

2. IDENTITY: GENDER DIVERSITY

2.1. GENDER IDENTITY

1. KEY POINTS

- ✓ Person's gender is a complex interrelationship between three dimensions: body, identity, and social expression.
- ✓ Our gender system has been non-binary since the beginning of time.
- ✓ Transgender children can know in early childhood that the gender assigned by birth does not match their gender identity.
- ✓ A teacher can contribute to the creation of a safe and inclusive school environment if, for example, they talk about the diversity of gender identities in their lessons.

2. INTRODUCTION

Exploring and finding your identity, including your gender identity, can be a difficult journey that may include one's low self-esteem, questioning, searching, fears, and losses, but also joy, discovering themselves and a sense of belonging. Part of a person's identity is the desire to belong to other people, but this desire can be an obstacle from painlessly defining, accepting, and disclosing their gender identity. Therefore, it is important that when educating and bringing up young people, we also need to focus on issues of gender diversity.

Sharing science-based information is one way to support young people on their journey. In addition, addressing this subject gives a clear signal to young people that different gender identities and gender expressions are part of the normal diversity of society, which allows the young person to grow into a safe and happy adult. In today's world, where, for example, sex education and LGBTQ+ issues have often turned into a politicized topics, it is especially important to talk to young people about these issues openly, boldly and using a science-based approach. In addition, numerous information about gender identities is available in social media and in different progressive series, so the younger generation can sometimes be informed about gender even more diversely than their parents or educators.

3. DEVELOPMENT OF THE SUB-TOPIC

Although a person's biological sex includes anatomy (breasts, vagina, penis, testicles), physiology (functioning of the hormonal system, menstrual cycle, sperm production) and genetics (chromosome types) (WHO, n.d.), at birth a new-born's sex is assigned as either male or female (some countries offer a third option) mostly based on the baby's genitals. And we presume the child's gender identity based on that (Gender Spectrum, 2019).

But a person's gender is a complex interrelationship between three dimensions: body, identity, and expression (Gender Spectrum, 2019), so therefore, often the sex assigned at birth may match a person's gender identity, but other times it may not.

3.1. Gender identity

Gender identity refers to a person's internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not match their physiology or the gender assigned at birth (WHO, n.d.). Since gender identity is a personal experience, it cannot be determined or regulated by anyone else. Gender identity can be man, woman, nonbinary, fluid, etc.

3.2. Development of Gender Identity

At the beginning the first years of a child's life, they become a part of a gender-typical way of behaviour, which demonstrates itself as the attribution of the corresponding social gender. Even if children aren't yet able to speak and don't establish connections with objects and actions of the surrounding world, behaviours corresponding to their gender are assigned to them. For example, parents express excitement when a child has done something that matches their gender and react in the opposite way when a child has behaved in a way that is appropriate for a child of the opposite sex. Such negative and positive reactions are creating connections and will settle in the future. That may lead to that girls start paying more attention to their female role models and boys to the male role models, even though they don't yet have any knowledge or experience how to identify themselves or others on the basis of gender. From the time children begin to understand speech, they also begin to understand that there is a lot of gender labelling around. During their growth, as a result of social-cognitive processing, children begin to define themselves as boys or girls, which is the impetus for acquiring gender-appropriate behaviour and gender-related characteristics (Marecek et al., 2004).

3.3. The Identity of a Trans Child

The preceding paragraph describes a situation that might be applied to most children but is not applicable to those whose gender assigned at birth and gender identity don't match. Various research findings indicate that a lot of trans people's questions and conflicts regarding their gender identity have emerged in early childhood (Mason-Schrock, 1996; Morgan & Stevens, 2008, cited in Patterson & D'Augelli, 2013). Since Kessler and McKenna (1978) concluded during their research that gender identity begins to be understood at the age of three or four, and within a few years it is understood that it is permanent, it can be determined that contradictions regarding children's gender perception arise at the same time as the surrounding world begins to attribute their social gender to the corresponding biological gender. When the social gender happens to be different from the biological sex, it causes confusion in children (Patterson & D'Augelli, 2013). Similar findings can also be noted in the studies of Gagne et al. (1997), Devor (2004) and Budge et al. (2013) – respondents of all studies already felt in early childhood that the gender assigned at birth caused them discomfort and they felt that they didn't fit in with others.

University of Washington study, largest of its kind published findings showing that no matter how long a trans child has been considered and treated as cis child, their gender identity is as strong as it is in cisgender children. Researchers found this similarity surprising, because trans children in the research were treated as cis children and cis children weren't treated as trans children (Eckart, 2019). Understanding these findings could help adults better support children during their development, gender identity and social transitions.

3.4. Binary and non-binary gender systems

According to the binary gender system, people are divided into two - male and female, and this is due to the sex assigned to them at birth. According to the non-binary gender system, person's gender is a complex interrelationship between three dimensions: body, identity, and expression (Gender Spectrum, n.d.) all of which are separate and at times may not coincide. Adding to that the spectrum of gender identity is considered wider than just a man - woman.

Although in today's western culture, we still tend to see gender as a binary system, when in fact the gender system has always been non-binary. Various anthropological and historical studies show this, and even today in many ancient cultures, the non-binary gender system continues to be a functioning appearance (United Nations Free and Equal, 2014). For example, Native Americans have always had *two-spirit* people, India has Hijras (the hijra community in India prefer to call themselves "kinnar"); or Māhū, from Hawaii or Tahiti.

The non-binary approach to the gender system allows transgender and **intersex** people to express themselves according to their identity and is inclusive and respectful towards them.

3.5. Diversity Gender Identities

- **Cisgender:** A person whose gender identity is aligned with the sex they were assigned at birth, describes people who are not transgender. "Cis-" is a Latin prefix meaning "on the same side as" and is therefore an antonym of "trans-". Commonly used by younger people and transgender people (GLAAD, n.d.).
- **Transgender person (trans person):** A person whose gender identity is different from the sex they were assigned at birth. A person who is trans may also use other terms, in addition to trans, to describe their gender more specifically. Being trans does not depend upon physical appearance or medical procedures – a person can call themselves trans the moment they realize that their gender identity is different than the sex they were assigned at birth (GLAAD, n.d.).
- **Non-binary Gender Identity:** Some people don't fit into the categories of "man" or "woman," or "male" or "female." For example, some people identify with more than one gender, or a gender that is neither male nor female. Some people don't identify with any gender. Some people have a fluctuating gender identity. Non-binary identities fall under the transgender umbrella (GLAAD, n.d.). Other terms besides non-binary can be genderqueer, agender, bigender, and more. None of these terms mean exactly the same thing – but common understanding is that it's the experience of gender that is not explicitly male or female (National Centre for Transgender Equality, 2018).

Different gender labels can mean different things to people, that means if a person discloses their gender identity to you, you could ask them to explain what that means to them. In that case, it will be easier for you to be supportive as a teacher or parent.

4. SITUATIONS OF DISCRIMINATION RELATED TO THE SUB-TOPIC

A transgender boy asks the school staff to use his chosen name and the pronouns he/his in the future.

Most teachers try to use the young person's requested name and pronoun, but there is still one teacher in the school who continues to disregard the child's self-determination and uses his old name (deadnaming) and calls him a girl (misgendering) when addressing him. The child repeatedly draws the teacher's attention to the use of the wrong name and gender, but the teacher continues his activity.

This situation is discriminatory, inaccurate, and misleading towards the student and depending on the laws adopted can be in violation of the child's rights of privacy and self-determination and expression. In such a situation, it is recommended that parents contact the school management for assistance. It is important to explain to the management that using the child's preferred name and gender is a life-saving approach for trans children.

In case of discrimination, the parents/school must always ask the child what kind of support they would need in order to feel safe after such a situation.

If the child cannot say for themselves what would help them feel safe and included, it is recommended to ask for advice from an LGBTQ+ organization with experience in the field of education. They can give advice or refer you to the necessary expert.

5. BEST PRACTICES (For teachers and for families)

Teachers have the opportunity to provide children with a safe and inclusive environment using small and simple activities.

- Create an inclusive curriculum where gender diversity topics are included. It is recommended that gender topics are not being handled separately from the main topics but are naturally integrated into the curriculum.
- Make yourself visible to children by wearing the LGBTQ+ symbols or keeping it in your class. In this way, a student can be sure who is the supportive adult at their school. Students need to know who the safe staff at school is, whom they can turn to if needed. This is necessary so that if the child has a previous negative experience with a specialist, or if they do not have a supportive family, etc., then they will find a safe adult to talk to at school and they will not be left alone with their questions and concerns.
- Propose to the school management that, next to gender-specific rooms, there should also be unisex rooms - toilets, locker-room, etc.
- Propose to the school management to celebrate different LGBTQ+ themed days at the school, such as IDAHOBIT, to create a support group for LGBTQ+ students and LGBTQ+ teachers, to add LGBTQ+ topics to school documents, for example, that bullying on the basis of LGBTQ+ is not tolerated in the school.

Visibility is one of the most important things students need - LGBTQ+ issues are mentioned in important school documents, LGBTQ+ friendly school staff are visible, etc.

Studies have shown that the more inclusive and safer a school is for LGBTQ+ students, the more likely they are to skip classes, have higher self-esteem, lower stress levels, better academic results, etc. In addition, other students are more open to LGBTQ+ topics.

In order to avoid discomfort and confusion arising from a child's own diversity, parents are advised to act according to their children's own gender perception and to allow children to start the transition to their cognitive gender at an early age. Especially since it has been proven that attempts to adjust transgender children to their sex assigned at birth can cause them to experience symptoms of depression or even lead to permanent psychological damage. In addition, allowing them to express their perceived gender in public helps them to adapt to their own gender in society better as they grow up and thereby avoid discomfort and negative feelings (Patterson & D'Augelli, 2013).

To make trans children feel good about themselves, one must first ask them what they need to feel good about themselves. At this point, the parent should not worry that supporting children starts with medical intervention, because the first steps are still small but have a great impact on them.

- Help them adopt a name that is more compatible with their gender identity.
- Sometimes the child and the parents choose a new name together, for example the name that the parents would have given the child if it had been of a different gender. Sometimes the child wants to choose a new name himself. Sometimes the family wants to celebrate the name and gender identity together because it helps them to adapt to the new situation and accept it with joy. There are no right or wrong actions here, choose what is best for your family and child.
- Start using words referring to their gender identity such as sister, brother, she, he, they, etc.
- Next, you can think together about the child's gender self-expression, whether there is something they want to change clothes, make-up, etc.
- If the child wants other family members (aunts, uncles, etc.) to know their correct gender identity, then you can discuss together how and when to tell them.
- If the child wants the school/kindergarten/club, etc. to know their correct gender identity, you can discuss together how and when to tell them.

If your child has told you their gender identity, which does not match the gender assigned to them at birth, then it can mean that the parent can experience the beginning of a new journey. That may include fear, guilt, loss, joy, finding, etc. While supporting your child, do not forget to seek support yourself.

What if my child is not trans? It is often the parents' fear that their child will make the wrong decision. At this point, it is good to read more about trans issues, meet the parents of transgender children, or meet the trans counsellors to understand when and how children realize they are trans. In addition, the most important thing is to listen to your child, because their feeling could never be wrong, but what exactly is their story behind that feeling, you can safely discover together with your child. As a parent, you don't have to know all the answers, but you must be able to listen, trust and support them and direct them to the necessary information or specialist. At the same time, don't let your own fears and worries be an obstacle for your child's journey.

6. LINKS TO VIDEO GAME

The student says he doesn't understand why there are so many different gender identities, and why people can't just be happy with the gender they are assigned at birth. The teacher explains:

- Gender is more complicated than just our biology and gender identity is separate from biological gender.
- The multiplicity of gender identity labels comes from the fact that we are all different and different labels give everyone the opportunity to better understand and describe themselves.
- In addition, it gives a sense of belonging. That means that we can find people with similar stories and exchange experiences and information with them if it's needed.

2.2. GENDER EXPRESSION

1. KEY POINTS

- ✓ A person's gender self-expression may not always reflect their gender identity because of not feeling comfortable / fear of discrimination.
- ✓ Social gender can be variable in time and space; therefore, it cannot be the norm. There is no right or wrong gender expression.
- ✓ Every school has students who are transgender, non-binary or have different gender self-expressions. This is the reason that schools should take that into account when setting requirements for accessibility and self-expression such as clothing, etc.

2. INTRODUCTION

When a person enters a room, one of the first things we notice about them is how they look, and their gender is often determined based on that. We often think about it so quickly that we may not even acknowledge it. Due to societal influences, we have come to understand that certain forms of self-expression are related to a certain gender, for example, women wear dresses. However, the world of gender expression is just as diverse and exciting, and perceptions of alleged binary have changed a lot over time.

3. DEVELOPMENT OF THE SUB-TOPIC

3.1. Gender

Gender is socially created set of expectations, behaviours, and activities that are associated to men and women based on their sex. Any particular set of gender roles' social expectations are influenced by a variety of socioeconomic, political, and cultural contexts as well as other elements including race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, and age. The roles that women and men play in human society are learned, diverse, and ever-changing (Council of Europe, n.d.).

Since the moment of our birth, we are socialized. Our family, school, workplace, media, new information technologies, and popular culture all have a significant impact on how we develop, grow, and learn about how to behave in accordance with the society we live in. For individuals to contribute to a group of people effectively, socialization is a crucial process. However, not all of the messages we are exposed to as part of our socialization can be viewed as being advantageous to either ourselves or society. Children may be unable to fully develop their talents and interests due to gender socialization. Often unrealistic and conflicting expectations can lead to internal conflicts and psychological problems, and failure to meet these expectations can lead to some form of punishment from others (Council of Europe, n.d.).

3.2. Gender expression

Gender expression may be the expression of an individual's gender identity, including the use of name, pronouns, clothing, haircut, behaviour, voice, or body characteristics.

It is important to stress that the way somebody expresses their gender does not always precept the gender they identify with. Lot of people try to hide or suppress their gender expression out of fear of negative responses or discrimination, both of which can have a major harmful consequence on their mental health. In fact, many transgender mental health issues arise from the worry or negative reactions of their gender expression (O'Neill, 2021).

As society has a well-established understanding of what a man or woman should look like, this pressure can create obstacles for young people (as well as adults) on the journey of understanding their identity and finding their comfortable place in society.

3.3. Different gender expressions

- **Androgyne:** someone who has a gender presentation or identity that's gender-neutral, androgynous, or has both masculine and feminine characteristics.
- **Cross-dressing:** the name for the act of a person wearing clothing usually associated with a different gender. Cross-dressing is not synonymous with being transgender.
- **Butch:** primarily used in LGBTQ+ communities, this term typically describes someone with a presentation, sexuality, or gender that is considered masculine.

These are just a few examples of different gender expressions. Some of the gender expressions, especially when the gender expression does not match the sex assigned at birth, can also fall under the umbrella term trans. Whether or not a person places themselves under the term trans is a personal decision.

Different gender identity or expression labels can mean different things to people, that means if a person discloses their gender identity or expression to you, you could ask them to explain what that means to them. In that case, it will be easier for you to be supportive as a teacher or parent.

3.4. Gender Expression in time and cultures

Gender expression changes over time because it is related to society's understanding of masculinity and femininity. Just as society changes over time and space, so do perceptions of men, women, masculinity, femininity, and gender in general.

As a good example, we can look back to the history of the colours pink and blue, which are also often associated with gender – girls wear pink clothes and boys wear blue. However, these colours have not always been this way. At the beginning of the 20th century, some stores began suggesting “sex-appropriate” colours, when originally pink for the boys, and blue for the girls, because the pink, being a more decided and stronger colour, is more suitable for the boy, while blue, which is more delicate and daintier, is prettier for the girl.” In the 1940s, children were dressed in sex-specific clothing – boys and girls were dressed like miniature men and women. Pink became the girls’ colour, blue the boys’ (Grannan, 2016).

However, if we look at gender self-expression through different cultural spaces, we see that there are also different understandings of what makes a person masculine or feminine. In many cultural spaces, for example, a skirt is only a woman's clothing, but there are cultural spaces where men also wear a skirt, for example, Scottish men wear a skirt (kilt) on a festive day, or a policeman wears a skirt (sulu) in Fiji.

Although social gender and its parts (gender roles, self-expression, etc.) are changing in time and space, people and society still collide, because someone's gender expression is not, as it were, right or appropriate. At the same time, we as a society should not judge people based on their gender expression, because what is masculine or feminine today may not be so in a hundred years.

5. BEST PRACTICES (For teachers and for families)

Teachers have the opportunity to provide children with a safe and inclusive environment using small and simple activities.

- Create an inclusive curriculum where gender diversity topics are included. It is recommended that gender topics are not being handled separately from the main topics but are naturally integrated into the curriculum.

- Children need to be talked to more about the fact that gender, including gender self-expression, do not have a norm. Self-expression is part of our identity, there is no right, or wrong way and it can change through time.
- Make yourself visible to children by wearing the LGBTQ+ symbols or keeping it in your class. In this way, a student can be sure who is the safe adult at their school. Students need to know who the safe staff at school is, whom they can turn to if needed. This is necessary so that if the child has a previous negative experience with a specialist, or if they do not have a supportive family, etc., then they will find a safe adult to talk to at school and they will not be left alone with their questions and concerns.
- Propose to the school management that, next to gender-specific rooms, there should also be unisex rooms - toilets, locker-room, etc.

Every school has students who are transgender, non-binary and have different gender self-expressions. In order to be more accessible to every student, schools should take this into account when they design their school uniform or set specific requirements for students on clothing, hairstyle, jewellery, make-up, etc.

If you want your child to feel free to express their gender however, they want, then you should encourage them to experiment with their gender expression. This freedom helps them find their true selves and thus grow into happy adults. You can set an example by offering to explore the gender expression possibilities together – research, discuss, play.

6. LINKS TO VIDEO GAME

The boy tells his father that he has experimented with make-up at home, and he likes it, and he would like to use it outside the home as well, but he is afraid of the attitude of his peers.

Father encourages:

- Make-up has never been only a women's topic, citing examples from history as well as from different cultures.
- Make-up does not make you less of a man, but helps you express yourself better.

2.3. CISNORMATIVITY

1. KEY POINTS

- ✓ Due to society's cisnormativity, transgender children and youth face a wide range of barriers, difficulties, and injustices at school.
- ✓ Educational inequalities arising from trans student's identity affect their emotional and psychological health and their ability to participate in education.
- ✓ By changing the perspective and seeing people as diverse human beings, education professionals and every adult can positively influence how a child understands the world and interacts with those around them.

2. INTRODUCTION

Over time, a perception has developed that heterosexual and cisgender people are the "norm" and all other different forms are perceived to be "different". People's established social beliefs, policies and the media are confirming this understanding. At the same time, differences have become more visible in society and "norms" no longer (if ever) reflect reality - the diversity of people's identities and self-definitions is visible everywhere around us.

3. DEVELOPMENT OF THE SUB-TOPIC

3.1. Cisnormativity

The word cisnormativity was first used in the 2000s. It is a combination of the prefix cis-, as in cisgender, and the suffix -normativity, as a complement to heteronormativity. The term cisnormativity was developed to describe the socio-cultural assumptions and expectations that all people are cissexual or cisgendered (Bauer et al., 2009). Although cisnormativity is rarely deliberate, it is often perceived as hurtful and offensive to the trans* community.

Cisnormativity can be understood as the belief system underpinning transphobia, which is described as the "irrational fear or hatred of trans people" (Israel & Tarver, 1997).

3.2. Transnegativity and Transphobia

Transnegativity is a range of behaviours, belief-based cognitive injunctions, and negative affective reactions related to trans persons. The term transnegativity could be defined by "any biased attitude, discriminating or victimizing behavioural action either overtly or covertly directed toward an individual because they are, or are believed to be, trans." (McDermott et al., 2018).

Transphobia is the fear, hatred, disbelief, or mistrust of people who are transgender, thought to be transgender, or whose gender expression doesn't conform to traditional gender roles (Chrisler & McCreary, 2010). It can be expressed in many forms, as negative attitudes, aversion to and prejudice against transgender people, irrational fear and misunderstanding, derogatory language and name-calling, bullying, violence etc (Egale, 2019).

Besides the long-used term "transphobia" there is a newly introduced term "**cissexism**". It can be understood as form of oppression and discrimination by those who fear, disbelieve or dislike people who are gender non-conforming (Zambon, 2021). The medical journal Medical News Today describes that people experiencing cissexism are likely to experience depression, anxiety, posttraumatic stress, and general psychological distress. It also can affect physical health in multiple ways in having worse access to healthcare, experiencing violence and abuse and other direct health effects such as high blood pressure, strokes, diabetes etc.

3.3. Educational Injustice

Transgender children and youth are known to face a wide range of barriers, difficulties, and injustices at school. As related to school environments people often presume a stable cisgender norm – the normalised assumption that everyone identifies with the gender assigned to them at birth; and, that gender identity stated at birth and doesn't change (Simmons & White, 2014). Cisgender students are privileged by schools' institutionalized cisnormativity and different gender expressions tend to be not welcomed (Miller, 2016).

School policies reinforce non-recognition and non-representation that invalidate trans identities, in worst cases enable bullying and physical harassment and teacher bias that affect education and lives of trans youth (Mcbride et al., 2020). Studies show that educational inequalities, injustices arising from trans* student's identity affect their emotional and psychological health and their ability to participate in education (Meyer et al., 2016).

In reality trans youth are too often left to speak about their own inclusion and acceptance within schools who are poorly prepared and not equipped to welcome trans students (Ullman, 2016). In other cases, parents and carers often take on a significant role in advocating for school inclusion, but too often it depends on whether the family is supportive or not (Neary, 2019).

Every young child deserves to feel seen and heard as their authentic self and to be in the care of responsive adults who are committed to helping them feel a strong sense of safety, visibility, and belonging in the classroom. This requires that trans children and youth are directed and welcomed to environments that communicate and reinforce the positive and affirming messages of who they are and the knowledge of gender diversity (Steele & Nicholson, 2020).

3.4. The Impact on Youth

Due to cisnormativity, it is sometimes difficult for people to understand that there are more gender identities and self-expressions who are part of the diversity of society. That is not a phase or fad that cannot be cured, which does not divide society or does not set a bad example for children. Such a misunderstanding can also led to fear or even anger towards the trans community.

A wrong perception of gender can cause difficulties and insecurity in teenagers in defining their identity, these external negative factors may then turn lead to risky behaviour, stress, depression, or suicide. Therefore, it is extremely important that every young person receives information about gender.

For a child who is non-heterosexual or non-cisgender, an environment where they do not feel represented or where they feel hated can have destructive effects. Negative environments can have effect on their mental health,-learning, self-esteem, and sense of self-worth. They are growing up in environments where boys and girls are segregated for sports or home education classes, where they are taught that anything other than a family with a mother and a father doesn't exist or is 'wrong'. By changing the perspective and seeing people as diverse human beings, education professionals and also every adult can positively influence how a child understands the world and interacts with those around them. Hopefully, resulting in a people who are accepting and considering all people, regardless of their identity (LGBTQ+ Primary Hub, n.d.).

4. SITUATIONS OF DISCRIMINATION RELATED TO THE SUB-TOPIC

There is a need to develop

5. BEST PRACTICES (For teachers and for families)

Small changes lead to big impacts:

- Listen to a child! Ask questions and have a conversation, rather than making assumptions.
- Consider that a child might not be heterosexual and/or cisgender and don't assume that child's parents are heterosexual and cisgender.
- Be an active ally and be ready to express that, educate yourself.
- Give children a guidance how can they educate themselves.
- Ask yourself the same challenging questions about gender and sexuality as you ask from a child.
- Use gender neutral language.
- Create an inclusive curriculum where gender diversity and different sexual orientations topics are included.

6. LINKS TO VIDEO GAME

A parent turns to the teacher because he is not happy that the teacher has talked about LGBT+ topics in class, because thinks it's propaganda and his child might want to be gay because of that, or maybe he will start to doubt his gender.

The teacher explains:

- Science-based speaking of topics, including LGBT topics, is necessary for children to understand the diversity of the world, to be able to be empathetic, and also to learn to feel shameless, knowing that gender identities and sexual orientations don't have a norm.
- Talking about LGBT topics does not make children gay or trans, but it can help some LGBT youth to discover themselves safely.

2.4. GENDER EQUALITY

1. KEY POINTS

- ✓ **Gender equality** (equality between women and men): refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys (masculinities and femininities).
- ✓ Gender equality in society is not directly related to identity issues, but efforts are made to reduce the negative impact of gender inequality and the myths and stereotypes that maintain it on the development of individuals.
- ✓ Breaking down gender stereotypes from a young age helps to stop negative consequences of inequality and discrimination as it can support children to grow into adults who are not limited by expectations based on their gender.
- ✓ Since gender roles, responsibilities and identities are socially learned, they can also be changed through education.
- ✓ When talking about gender equality, it should be kept in mind that rigid gender norms negatively affect people with diverse identities, who often come into contact with violence, shaming and discrimination.

2. INTRODUCTION

Gender equality in society is not directly related to identity issues, but efforts are made to reduce the negative impact of gender inequality and the myths and stereotypes that maintain it on the development of individuals.

Gender education is a necessary part of curricula at all levels of the education system, which would enable both girls and boys, women and men in their diversity to understand how constructions of masculinities and femininities and models for assigning social roles – which shape our societies – influence their lives, relationships, life choices, career trajectories, etc (Council of Europe, 2007).

The aim of the following text is to support teachers for discussing with students about gender equality, inequality and gender norms, roles, and gender stereotypes in society.

3. DEVELOPMENT OF THE SUB-TOPIC

3.1. Gender

Gender is a social and cultural construct, which distinguishes differences in the attributes of men and women, girls, and boys, and accordingly refers to the roles and responsibilities of men and women. Gender-based roles and other attributes, therefore, change over time and vary with different cultural contexts. The concept of gender includes the expectations held about the characteristics, aptitudes and likely behaviours of both women and men (femininity and masculinity). This concept is useful in analysing how commonly shared practices legitimize discrepancies between sexes (UNICEF, 2017).

EIGE defines gender that refers to the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationships between women and men and girls and boys, as well as the relations between women and those between men. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialization processes. They are context/time-specific and changeable. Gender determines what is expected, allowed, and valued in a woman or a man in each context. In most societies there are differences and inequalities between women and men in responsibilities assigned, activities undertaken, access to and control over resources, as well as decision-making opportunities. Gender is part of the broader socio-cultural

context. Other important criteria for socio-cultural analysis include class, race, poverty level, ethnic group and age (European Institute for Gender Equality, n.d.-a).

Gender as a concept refers to the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationships between women and men and girls and boys, as well as the relations between women and those between men. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialization processes, it means that gender is something that is produced through interaction between people (UNESCO and UN Women, 2016)

3.2. What is gender equality?

Gender equality (equality between women and men) refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men. Gender equality is not a women's issue but should concern and fully engage men as well as women. Equality between women and men is seen both as a human rights issue and as a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centred development (European Institute for Gender Equality, n.d.-a).

Progress towards achieving gender equality is measured by looking at the representation of men and of women in a range of roles on the base of data of sex -disaggregated indicators of economic, cultural, and social spheres.

The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) EU Gender Equality Index (European Institute for Gender Equality, n.d.-b) provides an easily interpretable measure of gender equality in the EU across 6 key policy domains – work, money, knowledge, time, power and health, and two satellite domains (violence and intersecting inequalities). A number of international comparative gender equality indices also exist showing differences in the situations of women and men, offering a way to compare achievements of countries.

The statistical data provided by sex make it possible to highlight differences in the lives of women and men, girls, and boys. When analysing the causes of inequality on the basis of statistical (factual) differences between women and men, different social norms, rules, gender roles, attitudes, stereotypical expectations, which apply to women and men must be considered. The concept of sex is biological while gender is the cultural or social interpretation of sex (Cole, 2019).

In every society, the expectations of gender norms and roles are different, i.e., what is expected, what is allowed and valued for women and what is expected, what is allowed and valued for men are different.

Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born female or male. The opposite concept of gender equality is inequality.

Gender inequality refers to situations where legal, social, and cultural situation in which sex and/or gender determine different rights and opportunities for women and men, which are reflected in their unequal access to or enjoyment of rights, as well as the assumption of stereotyped social and cultural roles. These affect their status in all areas of life in society, whether public or private, in the family or the labour market, in economic or political life, in power and decision-making, as well as in social gender relations. In virtually all societies, women are in an inferior position to men (European Institute for Gender Equality, n.d.-c).

Differences in women's and men's behaviour, social roles, rights, duties, responsibilities, and opportunities do not result from immutable biological-physiological differences but are socially

constructed - so it can be said that both individuals and all societal institutions, processes, practices, symbols, and other factors produce and maintain gender differences and often gender inequality.

The opposing differences between girls and boys are not innate and predetermined, but these differences and inequalities are created by different worlds of experience. For example, boys are given more freedom in behaviour and self-expression; girls' progress is explained by their diligence and boys by their talent; girls' failure is interpreted as lack of talent, while boys' failure to perform or poor performance may be attributed to laziness. Boys are more likely to be associated with stereotypical characteristics such as activity, thirst for success, aggressiveness, noisiness, etc. Girls, on the other hand, are seen as obedient, affectionate, sensitive, and more obedient to teachers' orders. These expectations are also perceived by the children, who behave according to them (Haridus ja sugu, n.d.).

For example, the ways in which teachers speak to male and female students plays a role in how girls and boys learn to view each other. The inferior position of women in society is often reflected through language. Sexist language is the language which is outright sexist such as '*Man up*' or telling a boy or girl that they run, cry or throw '*like a girl*' but often it is more subtle and sometimes even well-intentioned such as complimenting girls on their appearance or emphasising 'putting a brave face on it' for boys – yet can be just as damaging in the context of gendered messaging (Gestetner, 2015)

For example, '*Boys will be boys*' might be spoken or it might be an unspoken opinion, informing expectations of 'boys' as a group. This expression is used to excuse, justify, or anticipate rough or disruptive behaviour from boys. It's never used when a boy has been helpful or kind. Its effects are harmful and unfair, suggesting that boys can't help bad behaviour, suppressing the individuality of the many boys who are not behaving in this way and anticipating that 'girls' (again, as a group) will be better behaved (Gestetner, 2015).

Gender socialisation is a process by which individuals (especially children and adolescents) develop, refine and learn to 'do' gender through internalizing *gender norms* and *roles* as they interact with key agents of socialization, such as their family, schools, peer groups and mass media, social networks, and other social institutions (Hoominfar, 2019). During this process girls and boys are actively involved in constructing their own gendered identities and are affected by gender stereotypes and traditional gendered expectations (Vinney, 2019).

Gender norms are standards and expectations to which women and men generally conform ideas about how girls and boys, women and men should be and act (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs Statistics Division, 2016). Internalised early in life, gender norms can establish a life cycle of gender socialisation and stereotyping. Gender norms and stereotypes encourage or force girls and boys to act in certain ways. Kids believe gender stereotypes by age 10 and have internalized the myth that girls are vulnerable and boys are strong and independent (Luscombe, 2017).

Gender socialisation may limit boys and girls in exploring their talents and interests to their full potential. Some unrealistic and contradicting expectations can cause internal conflicts, psychological problems. For example, young girls being overly concerned with feminine beauty and body image may have eating disorders or boys, who are under the pressure to appear 'manly' and strong among peers, may motivate a violent behaviour and they grow up with far less emotional awareness than girls.

Gender stereotypes are assumptions about what men and women are usually like, or how women and men should behave to be 'right'. Stereotypes are largely unconscious "self-evident", deeply embedded in culture. Gender stereotypes contribute to the perpetuation of inequalities between women and men.

Stereotypes are mostly based on an assumption that all men/boys will be the same and like the same things, and all women/girls will be the same and like the same things. This can lead to children being restricted in the interests, skills, and behaviours they develop.

Gender stereotypes are often seen in assumptions about personality traits (e.g., women emotional and men rational), behaviours (e.g., girls helpful and boys boisterous), preferences, occupations and jobs and physical appearance.

3.3. How to set learning objectives

Learning objectives are to support the development of students who understand:

To support child's development, they need to understand:

- The differences between sex and gender and be able to use examples to explain the differences between the concepts and the changing meanings of being a man and being a woman in time and culture (how gender norms have changed throughout history).
- The role of prejudices, cultural gender norms and traditional gender roles in shaping the behavioural practices of people of different genders (e.g., gender roles and gender norms influence people's lives).
- The impact of different environmental expectations on the choices, opportunities and responsibilities of girls and boys and can critically assess these factors, reflecting messages that men and women are expected to act differently and that stereotypes about gender can lead to bias and inequality,
- And values equality and the principles of equal treatment of girls and boys, women, and men.
- That achieving gender equality is a development goal for all countries and know which areas are concerned by gender equality.

3.4. Tips for teachers:

Discuss with pupils what equality means. Equality means making sure that every girl and boy, and every woman and man, has the same chances to make the most of their lives and talents. Explain that equality is about being fair. Stress fairness because it resonates easily with teenage children. Discussing gender and gender equality, put across the message that:

- Both genders are equal
- There are very few things men and women cannot do equally well
- Both genders have the right to study for and perform any kind of work they wish to
- Equality between women and men, girls, and boys, is an issue of human rights and fairness.

When you discuss gender with children, talk about what people like to wear, the activities they engage in, how they feel about themselves, and social roles performed by women and men.

Teach students about the "what is this thing called gender" and how to avoid being trapped in the "box" of numerous gender stereotypes that usually dictated a way of behaving in numerous situations.

Teach that a stereotype is an overly simplified, often untrue, fixed idea about a group of people. Explain that a stereotype is a belief that someone's character, preferences, attributes, or abilities can be automatically inferred from a group that they may happen to be a part of. It is important to challenge gender stereotypes that treat groups of all girls as the same, or groups of all boys as the same. By teaching students that these gender stereotypes are not accurate, you can teach them to embrace the differences between them and respect each other. Differences within each gender

group are generally far larger than any differences between the groups (Open Textbooks for Hong Kong, 2015).

Help them to recognise the origin of machismo/ masculinity as a socio-cultural feature, and to analyse the role of the media in fostering and reinforcing the image of masculinity which is usually associated with use of power and violence.

Foster a level of self-reflection among teenagers that can help them better to learn from their own experience, to question rigid ideals of gender and masculinities and femininities and to change their attitudes and behaviours.

3.5. Gender Equality and Transgender People

When talking about gender equality, it should be kept in mind that rigid gender norms negatively affect people with diverse identities, who often come into contact with violence, shaming and discrimination. Gender discrimination can intersect with other factors of discrimination such as ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability, age, geographic location, gender identity and sexual orientation.

When defining the concept of "gender", the European Court of Justice has applied a broad concept of "gender" in the interpretation of the corresponding sources of European law (Ellis, 2005), taking into account, in addition to biological differences, social, psychological, and cultural aspects that affect a person's belonging to one or the other gender. As a result, the court has found (*K.B. v National Health Service Pensions Agency and Secretary of State for Health*, 2004; *P v S and Cornwall County Council. Equal treatment for men and women—Dismissal of a transsexual*, 1996) that less favourable treatment due to being transgender is also gender discrimination.

4. SITUATIONS OF DISCRIMINATION RELATED TO THE SUB-TOPIC

Trans child or youth is being bullied because of their look: "Look, he is like a girl!"

One girl is interested in information technology lessons, but in schools these lessons are only for boys.

The boys are aggressive and just slapping each other, the teacher is seeing that, but just says: "Boys will be boys!"

5. BEST PRACTICES (For teachers and for families)

5.1. Videos for self-education on the topics covered

- Gender Equality Explained by Children
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hLr2GNRnmXM>
- Gender Socialization
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8QWfCrNHKYA>
- Gender stereotypes and education
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nrZ21nD9I-0&t=6s>
- Gender Stereotyping
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L1m3XR4Y7T8>
- Sex and Gender
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=msqi1qEPjc0>
- Problems with Gender Socialization

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sZYJWPRYoGw>

6. LINKS TO VIDEO GAME

There is a need to develop

2.5. SOCIAL CATEGORIZATION

1. KEY POINTS

- ✓ Social categorization is the process by which people categorize themselves and others into differentiated groups.
- ✓ Gender differences by themselves are not a problem, but they become problematic for teaching when they involve gender polarisation and gender stereotyping.
- ✓ Gender stereotypes also overlook people who do not fall into the category of male or female.

2. INTRODUCTION

Social categorization is the process by which people categorize themselves and others into differentiated groups. Categorization simplifies perception and cognition related to the social world by detecting inherent similarity relationships or by imposing structure on it (or both). The main adaptive function of social categorization is that it permits and constrains otherwise chaotic inductive inferences. People attribute group features to individuals (stereotyping) and they—less strongly—generalize individual features to the group. The strength of these two kinds of inductive inferences depends on a priori assumptions about the homogeneity of the group. To the extent that social categories rest on detected patterns of feature similarity, their coherence is a matter of family resemblance.

Family resemblance categories comprise members of varying typicality, they have fuzzy boundaries (and thus tend to overlap), and the features they contain tend to be correlated with one another. Some social categories are 'thin,' however, as their coherence rests solely on arbitrary or socially constructed labels. Both types of categories (family resemblance and social construction) give rise to two common, and socially problematic, biases: (a) ingroup favouritism and (b) perceptions of outgroup homogeneity (Krueger, 2001).

3. DEVELOPMENT OF THE SUB-TOPIC

Most of the gender differences are not biologically or genetically determined but rather socially constructed. Gender differences by themselves are not a problem, but they become problematic for teaching when they involve gender polarisation and gender stereotyping. More ambitious and meaningful aims would be that, once in school, girls and boys experience quality learning and teaching, and that equality in schooling is linked with positive changes towards equality in broader society (Kütt & Papp, 2022).

Teachers generally believe that they treat all children fairly and equally at school. The studies, however, show that this is not always the case and teachers treat students differently based on the students' gender. They contribute to the social construction of gender by their expectations of and interactions with girls and boys, classroom practices, choice of educational materials, etc. which help reinforce or break gender stereotypes. "The most common goal of gender equality policies in primary education is to challenge traditional gender roles and stereotypes" (Kütt & Papp, 2022).

3.1. Gender stereotypes

A **gender stereotype** is a generalised view or preconception about attributes or characteristics that are or ought to be possessed by women and men or the roles that are or should be performed by men and women. Gender stereotypes have descriptive components, which are beliefs about what men and women typically do. However, they also contain strong prescriptive components or beliefs about what men and women should do. Female stereotypical roles include being emotional, caring and in need of protection. Male stereotypical roles include being rational, career driven and strong.

These assumptions can be negative (e.g., women are irrational, men are insensitive) or seemingly benign (e.g., women are nurturing, men are leaders) (Kütt & Papp, 2022).

Gender stereotypes also overlook people who do not fall into the category of male or female.

It is natural that stereotyping helps each person to quickly orient themselves in the information that is obtained from the environment. At the level of the individual, categorization is spoken of as a cognitive process, which is mostly based on stereotyping. This can lead to prohibited discrimination, i.e., unequal treatment of a person because they are attributed some characteristics that characterize the prejudices or stereotypes of a group. Discrimination can be both direct and indirect, but its detection is mostly a matter for the courts. Discrimination on some basis is still perceived by a specific person, who can then legally protect their right not to be discriminated against someone else.

Several processes in society can be indirectly discriminatory, which place persons in a certain category at a disadvantage as a group.

4. SITUATIONS OF DISCRIMINATION RELATED TO THE SUB-TOPIC

There are problems, if people do not see the person behind the stereotypes. There are people who are different from somebody's constructed gender role and these people are more likely discriminated, because of being different.

5. BEST PRACTICES (For teachers and for families)

- Social Identity Theory – Categorization, Identification, Comparison - [VIDEO](#)
- Social Categorization - [VIDEO](#)
- Gender Stereotypes - [VIDEO](#)
- Gender Stereotypes (Girl toys vs boy toys: The experiment - BBC Stories) - [VIDEO](#)
- [Gender Sensitive Education](#): study material for teachers to enhance teachers' sensitivity to gender issues. In this way, it will contribute to more inclusive classroom environments where girls and boys can develop their competencies in a safe and welcoming atmosphere without the pressure of restrictive gender stereotypes
- [Teachers Guide to Addressing Gender Stereotypes in the Classroom](#)
- [Teaching About Gender Stereotypes](#): materials for teachers

6. LINKS TO VIDEO GAME

There is a need to develop

2.6. RAPID ONSET GENDER DYSPHORIA

A Term with no Scientific Background Created on US Websites

In 2016, the term ROGD (**Rapid Onset Gender Dysphoria**) began to spread on the Internet, which refers to the allegation that due to social influence, young people who have reached their teen years (mostly girls) are not happy about their gender¹. Because it is said to happen suddenly and simultaneously in small groups, it was called a “syndrome” (Serano, 2019).

Before 2016, nobody was talking on the Internet of possible “socially contagious” behaviour and (in the future) so-called ROGD. In 2016, these terms brought up three US websites which are critical of transgender people and trans issues. The same websites often refer to each other and share stories and opinions of alleged researchers about how children are being influenced in social media to become transgender. These websites then made up the term ROGD and from there started presenting it as a factual medical syndrome. The information was quickly picked up and spread by conservative and extremist media publications and practitioners who do not support gender diversity (Serano, 2019).

There is no ROGD

In 2016, researcher Lisa Littman began researching the topic, and in 2018 she published her study, in which she also describes ROGD as a syndrome. She hypothesized a "potential new subcategory" of gender dysphoria in the ROGD concept – the distressful feeling that one's gender and assigned sex do not match. Littman's theory stated that young people with ROGD experience symptoms of gender dysphoria and self-identify (mainly online) as transgender due to peer influence, rather than dealing with their issues.

One of the problems with the research was that Littman tried to validate that there have not been transgender children in society and it's a new topic. But Jules Gill-Peterson (Kessler, 2022), associate professor of history at Johns Hopkins University and author of “The History of the Transgender Child”, asserted that while the issue of transgender children has only recently begun to be discussed in the mainstream media, trans children have existed defining themselves based on their gender identity without medical or legal intervention long before the occurrence of actions related to the transition.

The Littman research article was accepted into a peer-reviewed scientific journal, which immediately received widespread criticism. A week after the article was published, the scientific journal acknowledged that they had to issue an apology for publishing the work and a revised version of the article, stressing that Littman's work was “descriptive, exploratory” and had not been clinically validated (Littman, 2019). It asserts that Littman is not entitled to state that ROGD is a disease, disorder or medical condition based on her work. It appears that she did not check the validity of the hypothesis, but rather looked for evidence to prove her hypothesis.

In 2021, the Journal of Paediatrics published a comprehensive study that found no evidence of ROGD (Bauer et al., 2022). More than 60 psychological organizations, including the American Psychological Association, called for the term to be abolished (Coalition for the Advancement & Application of Psychological Science, n.d.).

A Dangerous Narrative

¹ Not to be confused with the gender transition process of trans people. ROGD is not about trans persons or their journeys.

The “contagion narrative” has long gone hand in hand with gender and more broadly with LGBTQ+ issues. The contagion narrative has helped to create a series of new harmful narratives – “LGBTQ+ as the result of brainwashing, LGBTQ+ as a phase, LGBTQ+ as a desire to be like others”, etc.

It is dangerous to spread the narrative of contagion because it prevents people from discovering their identity honestly and openly and makes it difficult to talk about LGBTQ+ issues in education. In addition, the desire of such narratives is also to separate and imprison the LGBTQ+ community from each other, which makes it more difficult for them to support each other.

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