ambiguous, the child can be considered intersex (Pitoňák & Macháčková, 2022).

### **3.7. Intersex, DSD = differences in sexual development**

People who are born with intersex variation have a combination of sex characteristics which do not fit typical binary categories such as male or female (see Figure 1). There are many different ways to be intersex. Intersex people can have different hormone levels than the average man/woman, they can have unusual combination of chromosomes and genitalia (for example XY chromosomes and a vulva) or other combination of sex characteristics (chromosomes, genitalia, hormones) (Cools et al., 2018). Babies who are born intersex are often subject of “corrective” aesthetic surgeries in order to more fit one of the binary sex categories. It is recommended that any surgeries which are purely aesthetic should not be performed until the intersex person is able to consent to it (Barker, 2017).

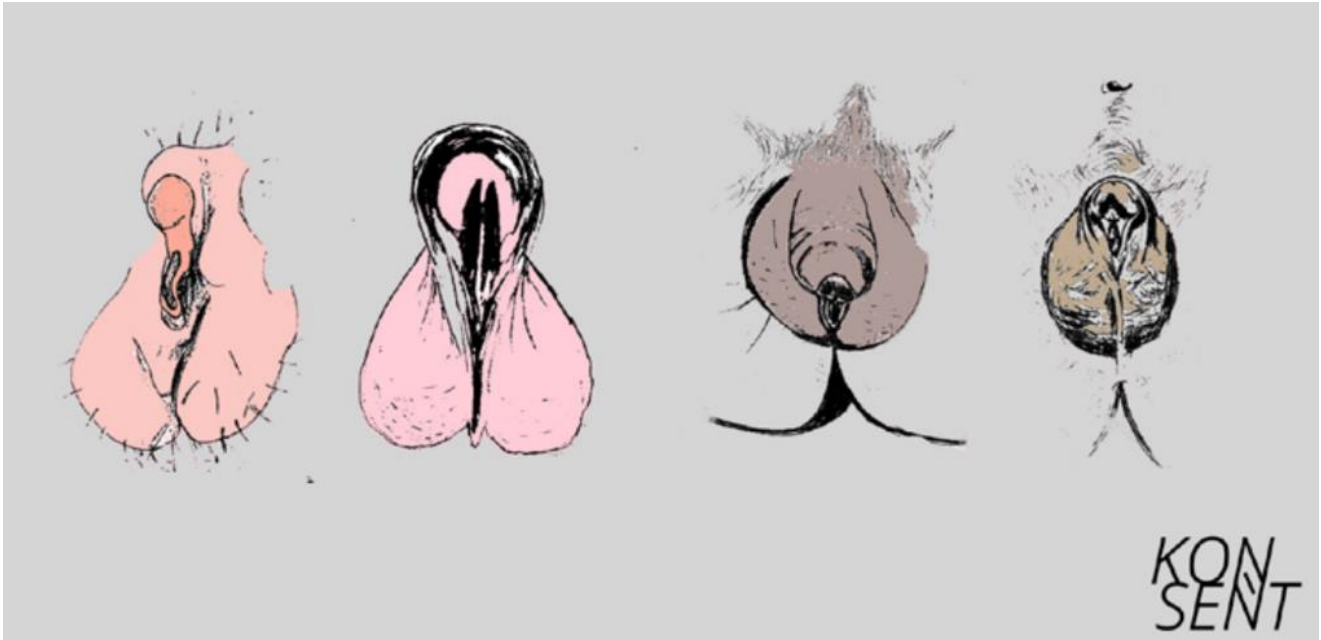


Figure 1. Combination of sex characteristics

### 3.8. Heteronormativity

**Heteronormativity** is a normative system within which heterosexuality and/or cisgender identity (the situation in which gender determined at birth is in accordance with the person's gender self-identification; that is why sometimes it is called **cisheteronormativity**) are considered by society to be the only normal results of adolescence, socialization, and the development of life relationships, and are therefore automatically assumed/expected from everyone (Pitoňák, 2017). As a result, other forms of sexuality and non-conforming forms of gender identities are considered unequally valued. (Cis)Heteronormativity thereby creates base for stigmatization, discrimination, and exclusion of non-heterosexual and transgender or intersex people.

You can read more about heteronormativity on the [topic 1.2](#) and the [topic 2.3](#).

### 3.9. Queer theory

Queer theory a diverse field of thought that started to be regarded as such in the 1990. An influential and not unified theory it is related to theorizing of gender, sexuality and identities that are outside of cisheteronormative expectations. As an approach it is typically questioning and problematizing binary categorizations related to sex, gender, and sexuality such as man/woman, male/female, straight/gay categories and brings forward questions related to power-relationships that are influenced by them. Queer theory states these binary categories help to reinforce differences and hierarchical structures (for example male being considered as superior and female as inferior) and calls to transgress conventional understanding of these while creating open space for various identities, embodiments, and discourses (Barber & Hidalgo, 2017; Jagose, 1996).

## 4. SITUATIONS OF DISCRIMINATION RELATED TO THE TOPIC

- Non-consensual surgeries of children born with intersex variations are still happening. Parents of the new-born are often told that the surgery is necessary for healthy development of the child, but the motivation behind is often just to be able to conform to what is deemed to be a “normally” looking boy or girl body.
- Shaming asexual people, trying to convince them to have sex.
- Sexual harassment.
- People not accepting asexuality as a valid sexual identity label.
- Questioning someone’s sexual identity - “you’re lesbian just because you didn’t experience sex with men”.
- Perceiving non-heterosexual people as if their sexual identity was the main defining personality trait, (oversexualization) and ignoring they are people with complex personalities and diverse interests.
- Contextualizing non-heterosexuality only within sexually-transmitted infections and "risk language".
- Silencing or tabooing discussions about non-heteronormative or queer relationships and sexual practices.
- Harmful assumption that assigned sex has to align with gender identity - and **misgendering people** who are trans/nonbinary. Overall fixation on assigned sex and not willing to accept people’s gender identity.
- Dating as a queer person specially in smaller towns can feel slightly more difficult, it can encompass experiences of flirting with someone who is cishetero and who gets offended and aggressively reacts.
- Comments or attacks on the street/ in the classroom towards queer people because of their appearance, which could be seen through a non/heteronormative gender expression (choices of clothes, make-up, accessories, etc.)
- Not allowing equal marriage for same-sex couples.
- Cisheteronormative expectations for relationships, appearance (gender expression), gender roles and other (further described in chapter cisheteronormative education).
- Addressing someone’s same-sex or gender-diverse partner as friend despite previous disclosure of their relationship.
- Not-respecting private space of children and adolescents, intruding into their personal space therefore violating their boundaries and privacy which can lead to maladaptive behaviours in the future.

## 5. BEST PRACTICES (For teachers and for families)

Avoid conflating sexuality with mere sex or sexual behaviour, sexuality represents a complex social axis of difference a dimension of each and every human experience. Especially for students aged 12 and below it can be helpful to speak about relationships and dating and their diversity (girl wants to date with another girl, two men start a family...), to put emphasis on the relational aspect of sexuality, which is for many people the key part.

Tips from Barker (2017, p.43-44):

- Reflexively engage with your own assumptions – and cultural norms – about sex and sexuality (penetrative sex can often be seen as the only “right” version of sex, when there are many more

sexual activities which are not any less “sex” than penetrative one – oral sex, hand – genitalia sex, genital rubbing, etc.). Suggested questions:

- How is perception of what constitutes a “good sex” influenced by popular culture and portrayals of sex in movies and popular culture?
- How is it influenced by porn? How do sex and couple dynamic look like in porn?
- What are the expectations for men/women to be like within sex?
- How is it to see straight couple kissing in public and same sex couple doing the same? Why?
- Engage in continual educational development around lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, queer, asexual spectrums, and other identities and practices. If you have not done this work, refer on to somebody who has where possible or start researching on your own so you can have discussion around the topics and be well-informed.
- Do not expect your students to educate you, but do be open to the nuances of their unique lived experiences and meanings of their sexual identities and practices.
- Aim to demonstrate comfort discussing the variety of GSRD (Gender, Sexual, and Relationship Diversity) practices.
- Be aware of intersections, acknowledging the difference in how sexuality is experienced across gender, race, class, culture, ability, age, generation, body type, etc. You can think of how is it to be gay in social class where masculinity is viewed very stereotypically, how is to be trans in religious environment where existence of LGBTQ+ people is viewed as sin, how is it to be lesbian in very conservative culture, how is it to be gay and fat in environment where there’s lot of pressure on body look).
- Normalize sexual diversity, and diversity of options in relation to sexual identities, desires, and practices, including a person being anything from not sexual at all to highly sexual. Do not imply that the lack of sexual attraction, or high sexual desire, is a problem to be treated unless it is accompanied with psychological distress or negative outcomes.
- Avoid assuming that the sexuality of somebody with a non-normative sexuality will be relevant to their presenting issue. Avoid assuming that the sexuality of somebody with a normative sexuality will not be relevant.
- Be careful not to assume the sexuality of a student based on heteronormative assumptions, or on their appearance, the gender of a partner mentioned, expectations about normal sexual practices, or anything else. Check out their sense of sexuality and make sure that you respect this. Be open to them choosing any label – or no label – for their experiences or attractions.
- Recognize the reasons why consent can be challenging in the current cultural context, challenge non-consensual behaviour (sexual harassment, rape, unwanted sexual texts, etc.), and openly engage with students around how they can ensure ethical and consensual practice with themselves and others. Activity that can be performed is to discuss with students how we generally recognize the situations when someone agrees to do things or when they are excited about them – we can brainstorm about this. How does a person look like in such situation (smiling, approaching, nodding, “Let’s do that!”, etc.) , and on the other hand how do we recognize when someone doesn’t want (e.g. to do) something (not saying much, avoiding, “no”) or when they’re not sure (silence, “yeah maybe”, ...having straight face). We can discuss how everyone might express these a bit differently, how it depends on how well we know the person, etc. We can then brainstorm how we can ask a person if they want to do something or like something – we write it down. Then we can discuss the same situation of agreeing / not being sure / disagreeing in sexual encounter. Signs would be similar – consent should be enthusiastic, they reciprocate



touches/kissing etc. and we can accommodate questions we wrote down earlier – how anyone can ask if person wants to do something in a sexual context – to give specific examples how students can check for consent:

- Would you like...?
- I would like to do..., how do you feel about that?
- Do you want to have sex now?
- Can I touch your...?
- Do you like when I do this...?

When teaching about sexuality, involve examples of various sexual identities and relationships, not only heterosexual and normative ones. In your classes you can give examples of two women being married to each other; of a trans man dating a man; of a bisexual person who is currently dating someone of the same gender/sex, etc. You can open the topic with activity focused on societal norms and what it means to critically analyse and break them. This can mean discussing expectations and norms revolving around sexual and romantic relationships. Example of such activity can be found in [Norm Criticism Toolkit](#) (2016).

You can talk to children about gender identity, sexual orientation and biological sex and reinforce the idea that these are all spectrums or indiscrete phenomena with otherwise complex variability that cannot be easily defined by categories or labels that would make them look like discrete categories. It can be helpful to talk about things we see as binary categories. Explore that further and brainstorm about some examples of things we tend to see as binary complementary categories (0 or 1 in IT, white and black, hot and cold, day and night, etc.). You can demonstrate with these, how often we think in binary categories, but the reality is more complex – there are shades of grey between black and white, there are different grades of temperatures between hot and cold. The same goes with categories as male/female, man/woman and straight/gay. It will help children in the future to understand their own identity and feelings. A practical guide to teaching about sexuality in a complex way can be found in [Gender, Sexuality and Sexual Orientation: Training Manual](#) (2019, pages 7-10):

Another activity to discuss sexual diversity can be “The world upside down” described in “[Somos Diversidades](#)” (Pichardo et al, 2020, p. 67). In this activity students individually and anonymously fill in so called “Questionnaire about heterosexuality” which includes questions non-heterosexual people often get asked, like “Did it cost you a lot to accept your heterosexuality?”, “Do you plan to tell your family?” and other. After filling it, you could start a discussion by asking both heterosexual and non-heterosexual students how it felt for them to carry out this activity, and what they found interesting or shocking. The activity should be wrapped up with information about sexual diversity.

To address common myths about asexuality, you can get inspired by activities in “[Somos Diversidades](#)” (Pichardo et al, 2020, p. 93). Start by dividing the class into groups of 3 or 4 people. Give them a test on asexuality (see below), where they should mark if a statement is TRUE or FALSE, deliberately giving them very short time for answering (3 minutes are suggested, according to your knowledge of the class this time can be shorten) so only quick debates can occur. After that, we can reflect with the groups – how was it to decide that fast? Were the groups clear and coherent on their decisions? After that we go question by question and collect answers of all groups, seeing what’s similar, what’s different and concluding with correct answer. After that is recommended to show some video or other incorporation of lived experience of being asexual. At the end of the class, we can wrap it by asking about what was surprising, what is the main take away, etc.

1. Asexual people do not have sex.
2. Asexual people don’t like masturbation.

3. Asexual people can only have relationships with people who are also asexual.
4. Asexual people may want to start a family.
5. Asexuality is strongly linked to religious beliefs

Correct answers:

1. FALSE: Asexual people are defined as those who do not feel or feel low sexual desire for other people. However, they can have sexual relations with other people, for example, to satisfy themselves when they feel sexual desire, or to satisfy their partners or with purpose of conceiving.
2. FALSE: Asexual people can enjoy masturbation, they can masturbate as anyone else for various reasons - for arousal, to relax or as part of sexual relations they have with their partners.
3. FALSE: Asexual people can have romantic relationships with both people within the asexual spectrum a of the allosexual (that is to say "other-sexual", heterosexuals, gays, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, etc.). Asexual people can name their identity in various ways – some of them using terms like heteroromantic, androromantic (romantic pursuit towards men and masculine people), panromantic, etc.
4. TRUE: The desire to have children or to start a family is not linked to sexual desire, so asexual people may or may not have the desire to have children or to start a family in the same way as allosexual people.
5. FALSE: Celibacy and sexual abstinence do not define people asexual, nor vice versa. Asexual people do not stop have sexual relations for beliefs of any kind, they simply do not feel or feel low sexual desire for other people.

When speaking about sexual orientation labels and diversity in this area, to avoid over-sexualizing perspective in form of giving the impression that sexuality of non-heterosexual people is the main defining trait of their psyche, you can include the activity "Star of me" where students have a star and in each 6 points of it to write an attribute or a characteristic. This activity is from [Teacher's Guide to Inclusive Education](#) (IGLYO, 2015, p. 17). It shifts back the perspective to people being complex human beings and it can show common ground. The activity can pose questions of some attributes being more hidden or more displayed, how they show up in different social contexts and the overall feelings of students while doing the activity - how did they feel when shrinking their identity into these 6 points.

Do not forget talking about intersex people when discussing biological attributes of sex, how sex is assigned and defined above binary categories and include this information in sexual education classes. Avoid using possibly conflicting and possibly harmful terms, such as "hermaphrodite" because it has negative connotation as it's sometimes used as an offence and is more commonly used to refer to animals with both male and female reproductive organs. To give proper information about intersexuality, you could invite an expert on the topic to prepare a program for you/your colleagues and classes).

Parents are recommended to talk with their intersex children openly about their intersex status, one information at a time and being ready to answer their questions. It is recommended to be partnered with your child when it comes to communication about their intersex status to other family members or school.

As for sexual orientation labels or intersex status, never share it with people if the person concerned did not consent to it. If you think someone else needs to know this information, discuss with the person first, ask for their consent and respect their wishes.



Include information about safe relationships and interactions, encourage students to brainstorm what kind of violent situations and gender based violence could occur and how they can address those ([Gender, Sexuality and Sexual Orientation: Training Manual](#) (2019, pages 45- 52).

Parents of intersex children may be posed in difficult situations regarding decision on early age surgeries for their child. Lot of support and information is offered by [Organization Intersex International Europe \(OI\)](#).

To prevent misogyny and inequality, challenge **gender stereotypes** ([for example with this technique](#)) and when working with children, treat them equally, giving them the same opportunities or offering the same toys/subjects and encourage them to try all kind of activities. Give examples of famous writers, scientists and public figures of all genders. Enhance respect and understanding. When dividing a classroom into groups, try to come up with other ideas than binary division (boys and girls), try for example a division based on who likes cats and who likes dogs, or a random division.

As skills of asking for consent are often missing, and sexual roles of people can be influenced by stereotypes based on gender, it might be useful to discuss **sexism**, its forms and create a space where sexism does not have a place.

### 5.1. Addressing sexism

To address sexism, you can get inspired by these tips below and see some case studies of specific schools [here](#). National Education Union and UK Feminista (2017) recommends:

Adopt a **‘whole school approach’ to tackling sexism**.

- A ‘whole school approach’ means action to promote equality between girls and boys is supported by an over-arching framework involving all members of the school community. This enables a consistent approach and long-term change.
- The three key components of a whole school approach are:
  - **An institutional framework:** put a strategy in place, support it through school policy, and drive it with leadership.
  - **Building staff capacity:** equip teachers and all staff with the skills, knowledge, and resources to understand, identify and tackle sexism, including through the provision of training opportunities.
  - **Empowering students:** enable students to discuss and learn about sexism, to report incidents, and to act for equality.

Take a **zero-tolerance approach to sexual harassment**.

- Sexual harassment should be specifically and explicitly addressed through school policy, including clear procedural guidelines which are consistently enforced. If it’s not addressed by the school, try addressing it inside of your classroom and normalize it.
- All staff should know what the school’s policies and procedures are regarding incidents of sexual harassment.
- All students should be aware of the school’s zero-tolerance approach to sexual harassment and be supported to report incidents.

Introductory class on sexual harassment for secondary age group (with simplifying the activity and small variations in it (most likely the quotes), it can be used in primary schools as well. For this you would need at least 60 minutes.

- Introduce what the class will be about and state the definition of sexual harassment:

### **Sexual harassment is unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature which:**

- Violates a person's dignity.
- Intimidates, degrades or humiliates someone; or
- Creates a hostile or offensive environment.

Sexual harassment can include verbal, non-verbal and physical acts – including sexual comments, taking 'up-skirt' photographs, or unwanted sexual touching. Sexual harassment is a form of violence against mostly women and girls, but it can affect people of any gender. When being aimed towards girls and women it is often underpinned by unequal power relations between women and men. It also includes unwanted sexual touching, where the target does not consent to the touching and the perpetrator does not reasonably believe they consent, constitutes sexual assault.

After that, divide the class into small groups and to each give a print of quotes of people who has been subject to sexual harassment. The groups should have 10 minutes to discuss these:

- "Some of the boys made comments on a lot of the girls in our years' bodies and the girls just have to ignore it because no one thinks it's a big deal. The boys also slap the girls' butts and touch their breasts without any consent."
- "The boys began to think it was hilarious to lift the girls' skirts. Us girls felt we had to laugh along as well, despite feeling humiliated."
- "After being together in a swimming pool, people in the class tried to guess the size of penis of some of the boys and making jokes about "small dick" and it was really embarrassing and humiliating."
- "I am nonbinary, yet in my expression quite feminine person - I like to wear short skirts, heels and I enjoy putting on make-up and stuff. Some people in the class (mainly boys) began to refer to me as "slut" or "sex worker" and when they'd meet me, they would make some kind of joke like "How is it going with your clients, how many you had today?", "Would you go with me? For how much? The people witnessing this always just laughed."

With each quote, ask the students to discuss these three points:

- What makes this sexual harassment?
- How do you think the person experiencing this harassment might feel?
- What action do you think should be taken?

After that, discuss with students:

- What were their answers to the three points above?
- If there were some common topics in the quotes?
- If they would agree on the answers or what were they discussing?
- Ask them how would they describe sexual harassment based on the quotes?

After that, introduce the new school policy. Inform them where to reach to for help if they are subject of sexual harassment and who are people responsible for this area in the school. Inform about how school will respond to individuals who perpetrate or participate in sexual harassment of another pupil or teacher.

Leave few minutes for questions.

## **6. LINKS TO VIDEO GAME**

- Simulation for cisgender and heterosexual people - how is it to be queer - when there is this pressure and expectation from everyone that you are straight and cis, feeling left out, having to be closeted, to lie when not feeling ready to come out.
- What it is to be accepted and not paid attention to (e.g., kissing between a heterosexual couple in public space) vs. what it may feel like to be gazed upon (e.g., kissing or holding hands in a same-gender/sex couple in public space). Although motivations for the gaze may differ and range from curiosity, support and acceptance to disapproval and disgust, they may not be read correctly by the involved parties, and they may feel uncomfortable and rather restrain themselves from expressing their sexualities in this way.
- Asking and practicing communication about consent to sexual activities.
- Being able to dress the character with whichever outfits, not restricted by gender.
- Include polyamorous relationships.
- Practicing coming out talk (from child's perspective, teacher's perspective, parent's perspective). What is the difference in preparation to coming out on the site of LGBTQ+ people and those to whom they come out? Perfect reaction may not be the first one as the other party also may need some time and space to process the information and react more appropriately.
- How to handle a situation of rejection in a romantic relationship? How to work with our own emotions (connection to incel topic?)
- Communicating different levels of sexual need among people (in a couple - someone has high sexual need, someone low, and they have to deal with it?), absence of desire, can I be asexual? Why defining it matters - process of affirmation.
- Include choice of pronouns when creating a character and offer asking about pronouns of other people in the game?
- Visualization of aspects usually consisting biological sex? (Hormones, chromosomes, genitalia, etc.)

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# 1.1. COMING OUT TO: A BEST FRIEND, PARENTS, CLASSMATES, COLLEAGUES

## 1. KEY POINTS

- ✓ There are many different reasons why LGBTQ+ people may or may not want to disclose their sexual or gender identities.
- ✓ Coming out can be seen as having three milestones:
  - People realizing their sexuality (or asexuality) might not be straight
  - Giving their experiences a name or label (gay, LGBTQ+, etc.)
  - Coming out to significant others
- ✓ People need to make coming out because we live in society, where it is expected to be cisgender and heterosexual - it is considered the norm (described by term cisheteronormative).

## 2. INTRODUCTION

Since the early 1970s, researchers focusing on healthy development of sexual minorities and the ways in which they assume sexual orientation identities or ascribe themselves by identity labels such as gay, lesbian, and later also bisexual etc. introduced a concept of **coming out** models. Coming out models were proposed to chart a progress of overcoming various but - sexual minority specific - challenges, typically during their adolescence and young adulthood (Cass, 1984; Troiden, 1979). These early "coming out" models typically assumed that sexual identity would develop in stages, starting with early childhood self-awareness, early recognition of same-sex desire during adolescence, sexual exploration during adulthood, self-acceptance, self-identification, and disclosure as gay/lesbian (and in later models, also as bisexual or others), and eventually leading to incorporation of same-sex sexual identity in young/emerging adulthood (Cass, 1984; Troiden, 1979). These early coming out models have become criticized for their methodological inaccuracy, lack of sensitivity to the surrounding cultural context, and for expectations of linearity of the process. They were also criticized for perpetuating a somewhat stereotypical narrative that was later nicknamed as a narrative of "struggle and success". Despite this, some aspects of the original models may be considered useful today (Cohler & Hammack 2007). Although we give much more attention to variability of contextual factors that influence one's sexual identity development, some factors may be considered as shared and conceptualized as milestones within the process of coming out.

These milestones typically begin when people realize they might not be straight (for example, by acknowledging their attraction to people of the same- or multiple- sex/gender); (ii) later they name or label these experiences (for example, by using the terms gay or LGBTQ+ in their understandings of self); and (iii) finally reach a point when they first disclose their identity, that is - come out, to significant others. This third milestone is oftentimes regarded as outer or external coming out, and there are multiple groups to which one may or may not want to disclose themselves.

This very "necessity" of coming out is in fact determined by the fact that we live in a world where culture and most of the social interactions are cis- and heteronormative. Cisheteronormativity is inasmuch normalized that it often became unremarkable or naturalized for straight people leaving them in a **privileged position** in which they do not have to come out to others about their sexuality, compared to all other groups with healthy non-cisgender distinctiveness and minority sexual orientations. Consequently, most people tend to assume, that others are cisgender and heterosexual. Perhaps in an ideal world, everyone would be open minded and would not automatically assume heterosexuality and cisgender status of others. In that kind of world LGBTQ+



people wouldn't need to come out. Nowadays, coming out especially of people who are publicly visible (tv hosts, artists, politicians, headteachers etc.) are especially important because they create a more open and welcoming atmosphere for young LGBTQ+ people and therefore making their coming out possibly a little bit easier.

An inclusive environment significantly reduces the stress associated with coming out. It is undoubtedly easier to come out in an environment where LGBTQ+ topics are commonly discussed, where there is no prejudice, where there is safety and trust. Coming out, on the other hand, can be made very difficult by any xenophobia or tabooing of LGBTQ+ topics. The inclusivity of the environment could be raised by LGBTQ+ people in position of power – for example openly LGBTQ+ teacher at schools.

### 3. DEVELOPMENT OF THE SUB-TOPIC

Attraction that forms the basis for adult sexual orientation emerge from middle childhood to early adolescence. These feelings can emerge without any prior sexual experience. Every coming out is different due to personal characteristics and also due to the context the person is growing up in (APA, 2008).

#### 1. Coming out in general

- Coming out is not a single event, but a never-ending process.
- Coming out could be extremely stressful, especially in a homo/transphobic environment.
- Trust is crucial for a safe coming out.

#### 2. Coming out to a best friend

- For many LGBTQ+ youth, their best friend is the first person to come out.
- Common advice is to come out to a close friend or other trusted person first.

#### 3. Coming out to parents

- Many young queer people fear the reaction of their parents the most due to religion, cultural or societal norms that can turn this conversation into a taboo topic. It is important to consider that in some countries, LGBTQ+ people do not even have the privilege/luxury to come out as their sexual orientation could be seen as a crime and punished with prison, isolation and in some extreme cases, death sentence.

#### 4. Coming out to classmates

- Coming out at school can be very stressful as schools are still places where LGBTQ+ people encounter homo/bi and transphobic and other discriminatory reactions very often (FRA, 2019).
- School should be a safe space for LGBTQ+ students to come out without fear of negative outcomes. The choice of sharing or not sharing this sensitive information always belongs to each and every student and the school should respect their decision and offer tools and support to make the process easier.
- The school environment is essential for safe coming out. School shouldn't be cisheteronormative and LGBTQ+ topics should be present during classes. You could start by using gender inclusive/neutral language in class, by offering access to age-appropriate informative resources or by expressing your availability and intention of support.

#### 5. Stigma by association / courtesy stigma

- **Courtesy stigma** is a tendency for a person to be stigmatized because of their closeness or association with stigmatized person. It can be experienced by friends and family of LGBTQ+

people. That can lead people who have negative attitudes towards LGBTQ+ people to also avoid their friends and family, or to think these acquaintances are LGBTQ+ too, or that they possess stereotyped personality traits associated to be gay/lesbian/trans, etc. This can be motivated by keeping the negative attitude towards LGBTQ+ people consistent and avoid cognitive dissonance (Sigelman et al., 1991). Other expression of the associated stigma can be **public stigma** - when the family members are stigmatized because they are being blamed for their loved one's LGBTQ+ identity (LaSala, 2010).

## 6. Coming out in terms of disclosure

- Not coming out to some in terms of concealment and passing as straight or cis person.
- The difference between concealment and disclosure.
- Multiple motivations of people not being out or authentic in different environments.

To come out, or not to come out? That is the question many LGBTQ+ people have to constantly consider. Why may some people choose not to come out in order to pass as straight/cis? The coming out strategies are different in each situation/context.

Sometimes LGBTQ+ people just don't consider coming out as necessary and they just don't mind if people around will or will not know that they are LGBTQ+. Especially if they are passing as straight or cis person it could be just easier to not explain other details about their sexuality or gender identity.

Concealment could be also a part of life strategy to stay safe. Especially for those, who are growing up in a homo/transphobic environment. Therefore, the strategies to support closeted LGBTQ+ youth should not always lead to coming out without considering all possibilities. Safety of the person should always be in first place.

The most important rule is that the coming out should always be in the hands of the person it relates to. Nobody has the right to make "coming out" for someone else without their agreement (to spread the information about someone's gender identity or/and sexual orientation without the person's knowledge and approval). Every LGBTQ+ person has the right to decide about their coming out (and it's time and form) voluntarily and independently.

## 4. SITUATIONS OF DISCRIMINATION RELATED TO THE SUB-TOPIC

What can be some points that LGBTQ+ people might consider when coming out?

- Misunderstanding and non-acceptance by parents and/or siblings.
- Rejection by closest friends.
- Being ridiculed and treated with hostility in peer groups.
- Negative depiction of LGBTQ+ persons in the media (on- and offline) and in the public space.
- Limitations in studies and professional paths.
- Social isolation.
- Being outed by others - online and offline.
- Being dismissed/not taken seriously when coming out, hearing reactions like "You'll know after you get proper sexual experiences".

Coming out is dangerous for many LGBTQ+ people. They face various kinds of discrimination, which affects their conditions and decision of coming out.

Read more in:

→ 4. [Violence](#)

→ 7. [European laws \(legal practice\)](#).

→ 9. [Environment influences](#)

→ 11. [Microaggressions](#)

### **Taboo**

If LGBTQ+ sexualities and identities are not discussed in a certain environment, it is likely that the majority is not familiar with the vocabulary to describe queer topics. In such an environment, coming out might require a lot of explaining and energy, which can complicate the situation. LGBTQ+ youth also cannot be sure if their family, friends, or teachers will accept their coming out well or if it will be unacceptable to them which is really stressful and can lead to hiding of one's identity.

### **Trivialization**

Sometimes parents and teachers tend to downplay or trivialize the queer identity of teenagers. Phrases like "you'll grow out of it" or "how can you be so confident at your age" can be very hurtful. Caregivers should provide children with safe space to let them explore themselves. If children grow up in the homo/transphobic environment, they will internalize this negative attitude and pathologizing view. This can backfire on themselves (if they are LGBTQ+) or on others in the form of homo/transphobic violence.

## **5. BEST PRACTICES (For teachers and for families)**

### **5.1. Creating a safe space and alliances**

How to create a safe space and be an ally which makes it easier for people to safely come out (Macháčková & Pavlica, 2020):

- By being respectful, open, and non-judgmental, you can create a space which is positive and open for everyone to be themselves.
- Educate yourself in LGBTQ+ area and potentially also others (for this, reach out for support you need from LGBTQ+ organization for example);
- Reflect on your own values and biases regarding sexual orientation and gender identity and how they influence your behaviour, how your education, environment and position in society shape your views of LGBTQ+ people.
- Include LGBTQ+ people and topics in your curriculum or talking (examples in literature, famous personas, inviting LGBTQ+ organization).
- Use inclusive language which is not harmful (for example say gay instead of homosexual - this term is outdated and has pathologizing connotation; respect people's identity and pronouns - you can always ask if you're not sure).
- Avoid laughing at homophobic jokes and avoid making assumptions about sexual orientation of people based on their appearance.
- Address homophobic jokes and remarks and set a positive example with your behaviour as an ally.

### **5.2. Supporting safe coming out**

If you are the person to whom an LGBTQ+ person comes out, it is important what your reaction will be. This applies both if you are in a professional relationship at the time, and also in the case of a personal relationship. How you could process and support someone when they confide in you and disclose that they are LGBTQ+ (Smetáčková, 2020):

- Listen to them. It takes a lot of courage and trust to come out.

- Avoid blaming, insulting, attacking, or condemning, insult, attack or condemn.
- If you are surprised, tell it sensitively. You have the right to do that. You can ask for time to absorb the news.
- Be honest and open about how you feel. Do not act theatrics but try to communicate objectively and respectfully. It is not only what we say that matters, but also how we say it.
- Talk about what the message means for your relationship. Reassure them that your relationship does not change, or in what sense it does.
- Ask about what interests you. Do not be afraid to talk about it, but do not interrogate. Do your research first if you do not have any information on the topic as LGBTQ+ people do not owe you education on the topic. They might be doing it every time they come out to someone.
- Respect the confidentiality of the conversation. Everything that is said should remain only between you. If you are convinced that someone else should receive the information, it is necessary to agree on this and obtain permission from the person who came out.

### 5.3. Education as prevention

- Talk to your children about relationships and sexuality and include LGBTQ+ examples in these discussions. You don't have to be an expert for LGBTQ+ topics. Just avoid stereotypical thinking about gender and sexuality, involve speaking about same sex/gender love and families, support possibilities for the child to express themselves freely regardless of gender stereotypes and give examples of non-stereotypical figures, which can be inspiring. Be open-minded and listen to your children. Let these discussions be part of your family quality time.
- Alternate cis and hetero with LGBTQ+ examples in teaching.

### 5.4. Other resources

- How to work with coming out topic as a teacher - activities and facilitators instructions (page 31-39):  
<https://www.fhi360.org/resource/gender-sexuality-and-sexual-orientation-training-manual>
- What to consider: [Gender, Sexuality and Sexual Orientation: Training Manual](#) (2019)

## 6. LINKS TO VIDEO GAME

These stories or conversations could be used in lessons to empathize the target group. Could be helpful in the game making process.

### 6.1. Coming out conversation between friends

Patricia is closeted pansexual, and Robert is her best friend. They are on a walk in a park together.

Patricia: *"Hey, I want to tell you something. It's hard for me to find the right words."*

Robert: *"You look serious! I'm listening. Don't worry, I'm here for you."*

Patricia: *"Well, I'm not sure, but I think I'm attracted to women."*

Robert: *"Really? I really appreciate you telling me that. How do you feel about that?"*

Patricia: *"Confused?"*

Robert: *"Haha, understand... and... uh... does your boyfriend know about it? What does this mean for your relationship? Will you break up?"*

Patricia: *"What? No! I'm still in love with him. I'm not lesbian, I think I'm pansexual, you know?"*

Robert: "Ooooh, that makes sense now! You have twice as many choices, or not? Sorry, that was just a silly joke. Is there anything I can do for you? I want to support you as much as possible." (This quote shows a myth about pansexual (sometimes this is mentioned also in regard to bisexual people) people being seen as hypersexual which is not true.)

Patricia: "You are helping. You are the first person I've come out to."

### **6.2. STORY: Inappropriate jokes make coming out to parents difficult**

Jack is a teenage boy who was assigned female at birth. He has a very kind and openminded mother, but his conservative father often makes jokes about homosexuality. Jack discovered his gender identity through YouTube videos and felt an increasing need to come out to his parents. He was mainly afraid of his father's reaction, but he also wasn't sure how his mother would handle it. Fortunately, Jack has a brother he could turn to for help and support with coming out. Both brothers agreed to tell their parents together, so Jack wasn't alone. The parents were shocked at first, but then started to understand what it meant to be trans and what the options were for the transition that Jack wanted and needed. Jack's mother visited the doctor with him and supported him during the transition and became a great trans ally. His father is not as supportive, but he respects Jack's identity and has stopped making inappropriate jokes about the LGBTQ+ community.

### **6.3. STORY: Coming out to classmates**

Alex is a genderfluid person and prefers to switch pronouns he/him and she/her. He wants her classmates to respect him, so she must explain them, what "genderfluid" means. Fortunately, they have a psychologist at school who understands LGBTQ+ topics and she prepares a lecture about gender for Alex's class.

### **6.4. STORY: Cisheteronormativity, coming out to colleagues**

Mary and Jennifer are a lesbian couple. Mary works at a company, where every Monday starts with a common breakfast, where colleagues usually talk about what they did at the weekend and what their plans are for the holiday. Mary doesn't like these breakfasts because she doesn't want to be *out* at work yet and it's hard to chat with others without mentioning her partner's name. She had bad experiences with mentioning that her partner is a woman - it usually leads to a conversation about LGBTQ+ related topics pointing the spotlight on their personal life.

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## 1.2. CISHETERONORMATIVE SEX EDUCATION

### 1. KEY POINTS

- ✓ There is a lack of inclusive sex education in schools.
- ✓ Where sexuality education does take place, it is very often Cisheteronormative, thereby excluding LGBTQ+ youth.
- ✓ Due to the workings of stigma and minority stress, the mental health of LGBTQ+ youth is significantly more at risk than that of their cisgender and heterosexual peers. Therefore, it is important to create a safe space and inclusive environment for everyone.
- ✓ The school plays a valuable role in providing a safe environment for the education of all pupils.

### 2. INTRODUCTION

Formal sex education in general reaches children too late and insufficiently. Teachers are often not trained to deliver respectful and inclusive sex education. In most cases, they had not gone through any sex education themselves. The support and training sex educators usually receive is centred on a Cisheteronormative perspective and does often not include diversity in terms of **sexuality** and gender identities. Therefore, there is a need for inclusive tools and training programs.

When taking a critical look at the available sex education and prevention of **homophobia**, **transphobia** and other types of **discrimination**, there are a few reasons that could help us see the bigger image and some of the reasons for the status quo:

- Teachers are not sufficiently educated on the **LGBTQ+** topics.
- School counsellors and psychologist often lack time or resources to introduce these topics into education.
- Some school curriculums choose to prioritise other subjects more than education for preventing discrimination.
- For various purposes, such as cultural or religious reasons, some parents do not want their or even other children to receive sex education at schools.
- Adults may be embarrassed to talk about sex themselves, they may feel unsure or unprepared to teach about topics such as consent, gender identity and sexual diversity since they receive no or very little training on these topics and no or very little up to date information.
- Schools may prefer to invite external lecturers, but they might not be sure how to check the quality of the programs beforehand to have truly knowledgeable and professional lecturers.
- In some contexts, there may be no official methodological documents that include prevention of discrimination when it comes to gender, sex and relationship diversity.
- Excluding of LGBTQ+ experience from education curriculum does not mean neutral attitude towards LGBTQ+ topics, but it validates cisheteronormative stereotypes, which leads to increase of minority stress towards LGBTQ+ youth.

When you notice signs of homo- /bi- / trans- negativity (“-phobia”) among the students, you should treat it like any other form of prejudice or xenophobia (e.g., racism). You should contact the school counselling centre and develop an individual plan to work with the student. Never let homonegative or transnegative remarks or attacks go unnoticed. The first thing you can do when you notice something inappropriate is to say that such things should not be said in school, because school is a

place for everyone without distinction. You can also say that you personally find such things inappropriate and don't like to hear them in the classroom. If you can, discuss later (when there are maybe bit less emotions involved) with students why they say such things and what do they mean.

You can start by addressing homo- / bi- / trans- negative language both among teachers and students:

- “That’s so gay”, “faggot”
- “Bisexual people just can make their mind up”
- Referring to trans person as “tranny”, or claiming they’re not “a real girl/boy”
- Misgendering deliberately trans or nonbinary people

Then as mentioning above, you can use your curriculum to involve information about LGBTQ+ people, else you can change your school policy accordingly and promote information together with this change to raise awareness. More useful tips can be found in [Stonewall Handbook](#).

### 3. DEVELOPMENT OF THE SUB-TOPIC

#### 3.1. Cisheteronormativity is harmful for everyone

**Cisheteronormativity** refers to a normative system within which the heterosexuality and/or cisgender identity (the condition under which gender assigned at birth is consistent with the gender self-identification of that person) are considered by society to be the only normal outcomes of adolescence, socialisation and the development of life relationships, and are therefore automatically assumed/expected of all (Pitoňák, 2017). As a result of cisheteronormativity, the range of other diverse forms of sexuality and gender identities are of unequal value. In this way, Cisheteronormativity determines stigmatization, discrimination and exclusion of LGBTQ+ people.

Consequently, growing up in a society that automatically assumes that all its members are **cisgender** and **heterosexual** can be difficult for LGBTQ+ youth, but it is important to consider that this mentality is affecting everyone, not only LGBTQ+ people themselves. It is also important to mention that heteronormativity is not equivalent to heterosexuality. Media representation and cultural norms reinforce these expectations on a daily basis through the representation and perpetuation of stereotypes and Cisheteronormative behaviours, images and subliminal messages. This environment can bring uncomfortable feelings of shame and inappropriateness for people who do not identify with this or do not fit in this category. Warner pointed out that no amount of legislation for LGBTQ+ adults can remove this hardship for many children who have been forced by society to belong to roles defined by Cisheteronormativity (Warner, 2000).

As mentioned before, Cisheteronormativity is harmful also for **cisgender** and heterosexual people. It's related to harmful patterns such as toxic masculinity, misogyny and even **gender stereotypes**. **Toxic masculinity** describes harmful exaggerated masculine norms which promote toxic behaviour such as violence, sexism, and dominance over women, and they among others negatively also affects men themselves, for example in the form of higher prevalence of mental health problems (Waling, 2019).

These Cisheteronormative norms about how “ideal” family should look like, how “ideal” gender expression should look like, how “ideal” sexuality of a person should look like etc. are enforced through promise of safety and belonging but also through exclusion and pathologizing of other variants (McNeill, 2013). It also leads to gender pay gap or even to gender-based, sexual, and domestic violence.

#### 3.2. Do not trivialize existence of LGBTQ+ youth

It is also extremely harmful if a part of society trivializes the **queer** experience and labels it as a trendy lifestyle. LGBTQ+ people are losing their freedom of expression to live their authentic lives and have to always consider what part of their true selves is appropriate for society and what is “too much” and they should hide it.

In *The Invention of Heterosexuality* Jonathan Ned Katz deconstructs the idea that people have always been heterosexual and that LGBTQ+ people are something “new” in society. He explains that sexuality is a complex axis of difference that takes many forms in different cultures - historically and geographically. He points out that heterosexuality as we know it today took shape in the last couple of centuries. The dichotomy of heterosexual and homosexual is a concept created mainly in the 20th century (Katz, 2007). Many cultures in which gender diverse and gender nonconforming persons were visible were diminished by westernization, colonialism, and systemic inequity (APA, 2015).

### **3.3. What is normal?**

Normality is a social construct, it may have power to affect everything that does not fit into it related norms, to be perceived weird or dismissed. Many people are conforming to the norms without even thinking about them. For example, a person might unthinkingly ask a person perceived as a woman about her boyfriend, assuming both her gender identity and **sexual/romantic orientation**. This is an example of naturalization of cisheteronormativity. Questioning the norms and realizing how they affect our values and everyday lives can be beneficial (Norm Criticism Toolkit).

It could also be harmful to compare the amount of visibility of LGBTQ+ people throughout various historical periods. LGBTQ+ terminology is relatively new. But so is the concept of romantic love as we know it today. Therefore, it is not possible to compare and quantify the forms of sexuality across history. But even we don't know exactly how many non-heterosexual and transgender people lived in the past, it is certain that such people always existed, and they were, are and will be a part of society (Rupp, 2001).

### **3.4. Are schools a safe space for LGBTQ+ youth?**

“Even in societies where sexual diversity seems to be generally accepted, schools in particular are still identified as one of the most homophobic (i. e. homonegative) social spaces. Homophobic language is commonplace in many schools and in many countries the term 'gay' is used by students (in both primary and secondary school settings) as an insult. For example, a UK study reported that 95% of secondary school teachers and three-quarters of primary school teachers had heard the phrases 'that's so gay' or 'you're so gay' used in this derogatory way. The same study also reported that 90% of secondary teachers and more than 40% of primary school teachers described homophobic bullying, name-calling or harassment in their schools, irrespective of their sexual orientation, and secondary school teachers identified homophobic bullying as the second most frequent form of bullying (after abuse relating to weight) (Dankmeije 2012, p. 6).

“In a US study, 57% of respondents reported that homophobic comments were made by school staff. [...] More than half of a sample of transgender young people reported being physically attacked, 74% reported sexual harassment at school and 90% said they felt unsafe at school because of their gender. These findings are reflected in similar studies in other countries, including Australia and the United Kingdom” (Dankmeije, 2012, p. 7).

Similarly results of a recent study conducted in Czechia show that on average only five out of 10 boys and eight out of 10 girls would be okay with having a gay classmate (Pitoňák & Spilková 2016). However, it is important to consider that this study only present part of the problem as it is using the gender binary and considering only sexuality and not gender or relationship diversity.

Schools can play an active role in promoting respect, diversity and inclusion and therefore creating an atmosphere where everyone feels accepted, everyone can focus and learn new stuff. Teachers

can mention gender identity and sexual orientation diversity in their classes and make LGBTQ+ children feel seen. Teachers can also discuss topics of gender stereotypes, personal boundaries, communication, and respect for each other. They also play important role model - by the way they speak, and they behave and take stance to LGBTQ+ rights and people, then they set positive example for others. The same goes for reactions to homophobic jokes and remarks.

#### 4. SITUATIONS OF DISCRIMINATION RELATED TO EACH THE SUB-TOPIC

Lack of acceptance and affirmation from the site of school staff and ignorance or undervaluing of the intentions and motivations of LGBTQ+ students may have serious consequences especially for trans students. Example of this situation may be a circumstance in which a trans student reaches out to their teacher or other school staff (e.g., school psychologist) and inform them about their self-identification and pronouns, The school does not acknowledge them and rather continues misgendering the student, through following their parents' wishes rather than their own. This situation may be particularly traumatizing for the trans student because their identity is being dismissed and it can also set a precedent for how other trans students might be treated in the school, which could lead to a lot of negative outcomes (mental health of LGBTQ+ youth, block coming out, fear o to ask for help when needed, isolation and dismissal of sexuality/gender/relationship diversity etc.).

Similarly, a coming out of a queer student within a classroom environment may incite discrimination from the site of classmates. School staff is responsible for making the classroom environment a safe space for all students, including LGBTQ+ students.

Everyday **microaggressions** taking the form of seemingly inoffensive jokes or statements are, in fact, deepening the cisheteronormative perspective and perpetuating specific social norms, behaviours and attitudes. This environment fosters discrimination and discrimination constitutes the backbone for the further and deeper normalization of the cisheteronormativity.

Another example of cisheteronormative sex education if when LGBTQ+ issues or more often only issues discussed with obsolete terminology such as "homosexuality" o if LGBTQ+ issues are contextualized only in context of the risk of **Sexually Transmitted Infections** (STIs) and **Sexually Transmitted Diseases** (STDs) transmission, specifically human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). Teachers and parents should avoid conflating the topics.

All students would benefit from learning about safer sex practices that go beyond the Cisheteronormative information or condom use. Teachers or other school staff should for example offer information about topics such as anal hygiene or the use of **PrEP** (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis: medicine people at risk for HIV can take to prevent the transmission), or **PEP** (Post-Exposure Prophylaxis: medicine that may be used to prevent HIV infection within 72 hours after exposure) when asked about and avoid stigmatizing these practices.

Parents tend to ask their children about their potential partners: "Hey, son, when will you finally find a girlfriend?" We should not assume that everyone 1) is cisgender and heterosexual or 2) want to be a relationship at all. This kind of comment is one of the microaggressions that LGBTQ+ people face every day and that contributes to the maintaining of a cisheteronormative perspective.

For more examples, follow this link to [sexual diversity topic](#).

#### 5. BEST PRACTICES (For teachers and for families)

One of the ways to avoid cisheteronormative patterns in your behaviour is to use inclusive or neutral language. What does it mean? (See Table 1)

Table 1. Examples of Inclusive or neutral language

Instead of:	Try:
Ladies and gentlemen	Esteemed guests/people/folks
Boys and girls	Students
Men and women	Everyone
Brothers and sisters	Siblings

### 5.1. Comprehensive and inclusive sexual education includes (Tolerance, 2018, p.15):

- Discussion of gender identities and sexual orientation— not just as a special topic, but included throughout the entire coursework. For example, if you are talking about relationships or sexual activities, you can use gender neutral terms as “when two people fall in love” instead of “when man and woman fall in love”.
- Examples of healthy and diverse relationships, including same-sex/gender relationships.
- Examples of diverse family constructions, including families with same-sex/gender couples.
- Information for safe and protected sex practices for people of all gender and sexual identities.
- Medically accurate, myth-free, and age-appropriate information on sexually transmitted infections and prevention of them, including but not limited to HIV/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS).
- Teaching that does not assume students’ sexual/romantic orientations and gender identities, and that covers LGBTQ+ topics whether students in the class are “out” or not.

### 5.2. Recommendation:

- **“Conduct a visual audit of your classroom** to examine your wall posters and other visible materials. Do they represent individuals with diverse gender expressions? Are there portrayals of “non-traditional families” or families with LGBTQ+ members?
- **Refer to a group of kids as students, scholars, class, friends, or everybody.** Avoid the binary term “boys and girls.”
- **Avoid separating students according to gender.** Dividing students along binary lines only enforces feelings of difference. When dividing students into teams, for partner work or to form a line, use rows, table groups or sides of the room.
- **In casual conversations with students, avoid making assumptions based on gender** such as, “boys will be boys” or “girls love to gossip.” Never tease or joke around with students in a way that presumes cisgender identity or heterosexual orientation.
- **Encourage all students to try different types of activities.** Do not ask for a group of “strong boys” to help carry furniture or “artistic girls” to decorate a bulletin board. Include everyone in a wide range of classroom activities and offer equitable opportunity for participation.” **Learning for justice (2021): Teaching Tolerance (a project of the Southern Poverty Law Centre).**

You can partner up with organizations, that work towards the inclusion of the LGBTQ+ community and can offer resources, and tools. You can also get familiar with most common myths about the LGBTQ+ community and with arguments against comprehensive and inclusive sex education and learn how you can deconstruct them when teaching about the value of inclusion. It is important to firstly acknowledge and learn how to deconstruct what we learned throughout our lives for us to comprehend why our behaviours and attitudes may be biased and perpetuating harmful misinformation. A valuable resource is [this guide](#).

## 6. LINKS TO VIDEO GAME

Some training in an inclusive language would be great. Maybe players could find non-inclusive words in some text and replace them with more inclusive ones.

Situations related to the examples of discrimination as mentioned above.

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