

Coming Out and Identities

Introduction

First of all

One of the main differences between homophobia and other forms of discrimination, such as sexism and racism, is that homosexual feelings are not readily recognizable from the outside, unless a person decides to openly show them. Sociologists call this phenomenon “invisible stigma”, as opposed to the “visible stigma”, i.e. a person’s sex or ethnic origin. To avoid possible hostile reactions, LGBT persons often have to decide whether or not showing their sexual orientation. “Coming out” means acknowledging one’s sexual orientation to oneself and to others.

Coming out is considered one of the key steps of the of the wider identity development process through which LGBT persons learn how to deal with the social stigma attached to their sexual orientation. Indeed, that begins when the moment in which individuals clearly identify themselves as homosexuals. Every coming out story is unique and it is a gradual, on-going process. There are people who came out at work, but not to their family, others came out only to their closest friends, others are openly homosexual. Of course, it a crucial process that involves not only the LGBT person but also the people around them, and it is an opportunity for tremendous emotional growth for all parties involved.



Therefore, coming out is a process that starts with individuals becoming aware of their own self and of their feelings, continues through the identification and fulfilment of their needs, and ends with the confrontation/encounter with the other and with the environment.

According to Coleman's model, there is a stage called pre-coming out: children over three years of age have already formed their gender identity and learned the ethical values of their family and social group. The majority of children internalise at a very early stage a negative judgement of homosexuality, bisexuality and transexuality. Consequently, those children who discover their homosexual, bisexual or transexual inclinations start feeling alone, different and confused. The feelings that characterise this kind of experience are perceived as unpleasant and are rejected through real psychological defences: every time people deny their feelings or avoid expressing them, they are wounding themselves. Basically, individuals in the pre-coming out stage are often not even aware of their homosexual feelings, they are unable to pinpoint what is wrong or, if they are aware of these feelings, they are accompanied by low self-esteem, shame, sense of unworthiness or experience them as belonging to a separate part of their personality.

Instead, when they come out, individuals acknowledge their homosexual, bisexual or transexual feelings. They associate themselves with their emotions, needs and fantasies to themselves, and accept them although they do not clearly understand their meaning and do not fully identify with the stereotypes or social images of homosexuality, bisexuality and transexuality. Then, over time, the need arises to tell such experiences others who they consider as significant people in their lives. This is a very delicate moment, where they can experience the joy of being accepted, as well as the pain of being rejected.

We can therefore imagine that, for LGBT persons, coming out is not a final decision made at a given stage; it is, rather, a continuous decision-making process, to be developed step by step, starting when a person – often teenagers – acknowledges his/her homosexual (and/or bisexual or transexual) feelings. From that moment on, they will have to decide whether or not to come out every time they meet a person “who does not know”.

Basic information

Puberty is a crucial moment in the development of any human being. As heterosexual teens start to experience their sexuality and their first romantic feelings for the opposite sex, LGBT teens feel left out of this fascinating experience. The social pressure surrounding gender roles is extremely strong and the people whose sexual identity does not fit into the traditional model have the impression that they don't have a place in the world and can feel lonely, confused, "abnormal". This can sometimes even lead to suicide.

During puberty, as this situation makes them feel helpless, LGBT persons feel forced to choose between a double life (heterosexual in public and LGBT in private) and a public coming out.

The coming out process is influenced by a number of variables: gender, ethnic group, environment (urban vs. rural), values and attitudes of society, individual characteristics and physical ability. Also the way in which boys and girls are socialised into traditional gender roles has an influence on their coming out.

Many counsellors note that girls often discover their homosexual orientation after feeling a 'sentimental' or 'romantic' attraction for other girls, while boys more often realise it after discovering they are sexually attracted to other boys or after having sex with them.

There are no role models for gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transexuals. This problem can be even more pronounced for migrants. There are virtually no openly homosexual, bisexual or transexual public figures who belong to ethnic minorities for young people to identify with. The lack of role models leads many LGBT persons to feel isolated and to suffer from low self-esteem.

Being gay, lesbian, bisexual or transexual and, at the same time, a member of an ethnic minority means having a multiple minority social status.

A black lesbian, for instance, will have to fight against racism, sexism and heterosexism.

However, there is a difference between a minority status linked to sexual orientation and a minority status linked to ethnic origin. Young LGBTs are born and grow up in families that hadn't foreseen their sexual orientation and that often react to it by showing negative feelings (e.g. fear, disgust, hatred, sense of guilt). Parents of LGBT children frequently mourn the loss of the heterosexual image of their child as they were almost grieving the death of a child. Conversely, a boy or a girl who belongs to an ethnic minority grows up in a family that is likely to be very proud of its cultural background and therefore supports and strengthens the identity of the child.

What does this mean to me?

Coming out must be a personal choice and is a continuous process. Therefore, it is important to treat the decisions of the boys and girls with respect. In order to provide adequate support, it would be preferable to create a secure and empathic atmosphere in which teens can talk freely about their needs. They should be supported and helped in managing their feelings and building their identities.

It is important that you respect the emotions of the teens and accept them for what they are.

Teachers and psycho/social/ healthcare professionals should accept the self-definitions of the teen without questioning them. Remember that there are people who have sex with persons of their own gender but do not define themselves as homosexual or bisexual. It is therefore important to understand what the teens mean when they describe themselves.

Education (Teachers)

Bear in mind

- What do you think about students who come out to their classmates? Do you think that this is important for LGBT teens? Do you fear this situation? Would you react in a positive way?
- Teenager should not be forced to come out to their classmates. It must be their own decision because it will profoundly affect their life. Consider the difficulties people from different cultural backgrounds have to face during the coming out process.
- How do you think your students would react to the coming out of a classmate? What would the atmosphere in the classroom be like? Would a LGBT student dare to publicly show his/her homosexuality, bisexuality, transexuality?
- If you think that coming out is in principle no longer a problem in your school, could you identify the 5-10% gay, lesbian, bisexual and transexual students of your school?
- Do you know why your students might react negatively towards this issue? Remember that they are engaged in building their own identity and they probably feel that it is disturbing to confront someone who does not follow the rules of the majority: this implicitly questions the direction of their own development.

Education - FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions)

Please also refer to the FAQs for the psycho/social/healthcare professionals.

How do teenagers understand they are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transexual?

Most gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transexuals realise it just the way heterosexual teenagers realise that their romantic feelings and sexual desire are directed towards the opposite sex. This process starts earlier than one might think, around the onset of puberty. Since their sexual orientation is socially stigmatised, it could take longer to acknowledge homosexual, bisexual or transexual feelings, especially if they are repressed.

How does the environment react when a person comes out?

There is no straightforward answer to this, since individual situations may vary greatly. If young LGBTs think that homosexuality, bisexuality and transexuality is something to be ashamed of, they have most likely interiorised the homophobia and transphobia that is – consciously or unconsciously – present in their environment or families. In this case, their coming out will probably be met with hostility. Conversely, if someone is open and feels at ease in his/her

Education - Tools

Me / Not Me-Game

Aim: to experience how it feels to belong to a minority group.

Method: prepare a list of questions asking “who“ behaves in a certain way (e.g. Who has smoked at least once in his/her life? Who has ever taken the bus without paying? Who has ever kissed a girl or a woman?

Who has ever kissed a boy or a man? Who would go to a lesbian café? Who would go to a gay nightclub? And other questions concerning love, relationships and sexuality. The participants walk around the room while the questions are asked. There are two opposite zones in the room: one for the “Me“ answers and the other for the “Not me“ answers. Those are the only two possible answers. The participants are asked before the exercise to answer by choosing one of the two zones in the room, then they are asked to remain silent and abstain from making comments during the exercise. The main goal of the exercise is to observe the situation determined by the answers and how people split up in the two zones.

After each question, the participants have to split into two groups: those who answer “Me“ go to one side of the room and those who answer “Not me“ go to the opposite side. Participants have to look at the people in the room, noting who is on their side and who is on the other, and pay attention to their own feelings. Then everybody starts walking around the room until the next question is asked.

Important note: the students are allowed to lie, i.e. nobody should be forced to answer the questions by telling the truth. Which is why the last question should be: “Who has lied at least once during this game?” The questions should be followed by a group discussion on the emotions and feelings of the participants, including possible feelings of surprise (if any).

Please note: in this game, students can experience the situation of those gay, lesbians, bisexuals and transexuals who have to hide an important part of their life. It is important for the teacher to play along and answer the questions by moving from one side of the classroom to the other. The teacher should finish the session by answering to the last question “Who did not tell the truth at least once during this game?” by saying “Me”, otherwise most students will not dare to say that they lied.

condition, they presumably grew up in a more welcoming environment that allowed them to interiorise a positive image of themselves and of others. Thus, their environment will probably respond in a positive way.

Absurdly, those who need more help find less support in their closest circle.

Why is someone gay, lesbian, heterosexual, bisexual or transexual?

To date, there is no scientific answer to this question. The most commonly accepted explanation is that sexual orientation is the product of complex interactions between biological, psychological, social and cultural factors.

How do I deal with a teenager who comes out in class?

Teenagers rarely come out in class. If it does happen, it would be best to talk about it in front of the class as frankly as possible. The boy/girl should be consulted in advance and asked if this is alright with him/her.

When discussing the subject in class, do not refer directly to the student who has come out, but speak in more general terms. Increasing people’s knowledge about gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transexuals is crucial for preventing social exclusion.

Inside the family

Aim: to explore the crises that arise when people come out to their families or relatives.

Method: the students are asked to talk about the main problems they have with their parents (difficulties, disagreements, etc.), the way in which they and their parents manage the disagreements and the emotional reactions involved when their (teens' and parents') expectations are different. The students discuss the possible reactions of families that discover that their son or daughter is homosexual, bisexual or transexual. To foster the discussion, you could show the students the music video of the song "Smalltown boy" (Bronski beat, 1983). Then, a girl is asked to role play the part of a student who finds out that her sister is a lesbian during the break and she is unsure about telling her parents. Finally, the students analyze and discuss what happened in the role play.

Please note: if the discussion becomes too chaotic, you can divide the class into small groups, each group will designate a spokesperson.

During the discussion, make sure that the students don't focus their attention of value judgment, on what is right and what is wrong, and encourage them to express their emotions with questions like: "what do you feel when you say that?"

Let's Imagine That ...

Aim: to understand why the coming out process can be very difficult for gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transexuals.

Method: divide the students into small same-gender groups. In these groups, they have to imagine what would change in their life if they were gay, lesbian, bisexuals or transexual. Give the groups time to think about it. How would they behave? How would their friends react? Do they picture positive or negative reactions? Why?

Please note: this method can be embarrassing for LGBT students, especially if they have not come out, therefore it requires caution. If someone has difficulty imagining being gay, tell them to imagine that everyone was homosexual and only a few people were heterosexual.

What would that be like for those few people?

Alternative suggestion: have the students read an extract of an autobiography by a gay, lesbian, bisexual or transexual author (see *Appendix 4 of the Handbook*).

Counselling

(Psycho/social/healthcare professionals)

Bear in mind

- How do you view the effects of discrimination on LGBT teenagers? What does having homo-erotic desires mean in teen culture?
- What do you think about sexual orientation? Is 'orientation' for you the same as 'preference', 'identity', 'classification' or 'behaviour', or do you normally differentiate between these aspects?
- Observe yourself the next time you will talk about homosexuality, bisexuality and transexuality. Do you tend to avoid using the term homosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual or transsexual? How often do you mix up these words when you use them and how often do you pay closer attention in order to use them properly?
- How would you deal, for instance, with a boy or a girl who have sex with same-sex partners but who declare themselves as heterosexual? Would you consider them homosexuals in denial or just teenagers who are in search of their own identity?
- Counsellors are aware of the challenges facing teenagers in Western culture, but what about the challenges facing a LGBT teenager belonging to an ethnic minority?
- What do you think about the coming out process? Do you consider it to be important? How do you deal with a LGBT teenager who is afraid of coming out?

A STORY...



Why did he even mention the existence of the sports group to Jan? And he really come, can you believe it?

Jan makes him feel confused, it would be better if he had never come to Amsterdam. At first Mark was quite happy to finally have another enthusiastic and talented swimmer in his class, and not to be the only one.

Two young guys are hanging out in the yard outside his house, casually walking around. They were obviously waiting for him. For days now, they have been following him around, yelling stupid comments. I'll just pretend they're not really here, he thinks. He crosses the street, seemingly indifferent to their taunts, and heads to his door. Peter is standing in his way, with an evil grin on his face. Mark holds his breath, doesn't see Peter and suddenly bumps into him.

"Hey, you fucking faggot, don't think I'll let one of your kind grope me like that!" sneers Peter, taking one step towards Mark.

"Shut up, damn it!" screams Mark. Peter and Freek back off, bewildered. It takes less than two seconds for Mark to turn the key and open the door. Furious, he slams it shut after him.

"Mark, what's wrong? Your father is trying to rest. He just finished his shift!"

Mark doesn't even bother to look at his mother.

Could the whole world please leave me alone?

"Mark, I am talking to you." His mother pulls his sleeve.

"You know what? Living in this shitty place is so great!" Mark snaps back at her through clenched teeth. He breaks himself loose quickly and runs to his room.

I must think about something else. Do my math homework or perhaps call Mareike. Irene still thinks that she fancies me. Alright, then...

He stares at the telephone, dials Mareike's number but when he hears her voice he immediately hangs up. He runs back to the door and locks it.

He pictures Jan smiling at him and hugging him at the end of the game. A kiss on the right, a kiss on the left, they all say goodbye like that. The only thing is that Mark's heart starts beating like crazy, his whole body becomes electrified when he feels Jan's body so close to his own. I must have gone completely mad, thinks Mark, desperate. A guy shouldn't be able to turn me on like that. It's Mareike's voice, not his hug that should make me feel this way. I can't go to school any more. I must avoid Jan.

"Mark, could I please talk to you after class?" Great, and now this! His mother receiving a letter from the school yesterday – telling her that due to frequent absences Mark might not be promoted at the end of the year – was already bad enough. And now the teacher wants to talk to him.

Mark can already imagine what it will be.

He should not have yelled at Jan, let alone push him away so roughly. The fact that Jan had hugged him so enthusiastically after they won could not excuse his reaction. But the worst thing was the way in which Jan had looked at him, turning around and walking away without a single word. Mark's stomach turns over every time he thinks about it. During class, Mark keeps staring at Jan's empty chair and cannot think clearly. Jan's face has been haunting his dreams for weeks, turning him on, and his heart starts to beat faster when he sees Jan, even from a distance.

"We've got to talk, right away," says the teacher to Mark. "Since the start of the school year, you have become another person. You skip school, you barely let anyone at school talk to you, and now this. I would have thought you'd be pleased to have a fellow swimmer in the class, and that you and Jan would become best friends."

"He might be a super-swimmer, but that's not enough", snaps Mark. "I just don't want him to touch me like that!"

"Mark, you must apologise to Jan!" The teacher looks at Jan, pensive.



“Having hugged you doesn’t mean Jan is gay. And even if he was, I won’t tolerate homophobia, or any other type of discrimination.”

Homophobia, homophobia, the word keeps pounding in Mark’s head, and suddenly he begins to cry.

“Come on now, what’s wrong with you?” The voice of Mr. van der Kolk sounds bewildered. He holds Mark by the shoulders, cautiously. “You have always been such a brilliant student. And being homophobic simply isn’t like you. Jan has enough problems as it is, what with being new in this school and everything. And he likes you, I noticed it from the very first day. Mark, I expect an explanation for your behaviour in front of the whole class. You will take responsibility, is that clear?”

“Jan really likes you.” The teacher’s voice goes on and on in Mark’s head.

“Mark?”

“I can’t do it.” Mark’s voice trembles.

“Then you will have to speak to our school psychologist. This thing with Jan, your poor attendance, all that must be sorted out. Quickly.”

The school psychologist looks friendly. “Among other things, I insulted and pushed back a schoolmate, that’s why I am here.”

Mr. de Vries nods almost imperceptibly. “What happened?”, he asks as Mark stops speaking.

“Why does he have to touch me when I win?” cries Mark. “If he had only kept his hands to himself.” He stops, despaired.

“Is it because he hugged you that you lashed out at him?”

Mark nods silently.

“Perhaps it was important for Jan to show you how proud he was of your performance, because he likes you. There’s nothing abnormal about that, Mark, don’t you think?”

“No”, yells Mark, and runs to the door. “It’s absolutely not normal, it’s perverse.”

Nobody knows what he’s going through. Peter and Freek wouldn’t hesitate to beat him up, if he ever... It’s best not to think about it. He must go through ten sessions with the school psychologist – that was the agreement with Mr. van der Kolk.

“Nice to see you again”, greets him Mr. de Vries.

Mark nods silently. How could he make it clear to the psychologist that at night he dreams of Jan, that he even has erections because of him, and that at the same time he would most of all like to get rid of him?

“Here you can say anything you want, even what seems strange to you”, says Mr. de Vries quietly, suddenly breaking through Mark’s confusion.

“I don’t even understand myself. I didn’t mean to hurt Jan, but ...”. Desperately, Mark wipes off his tears with his pullover sleeve.

“But he confuses you quite a lot?” The school psychologist’s question sounds almost like a statement.

Mark looks at him quickly. How did he understand that? “I think about him all the time”, slips out of him so suddenly that he does not have the time to think before speaking.

“You like him so much and this scares you, is that right?”

“Yes”, whispers Mark in tears. At last he has told someone about it. He gives a quick glance to the psychologist. He still looks friendly.

“You are not the only guy attracted to another guy, Mark.”

“Are you kidding me?”

“I know how difficult it is to speak about attraction between guys. But you are not alone. There is a gay and lesbian group for young people, here in Amsterdam. I am quite sure that they would be happy to meet you. Maybe you’d like to take their brochure “Boys who love boys”. You just have to call them. Think about it Mark, will you? If you need me give me a call, okay?”

Mark doesn’t look at the psychologist. But he nods.



Counselling - FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions)

Please also refer to the FAQs for the education sector.

And if a teen asks me “Am I gay?”, how can I know that?

Gays and lesbians are as much a mixed group as heterosexuals and homosexuality cannot be identified from physical or personality features. Counsellors can ask teens what they feel, what they are thinking, supporting them without judgement or ready-made answers.

It could also be useful to explore their personal representations of homosexuality.

Do people choose to be gay, lesbian, bisexual or transsexual?

No. Being homosexual, heterosexual, bisexual or transsexual is not a choice; LGBT individuals can only decide whether they will come out to others or not.

Are parents to blame for their children’s homosexuality, bisexuality or transsexuality?

Absolutely not. In fact, gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transsexuals are usually born to heterosexual parents and the children of gay, lesbian, bisexual or transsexual parents are often heterosexual. Parents have no influence on a child’s sexual orientation but they can encourage their children’s self-esteem and independent sexuality.

How should I deal with a teen who has sex with same-sex partner but defines him/herself as heterosexual?

Sexual orientation is made up of many components: erotic attraction, sexual behaviour, sexual fantasies, falling in love, self-image and social preferences. These dimensions do not always coincide; there are indeed a few people who have sex with same-sex partners but do not define themselves as homosexual. The counsellor must accept the teens’ own self-definition without questioning it, while at the same time trying to understand the underlying representations.

In any case, self-definition as a gay, lesbian, bisexual or transsexual may be irrelevant in some cultures.



Counselling -Tools

A Gay Man/ a Lesbian Woman/ a Bisexual Person/ a Transsexual Person Is...

Issue: internalised homophobia and transphobia prevents gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transsexuals from feeling at ease with their own identity and forces them to keep their sexual orientation hidden from everybody at all costs.

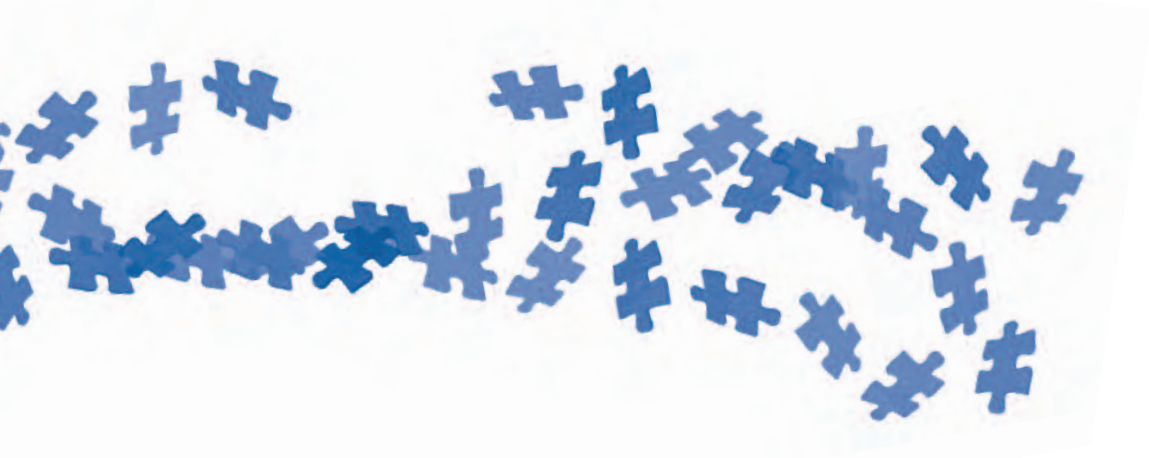
Method: invite the teen to say the following sentence out loud: “A gay man/ a lesbian woman/a bisexual person/a transsexual person is...”, and then complete it by adding whatever comes to his/her mind.

The teen repeats the sentence several times until a variety of statements have been spoken. This allows the teen to work on the stereotypes and prejudice he/she has internalised. For instance, one lesbian teen could say to the counsellor: “A lesbian woman is not feminine; that’s disgusting”.

Please note: before using this exercise, you need to establish a trusting relationship with the teen, so that he/she will feel comfortable enough to open up to you; it is useful to start by telling the teen that whatever he/she will say is ok and that there is nothing wrong with it.

The Two Chairs

Aim: to work on a person’ indecision on whether or not to come out. The purpose of this activity is to investigate the reasons why a person chooses (or does not choose) to come out and the emotions connected with that.



Method: put a chair in front of the teen and ask him/her to imagine that a part of him/herself is seated there. Explain that this is the part which is undecided about whether or not to come out and leads him/her to hide his/her sexual orientation. The teen must then address this alter-ego and then goes to sit on the empty chair and tries to explain how he/she feels after listening to the other self.

Please note: this work tries to highlight creative behaviours taking into account the feelings and emotions of both parties. Make sure that the teen looks at both the positive and negative sides of his/her possible coming out.

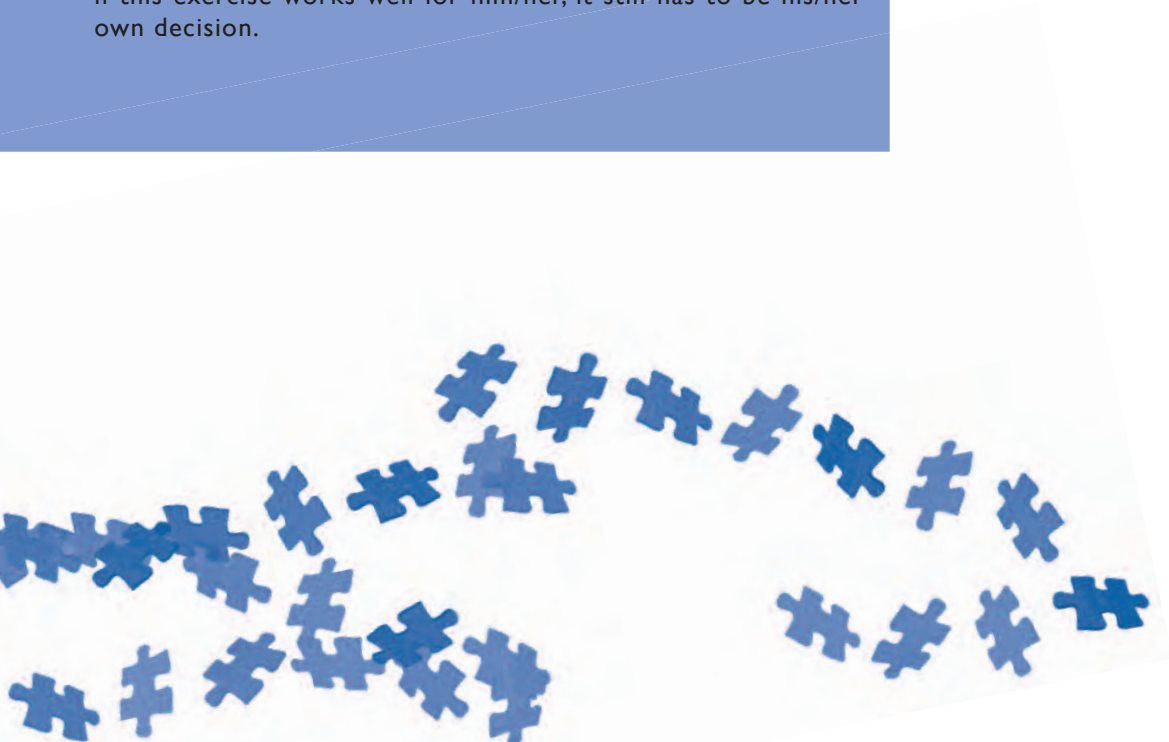
This exercise may be particularly indicated for teens who have already explored the cognitive aspects involved with coming out but still have problems dealing with the emotional aspects. It cannot, therefore, be used at the start of the counselling process.

Coming Out to the Family

Aim: to work on the decision to come out.

Method: ask the person to imagine coming out to his/her family. What person would he/she tell first? How would he/she do it? What would he/she say? What does he/she think his/her parents' reaction would be? How would he/she react him/herself? How does he/she feel while doing this imagination exercise?

Please note: do not try to convince the person to come out. Even if this exercise works well for him/her, it still has to be his/her own decision.



2 LGBT relationships

Introduction

First of all

Contrary to popular myth, LGBT relationships are not essentially different from other types of relationships and offer as much diversity as heterosexual ones. However, there is one difference and it is due to the fact that, in most societies, LGBT relationships are far less accepted than heterosexual ones. Indeed, in most EU Member States, LGBT couples have less or no legal rights at all (see *Handbook, Appendix 5*; see also *The Rainbow Map, May 2001*). Therefore, having to live in a society that considers their couples less worthy than others creates many obstacles in their everyday lives.

Another difference comes from the impossibility for LGBT couples to function on the basis of the traditional division of gender roles. In a LGBT couple, the partners have to find a way to interact which is not based on standard role patterns and this is why it is crucial for gays and lesbians to have the opportunity to affirm and share their way of life, just as much as heterosexuals do. It would be hoped that, since these “alternative” models are parts of reality, they could be regarded as shared and accepted cultural models.

Moreover, LGBT couples are not necessarily childless and in fact many children live in LGBT families with two mothers or two fathers. Studies and statistics shows that the sexual orientation of these children is not different from that of children from heterosexual households but, apart from their sexual orientation, they might have problems in comparing their families with those of their friends. However, they may experience bullying by their peers or, in general, discrimination from a non-supportive and/or openly intolerant environment.

Basic information

There are many factors that contribute to determine the meaning of relationships: religion, culture, national laws, education, social norms and personal values. In some cultures and societies, the choice of the type of relationship is more influenced by family or community values, while in others it may be a more individual choice. These differences can have significant implications for those who come from a traditionalist cultural background. Indeed, in these cases, gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transexuals encounter great difficulties in conducting a LGBT life while at the same time maintaining a good relationship with their families. At this regard, it needs to be pointed out that the family plays a crucial role in the development of the child as it provides him/her with the necessary protection to grow into an individual who will strong enough to face the challenges of life.

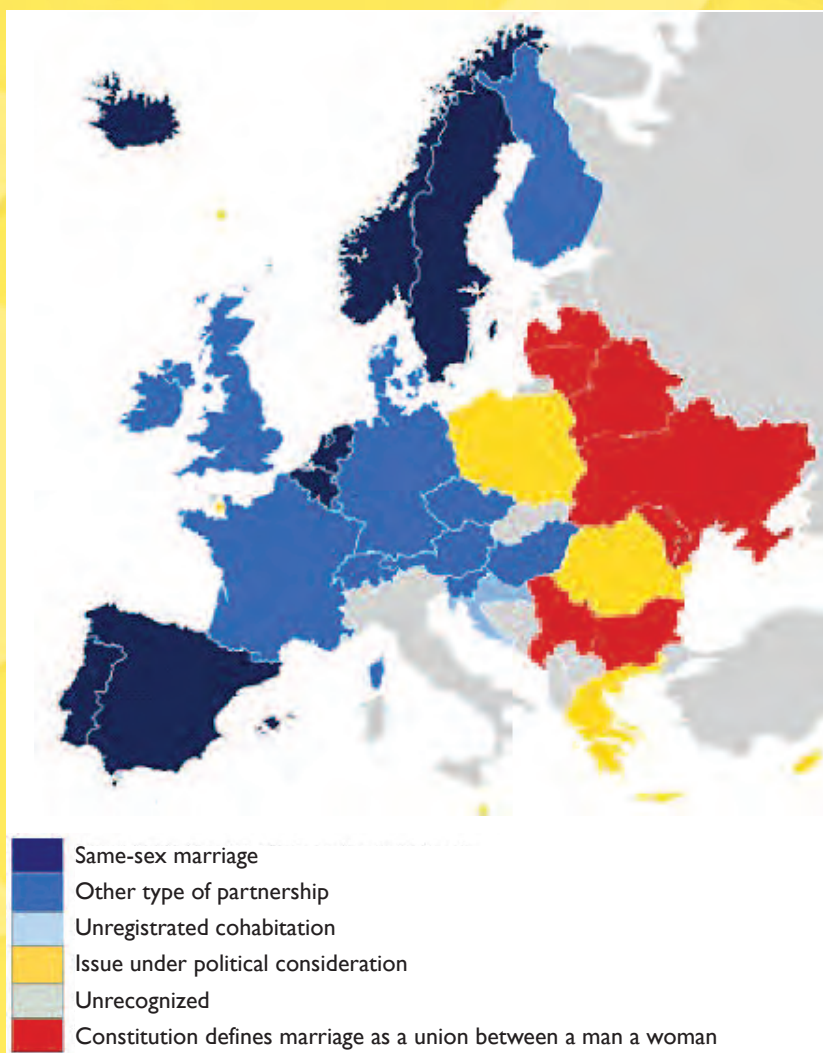
Today, relationships are being redefined and reshaped. The types of relationships that are available for gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transexuals and heterosexuals are more varied than they were 30 years ago: getting married, staying single, living together, same-sex registered partnership. Therefore, there are different types of families that exist alongside traditional nuclear families: reconstituted families, single-parent families, intercultural families. Today, many couples fulfil their wish to become parents thanks to scientific advancements or adoption and fostering: the biological dimension of the family ties starts to make room for a conception of the family as a socio-cultural construction. However, although “sexuality” does not exclusively mean “reproduction”, the concept of parenthood still revolves around these two concepts and today it is still difficult to view filiation as something separate from these two domains.

Hence, when dealing with homosexual parenthood, it is necessary to examine the heterosexist prejudices and stereotypes that prevail in the general population and that are shared by heterosexuals and LGBTs, and often by the scientific community as well.

We therefore invite you to reflect on the most common objections (Lingiardi 2007), such as:

1. children must have a mother and a father;
2. homosexual couples who want children are not aware and/or do not consider the implications of the limitations posed by their condition;
3. LGBT persons are unfit to raise a child; lesbians are less maternal than other women;
4. LGBT couples are less stable than heterosexual ones, therefore do not guarantee familial continuity;
5. the children of LGBTs have more psychological problems than the children of heterosexuals;
6. the children of LGBTs will more easily become homosexual.

At the moment, in Europe, laws that recognise LGBT marriage or partnerships exist in the Scandinavian countries, Belgium, France, Germany and the Netherlands (for more detailed information get in touch with local or European LGBT organisations such as ILGA-Europe). However, there are only limited possibilities for LGBT couples to be recognized as a couple in another Member State if the law of that country does not allow it.



Below, you'll find the three ways in which LGBT couples can fulfil their parenting desires and the Countries that allow them:

- joint adoption (the least frequent in the EU: allowed in Spain, UK, Belgium, Netherlands and Sweden.) – LGBT couples can jointly petition for adoption;
- second-parent adoption (allowed in the abovementioned Countries, and also in Germany, Denmark and Finland) – LGBT partners can petition to adopt their partner's child;
- fertility treatment (allowed in the abovementioned Countries, except Germany) - possibility for LGBT couples can access a range of treatment options aimed at producing one or more biological children (insemination, egg-donation, etc.).

What does this mean to me?

For young LGBTs, it is very important to meet others with whom they can socialize and share their experiences about couple relationships. In this way, they have the opportunity to realise that they can play an active role in the creation of their relationships and can develop their own way of life. Here are some suggestions:

- Show that you respect LGBT relationships through your own attitude and that you regard two people who care for each other as a value for society.
- Be sensitive towards same-sex relations between young people, regardless if they are of a romantic or sexual nature or not, and encourage them to establish a mutually respectful and friendly relationship. Be supportive - even general remarks or statements made in class can be helpful.
- Support the parents of gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transsexuals. If the parents can't accept their children's partner, this may become a major stress factor.
- Sex education should deal not only with biology but should also focus on the emotional aspects of couple relationships and gender identity. Try to remember that some of your students may experience difficulty in fitting in conventionally defined genders and identities. Moreover, sex education should not present LGBT issues separately from heterosexual ones. This would only lead to reinforce the division between the different forms of sexual orientation and would encourage young people to believe that some sexual orientations are "normal" while other are "deviant". Instead, sexuality should be presented as encompassing different types of sexual orientation and identity where hetero- and homosexuality are only two examples of many.
- When dealing with intercultural questions, you should be willing to accept other points of view, even those that seem very different from yours: being respectful towards others is the best way for people to live together.
- It is not useful to pressure young people into coming out. Focus instead on offering support and do not try to define the sexual orientation of the person you are counselling, especially if he/she does not feel the need to do so.

Education

(Teachers)

Bear in mind

Each of us is involved in many different types of relationships at the same time: with our parents, friends, teachers, etc. Each of these relationships is unique and changes over time. Moreover, the word “relationship” means something different to everyone. For some people it is something that is exciting, for others it means to be close to someone, to feel safe and secure or to regain energy. What is right for one person is not necessarily right for another and an arrangement that works well for a given person today perhaps won't be as well-suited tomorrow. There is no “right” or “wrong” way to have a relationship. The type of relationship people choose and the way they shape their lives within that relationship must be negotiated between the partners involved.

You are invited to think about your own couple relationship and the couple relationship between two men or two women. Take your time to answer the following questions. It may also be interesting to look at the

Eduaction - FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions)

Please also refer to the FAQs for the psychosocial/healthcare professionals.

Who is the “man” who is the “woman” in a LGBT relationship?

The notion that one of the partners in LGBT relationship must adopt a “masculine” role, while the other must take on a “feminine” role is a cliché based on heterosexist stereotypes. If we take a closer look to any individual involved in a LGBT relationship, we will see character traits that are traditionally defined as “masculine”, as well as characteristics that are traditionally viewed as “feminine”; this is clearly true also for heterosexual couples. The identity of an individual is the result of the combination of characteristics that are associated with both genders and today also gender roles are increasingly becoming objects of negotiations at individual level.

Do same-sex, bisexual, transexual relationships last longer than heterosexual relationships?

LGBT persons may have long- or short-term relationships, just as heterosexuals do. Some can last for only a few months while others may go on for many years or even “forever”. The only difference is that a LGBT relationship is rarely encouraged by society or by the partners' families. It is important to bear in mind that this lack of acceptance and

corresponding paragraph in the counselling section below.

- What do you think defines a happy relationship? What do you think is your partner's opinion about this? What does your partner think that your opinion is about it?
- Have you ever seen two men or two women kiss or hug each other or hold hands? What was your reaction to this? Why did you react in that way?
- How do you imagine a relationship in every day life? What role have examples and traditional role patterns played in the shaping of these images? How do you define fidelity?
- What kind of division of roles do you practise in your current (or in your last) relationship? Do you (or did you) feel comfortable with it? What do you think is your partner's opinion about this? How was the division of tasks negotiated?
- What advantages do you see in a same-sex in a relationship? What problems can arise?
- How do your personal values affect your teaching?

external support can make it more difficult for the couple to solve possible relationship problems.

Do gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transexuals cheat on their partners more often than heterosexuals?

Scientific research has shown that a large majority of young people want to live in a stable relationship and would be happy to grow old with their partner. In this sense, gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transexuals are no different from heterosexuals. Many people long for an "everlasting love", however most change stable partners once, twice, or several times during their lifetime (serial monogamy). Therefore, the notion that cheating is more frequent among LGBT couples than in heterosexual couples is just an urban legend.

In which ways are LGBT relationships discriminated against?

LGBT relationships are discriminated against in many ways. They face legal discrimination because, in most countries, same-sex or transexual couples are not legally recognized. This implies a series of limitations in inheritance laws, visiting rights in hospitals or in housing rights, just to name a few. LGBTs are discriminated against in terms of visibility, for instance they are only rarely mentioned in schoolbooks. The above-mentioned examples show that there are still many people who think that LGBT lifestyles are not as "good", appropriate and normative as the heterosexual one.

Education - Tools

Love story

Aim: to explore the representation of LGBT relationships in the media, to educate students about the media's influence on public opinion.

Method: find an example of a homosexual or transexual love story in a teen magazine (ask your students to bring it to class; if they cannot find a story, you can use a photo to get started). Take a critical look at the story content and discuss it in class. Possible questions may be: What is the general function of a love story in general? How are LGBT relationships represented in this story? What information does it provide on this type of relationship? Does it stereotype certain people or certain roles?

Please note: the exercise is suited for students aged 14 or older. In order to be effective, it should be included in a lessons cycle about the media. Journalism should be critically analysed in its function and form: Who writes the articles for the magazines? How? Who gives them information? What is "good" journalism? If the students criticise the story as being too conventional or as portraying stereotypes, they can create their own story using their own photos.

Hetero, Homo, Bi, Trans: pros, cons and stereotypes

Aim: to identify stereotypes and compare different forms of relationships.

Method: split the students into small groups and distribute a sheet of paper which includes the following categories: Heterosexual Relationships, Gay Relationships, Lesbian Relationships and Transexual Relationships. In each group, students are asked to consider the advantages, disadvantages and commonly known stereotypes for each relationship category. The results should be written on the paper and are then discussed in a plenary session.

Please note: the exercise is appropriate for students aged 14 years or older. The teacher can further the discussion by asking "Where have you seen this happen?" The stereotypes should be questioned in a critical way and selective perception should be explained.

A STORY...



Her hands shaking, Almira grabs the telephone. The writing blurs again and again before her eyes. In a few seconds her life has been destroyed, as though by bombs.

"Hello, Julie Bäcker speaking?" Almira sobs uncontrollably.

"Almira, is that you? Good heavens, what happened?"

"I have to go back to Kosovo."

A breathless silence at the other end. "My God", whispers Julie, ages later.

"Stay where you are darling, I will be right there in a moment."

...

"They can't just simply deport you. You've been living here for eleven years.

That's almost half your life" Julie, bewildered, keeps reading over and over the notification from the Aliens' Registration Office.

"They say the war is over", whispers Almira. "But my family originally comes from Bosnia, and they'd make my life a living hell if I went there. And if they ever find out that I'm a lesbian they'll kill me," Almira looks at her girlfriend.

"In Kosovo people were killed. I saw them beat up my sister and my cousins, and threaten to kill my uncle. Death awaits me there. I will not be able to study, there will be no home, no love. Only violence, only destruction.

I can't go back, Julie."

"No, of course not. We'll find a way, Almira. I love you, I won't let you go.

Never, do you hear me?"

"What happened, Almira? You have been staring at the walls for weeks. You received low scores in three subjects. And I really thought you wanted to achieve something here in Germany. If you continue this way, you'll never get your diploma".

"It's not my fault", says Almira softly. "I have no future in Germany."

"Nonsense", fumes the teacher. "Of course it's up to you. If you really want to achieve something, you can make it. But of course not with this performance. Your scores are too low Almira, I was wrong about you."

If he only knew that I'm a lesbian, he'd probably approve of the deportation notice one hundred percent, thinks Almira and puts away her work, quietly.

...

"But surely something can be done against a deportation notice" Julie looks at her classmates defiantly, as they leave the classroom together.

"Hey, the war in Kosovo is over, Julie. All these people, they've been here long enough. You'd better look for another girlfriend" Georg grins maliciously.

Others nod.

"What kind of people are you?" Julie looks around, shocked. "And you want to become educators?"

"Oh honestly, you only want to prevent this deportation because you fancy her, don't you?", Karin says.

"You have simply no idea of what war can do to a person, even after many years", replies Julie.

"I think you're over-reacting again, Julie. As usual." Georg leans back nonchalantly.

...

"In school nobody understands me. I feel so lonely. The teacher thinks I'm lazy." Almira shows Julie the messed-up German essay.

"The students are just as bad", sobs Julie with resignation. "They couldn't care less what's going on here."

"Someone told me that we could find useful information on the internet. Why don't we look for help on the Web?"

"Almira honey, that's a wonderful idea!"

Moments later they sit in front of their computers, they are very concentrated on their task.



“Support Group for Refugees, here it is!” says Julie suddenly. “Exactly what we were looking for.”

“And see here,” laughs Almira. “I’ve found a European Chat for young LGBTs.”

“Fantastic!,” smiles Julie. “I’ll call up the Support Group, ok?”

“In the meantime I’ll join the Triangle – Chat.”

“Appointment at the Support Group in one hour”, announces Julie.

“The Chat is open.” Excited, Almira types something in.

“Show me.” Julie takes a seat next to her.

<Almira> Hi, I am a lesbian living in Germany, soon to be deported back to Kosovo. What can I do?

<Mark> Hey, I’m from the Netherlands. If you have a German girlfriend, marry her. It should be possible, according to the German Life-Partnership Law, if you are both over 18.

<Julie> Hi, I’m the girlfriend. Are you sure? That would be great. We’re both over 18. But we have to go now. Should we keep you posted?

<Mark> Absolutely. Nice chatting with you.

<Aaron> I’d also like to be updated. You can meet me here often in the Chat.

<Almira> Great. Thanks. We’ll keep in touch. Cheers. “I’m afraid it doesn’t look very good for the refugees from Kosovo. Our authorities don’t want to understand that minority groups like Bosnian Muslims still have a hard time there.” The counsellor of the Support Group for Refugees looks at Almira for a long time.

“If we got married – according to the new Life-Partnership Law – we could avoid deportation?” Julie’s voice sounds imploring.

“Yes, that would certainly be possible. According to Article 23 of the German Immigration Law, after the marriage Almira would be entitled at first to a limited Residence Permit for three years, then she’d get a renewal, and in eight years’ time she could apply for German citizenship.”

“But what would happen to my parents?”, asks Almira.

“It would not prevent your parents from being deported”, says the advisor softly.

“I can’t stay here without them”, sobs Almira. “I can’t live here without my parents.”

“You should come here with your parents. We’ll do everything we can to protect them.” The advisor hesitates. “Is it because you’re in love that you want to get married, or is it just an attempt to save Almira?”

“I love Almira”, replies Julie. “Perhaps I wouldn’t have thought about marriage if there wouldn’t have been this emergency, but now I see it as a great opportunity.”

“I don’t want to lose my parents”, whispers Almira. “I don’t know if they’ll ever understand, me marrying a woman.”

“Almira, for you going back to Kosovo would be the end. You told me that you grew up here, you have spent more than half your life in this country, you want to study here and, on top of that, you love a woman. To have such a life in Kosovo is unthinkable. And then there is the trauma that you and your parents have gone through. There is no chance to get therapy there. Returning to Kosovo means a whole new trauma for all your family. You told us that some members of your family were brutally beaten up and received death threats before your very eyes.”

Almira weeps silently. “Both my parents have gone through this. My mother tried to protect me. She is very strong. But my father was crushed. I cannot leave my mother alone with him. Dad needs us both.”

“Do your parents know that you and Julie want to get married?”

“Perhaps they’d put up with that, but they couldn’t stand to be separated from me. For my dad it would be the end.”

“There must be a solution for you and for your parents, Almira. I can’t promise you anything. Marrying Julie would certainly save you and that’s for sure”.

The counsellor smiles encouragingly at Almira. “Come back next week with your parents. Together, we we’ll see what needs to be done”



Counselling

(Psycho/social/healthcare professionals)

Bear in mind

Along with positive feelings, all relationships, even heterosexual ones, include anger, stress, and different expectations between the partners. For instance, some people become oppressive because they are afraid of losing their partner and they want to possess and control their partner. Generally, fidelity is particularly important in couple relationships, yet everyone defines fidelity in a different way. Can someone be called faithful if they spend a lot of time on their own without their partner? And what if someone has a one-night stand? The fact that there are many different definitions of fidelity may create some problems.

You are invited to consider your own relationship and LGBT relationships. Take your time to answer the following questions. It may also be useful for you to first have a look at the corresponding paragraph in the education section above.

- When did you first realise that there were different forms of living together than those you learned about in your family? Are you looking for a partner who shares your point of view or for someone who has different views than your own?
- Do you think that LGBT relationships are as fulfilling as heterosexual relationships? If no, why not? What is fidelity for you?
- Are there problems in couple relationships which you would describe as typically male or typically female? Are there any typical differences between heterosexuals and gays/lesbians/bisexuals/transsexuals in dealing with problems in their relationships? How could these problems be solved?
- What impact can an uncertain legal status have on a relationship? How must it be like for the partners involved to know that a large part of society would rather their relationship didn't exist?
- How do your personal values affect your counselling?

Counselling - Tools

A question of scales

Aim: to help the partners of a LGBT couple to formulate their expectations at the beginning of the counselling process.

Method: independently from each other, the two partners give their responses to a series of statements according to a scale ranging from 1 to 10 (1 = lowest value, 10 = highest value). First they give their own answer and then they also indicate what they think their partner would reply. The statements can be prepared on a flip chart by the counsellor before the session.

Some examples for possible statements are:

- The chances that we will be still a couple in one year's time are very low/very high.
- The resources we have to cope with a crisis together are many/few.
- After our sessions with the counsellor, dealing with our smaller problem will be easier/more difficult.
- Personally, I think our joint counselling sessions can contribute few/many things to solve the problem;
- My partner can contribute few/many things to solve the problem.

Please note: the use of circular questions helps to clarify each partner's point of view (e.g. What do I think? What do I think the other thinks? What does the other think I think?) For

Counselling FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions)

Please also refer to the FAQs for the education sector.

What impact does an unequal legal situation have on LGBT relationships?

LGBT couples do not enjoy the same legal rights as heterosexuals do. This can affect their relationship in many concrete ways. For example, if one of the partners dies, the other can be thrown out of their common apartment if she/he is not the official owner/renter of the apartment (see the movie “Women” mentioned in the Handbook, Appendix 6). A gay or lesbian person cannot always join his or her partner in another EU country as heterosexuals do because many Member States still deny LGBT couples the right to housing and social welfare benefits. Furthermore, LGBT couples are often not encouraged or supported by others and must solve most of their problems by themselves. This lack of acceptance and support is generally a cause of stress for gays and lesbians. It has even more impact if it comes from the closest family members. Moreover, a hostile environment brings the couple closer and leads to its isolation.

Lastly, lesbians often suffer from double discrimination, because women and men are still not treated equally in many societies.

How does the everyday life of LGBT couples differ from that of heterosexual couples?

It can differ if their family, friends, neighbours, or colleagues have a problem with homosexuality, bisexuality and transsexuality. LGBT partners usually have to declare or justify their sexual orientation in public, while heterosexual couples don't, and this makes a difference in their lives. LGBTs have to come out and “label” themselves instead of “just going on with their lives” the way heterosexuals do. Com-

this to be effective, it is important that counsellors put the questions to both partners in exactly the same way.

The answers to these questions indicate the direction the counselling process will have to take.

If the partners express different opinions, it is important to work on their common aims. In the second step, change can be encouraged by asking the partners what could happen if a rating on they would change their ratings. A homework assignment for the couple in between sessions could be to ask them to pretend for one or several days that the positive changes have already happened.

Social environment as support

Aim: to work on the representation of the social environment of LGBT couples and identify sources of support in order to find solutions for problems.

Method:

1st step: Set Up

The couple is asked to set up a system with different coloured figures or symbols. These symbols represent themselves and the people of their social environment (members of both families, particular persons that are important to one or to both partners, children, former partners, counsellors, etc).

ing-out is a constant lifetime process for gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transexuals.

How can I help LGBT persons who feel the need to meet other LGBT persons?

To help them avoid isolation, it might be a good idea to encourage them to contact and possibly join a LGBT youth group. If they are already beyond the age limit of youth groups, you could suggest they join other groups, such as a LGBT sports team. People living in small towns or villages may not always find these groups in their area and could try to and meet new people on the Internet. However, caution is required when making contacts on the Internet – anonymous users may not be who they claim to be.

If a person asks me: “Am I gay/lesbian or bisexual if I had same-sex sexual relations once or twice in my life?”

Most teenager boys have sexual experiences with other boys (for example, mutual masturbation). This is common even for those who define themselves as heterosexual. If you fall in love with someone of the same sex, you may be gay/lesbian/bisexual/transexual, but not necessarily. Also self-defined heterosexuals may have affectionate moments and/or sexual experiences with persons of the same sex. Nowadays, the need for labelling their identity seems to be less important for some people. It would be more appropriate for counsellors to pay attention to the emotions of the person they are counselling and to the way he/she lives his/her relationships, rather than focusing on verbal labels.

It is important to bear in mind that, alongside the concept of homo-bisexuality, there is also the notion of bi-affectivity. For instance, this may mean that a person may perceive him/herself as homo-affective (i.e. he/she falls in love exclusively with persons of the same sex) and yet perceive him/herself as bisexual (i.e. he/she engages in sexual relations with both sexes).

2nd step: Perception

The partners explain who are the persons they represented during the set-up phase and explain the system from their point of view.

3rd step: Questions

- How static/ dynamic is the system?
- Where are the limits between the persons in the system?
- Which links exist?
- Who has contributed to stabilising the relationship in the past and how?
- Who was involved in finding solutions to the problems?
- Who supports the fact that the couple has sought out counselling and how?
- Which of the persons identified in the exercise best knows how the partners could cope with their current crisis?

4th step: Anticipating changes

The partners are invited to change the way the relationship is presented in terms of figures and symbols, and to move them to a different spot. What exactly would change then?

Please note: this exercise focuses attention on the social resources that could provide support to the couple. The representation of real persons with neutral symbols should not lead to interpretations of the role of those individuals. The point of the exercise is to look at the system as a whole.

3 Different Lifestyles and Stereotypes

Introduction

First of all

There are many opinions about homosexuality and they vary according to the social and cultural context of peoples and individuals.

Those convictions are the result of the combination of a number of factors on which it's worth reflecting.

Stereotype: a rigid and conventional pattern of behaviour or discourse; preformed opinion, not based on direct experience. In general, stereotypes provide individuals with behavioural guidelines that are applicable even when the subject has no prior direct experience with a given situation. However, when stereotypes are used in an indiscriminate manner, they contribute to create and perpetuate prejudices. When the opinion is shared by a group of people, we talk about social prejudice. In this case, for instance, social stereotypes that refer to specific countries or to ethnic and religious traits may lead to racist behaviour.

Prejudice: preconception, judgement formed beforehand, not based on direct experience. It is a generalised and simplified perception of specific aspects of reality or of a person.

Discrimination: division, separation, tendency to apply different and worse conditions to people because they belong to a specific social group. Discrimination may be based on ethnicity, religion, geographic origin, cultural origin, sexual orientation, age, gender, body weight, financial status, socio-relational status, physical appearance, political beliefs, physical or mental disability, among many other things. Therefore, homophobia and racism, the main issues around which Crossing Diversity is conceived, are just two of the many types of discrimination which can be found among teens/young adults and in the environments in which they live (school, family, group of friends).

In particular, beliefs on homosexual people are usually based on rather traditional stereotypes regarding gender roles and sexuality. These, in turn, lead to a series of prejudices, which are usually negative, about homosexuals. These prejudices contribute internalising homophobia in LGBT persons and spreading it in their social environment, thus bringing about new forms of discrimination.

Many religious fundamentalisms view sexuality as sinful when it is expressed outside of specific social rules and rituals (e.g. marriage). Therefore, homosexuality is not viewed in a favourable way, indeed is seen as “scandalous” and its positive - both individual and social - aspects are denied. A young homosexual who belongs to a traditional religious or social community might find him/herself in a difficult position because he/she will have to deal with different levels of prejudice both outside his/her community, because he/she is a member of a discriminated group, and within his/her own community because he/she is a homosexual.

Basic information

In *Crossing Diversity*, on more than one occasion we suggest you personally meet and get to know LGBT people and organisations. Direct exchange and experience expose us to elements that might be dissonant with our conscious or unconscious stereotypes. Therefore, direct experience discourages the formation or preservation of existing stereotypes and the possible discriminating behaviour that might follow as a result of that. Indeed, in the European Union, gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transsexuals have developed many different 'lifestyles'. For some LGBTs, the anti-discrimination aspect is paramount and therefore they create associations, wear symbols and promote equal rights, i.e. they live an "activist" lifestyle. For others, the priority is on social contact, romantic or sexual relationships, hence they prefer to join communities that organise meetings and events. Others are looking for a permanent and monogamous romantic relationship. Thus, the scenario is as varied as that of the majority of people; however, we can become aware of that only if we come into contact and interact with different behavioural models. Contemporary societies, with their social and economic mobility, offer much more diversity and freedom for individuals to express their desires and peculiarities, especially regarding gender roles. With this greater diversity comes the need for mutual respect, acceptance and flexibility. Today, one of the basic principles of the EU is that all persons, couples or families, shall have equal rights and responsibilities, without regard to sexual orientation or any other personal characteristic, because they all share the same European citizenship. Most EU Member Countries provide legal recognition to homosexual couples and families and a growing number of countries allows these families to adopt children. As acceptance towards homosexuality increases, gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transsexuals no longer feel the need to hide their homosexuality behind a heterosexual marriage and a traditional family, like they often used to. As a result, there are more and more gay men and lesbian women who have long-term relationships or have adopted or natural children. Studies show that children raised in such families do not lack affection or role models. However, these children do suffer when laws make good parenting difficult (e.g. by denying parental authority or legal recognition as a parent to the partner of the natural parent) or when others treat them in discriminatory ways.

What does this mean for me?

In your work inside and outside of the school setting, you will often encounter stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination toward homosexual people and families, due to the increasing number of coming out cases.

In Theme Map 2 (*LGBT Relationships*), you will find useful information on the possible ways to challenge the most common stereotypes in the “Basic information” section.

School is the place designed specifically to prevent distress and value the relational dimension in addition to the cultural one. Here young people, each with their own backgrounds and differences, come into contact with social values, including stereotypes and prejudices. It is precisely in the school, which is a space for dialogue, exchange and mutual listening, that we need to promote actions aimed at integrating and celebrating diversity, to be seen as an opportunity and potential for personal growth.

Today, everyone has the right to choose their own lifestyle, based on their wishes and on their own gender, cultural background, religion, age and other socially relevant aspects.

Consider for a moment the way in which your organisation or the people around you deal with lifestyles that are different from traditional ones. For instance, do employment criteria, workers’ benefits and internal regulations provide equal treatment to men and women, homosexual and heterosexual couples, citizens of your country and foreigners?

Indeed, counselling can help teens explore their feelings and needs by fostering the resolution of the internal and external conflicts that prevent them from freely choosing in their lives. At the same time, the school can provide teens with a safe and welcoming environment that promotes equitable exchange and respect for diversity, condemning and preventing any psychological, verbal or physical violence that may occur on its grounds by discussing and challenging distorted images and representations.

Education

(Teachers)

Bear in mind

It is important that you and your students acknowledge that dealing with differences is not always easy.

As educators, you can look at and analyse your own opinions about diverse lifestyles and LGBT issues.

Keep in mind that your teaching is very much influenced by your personality. For instance, if you talk to your students about diversity and different lifestyles, while at the same time you show that you don't approve of lifestyles which are too different from your own, your students will not take you seriously. Ask yourself these questions and then carefully read the questions included in the Counselling "Bear in mind" section:

- What lifestyle do you like or prefer? Why?
- Have you ever considered that there might be people who do not approve your lifestyle and choices?
- How do you feel when you are with people who don't approve your lifestyle? How would you like to be treated by them?
- Do you think that gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transexuals have specific lifestyles? What kind of lifestyles?

The next step is to prepare yourself to listen to the emotions and opinions of your students. You may also ask them the questions cited above. Try to imagine their answers before you begin the discussion.

- What will they think?
- How will they react to the topic of diversity?
- How will you feel while working with them on this topic – comfortable, insecure, threatened, etc.?

Keep in mind that you will increasingly have to deal with students who come from very different families and backgrounds, as regards culture and nationality, their own or their parents' sexual orientation, religion and lifestyles. As teachers, you have the duty to embrace this diversity – without discriminating or denying it - and to personally and professionally get in touch with it and turn this experience into a valuable learning and enriching opportunity for your students.

A large, stylized pink puzzle piece graphic is positioned in the upper left background, partially overlapping the white header area. The puzzle piece has a complex, interlocking shape with several notches and protrusions. The main content area is a solid pink rectangle that sits on top of the white background, containing text in white and black. The footer area is white and contains a pink square, a page number, and text in black.

Education - FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions)

Please also refer to the FAQs for the psycho/social/healthcare professionals.

How do I deal with opposing views on diversity in my class?

Welcome this as a good opportunity for discussion. The ground rule is: “all opinions are valid if they are expressed with respect for others and argued in a serious way”. Ask students to explain and explore their positions and promote curiosity about other points of view.

How do I make sure that LGBT issues will be dealt with in an objective manner?

You don't have to cover all the possible points of view, and it would impossible for you to do that, what is important is for you and your students to know the main points of view on sexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality and transexuality. The Crossing Diversity Handbook is a good place to start. Present it to your students, encourage them to use the included filmography, glossary, webliography and to contact listed associations. Give students the opportunity to share their thoughts and opinions, and you will be able to express yours, by being careful and not make your position act as guidelines for the teens' discussion.

How do I deal with parents who expect the school to promote their preferred lifestyle?

You need to explain to parents that the mission of the school is to teach respect and that this means also embracing diversity. Explain the goals of your educational method to the parents: to respect all differences, our differences as human beings.

Education - Tools

Defining normality

Aim: clarifying the relativity of the concepts of “normality” and “abnormality”, discussing the topic of “belonging” to and being excluded from a group.

Method: collect a series of pictures of men and women. Ask students to arrange the pictures in a line so that they constitute a continuum from “normal” to “abnormal”. Discuss where the boundary between these two extremes lies (this will certainly differ from person to person). Discuss why it differs.

Steer the discussion toward the definition of ‘normal’, ‘abnormal’, and their relation with the word ‘different’. Explain the concepts of belonging to a group (insiders) or being outside it (outsider) and analyse them. As we identify insiders, i.e. the members of a group, we automatically identify those who are excluded from that group. Then, analyse the effects of exclusion and the way to treat diversity with respect, including differences in sexual orientation.

Please note: this exercise is suitable even for young teens, however they must be aware of their own points of view and trained to critically process information. Those students who grew up in cultures that place particular emphasis on ‘collectivity’ will find this exercise rather difficult and will be more sensitive to the reactions of others. In order to obviate this block, the discussion can start tackling general topics (including smoking, going out at night, etc.) and various opinions about normality and abnormality relating to such issues, stressing the different pressure exerted by groups for conformity to any social norm.

Integration of diversity

Aim: to introduce the concept of “diversity” through the topic of cultural diversity.

Method: place the focus on cultural stereotypes and prejudices against cultures different from one’s own.

Ask students to talk about episodes in their own life in which they met people from different cultures and had to confront views and lifestyles different from their own.

Ask them how they felt when they met these people, if there had been something that scared or disturbed them or, instead, that made them curious and also ask them about situations in which they felt “different” and how they felt.

Then you can ask students to act out the stories they told in front of the class, suggesting to switch roles (e.g. to play the part of the “different” character in the story), so as to provide the teens with the opportunity to “physically put themselves in the shoes of the other” and to experience what “feeling what the other feels” (empathy) is. At the end, ask students whether they have discovered something new and what it was.

Please note: you can start from these types of experiences and then broaden the scope of the exercise to include sexual diversity and prejudices and stereotypes connected with it.

Labels

Aim: to explore how stereotypes work and show how labelling reinforces stereotypical behaviour.

Method: glue a label with a stereotype (e.g. ‘lazy’, ‘rude’) on the forehead of every participant. Don’t let them see what is written on their label. Students may look at other people’s labels but must not reveal their content. Participants now have to carry out a simple collaboration exercise (e.g. the group has to choose a recipe and cook a meal. They have to decide who will do the shopping, who will cook, who will do the dishes, etc.). During this exercise, students have to behave in accordance to the stereotype written on their labels. Stop the exercise after a few minutes and discuss the effect it had on the students. Usually, participants feel disoriented, sometimes they are frustrated and many start to behave accordingly to their label. This is a demonstration of how stereotypes unconsciously influence our and others’ behaviours. Expand the discussion to include the labels used for gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transexuals.

Please note: this exercise works best when the students know and trust each other to some extent. With new groups, there is a chance that people will unintentionally offend others. Be careful not to give the labels that are considered as being the most negative ones to students who are already excluded from the group of their classmates.



A STORY...



“Alexander, do me a favour, give me the invitation to the Parents’ Evening, please. Hans would like to come and he wants to make a note of the date.” Flabbergasted, Alexander stares at his father. “Oh, come on, Dad. Why does Hans have to come with us?”

“We’ve been living together for five years. Hans is like a second father to you, isn’t he?”

“Yes, but – honestly, can’t you go there just with Mum anyway? That would be much better, really.”

“Darling, being gay is quite normal. You see Mum only every second weekend and the everyday things, your homework – Hans and I look after everything that concerns you. Don’t we? At your school, they should have gotten the idea by now, Hans is just as responsible for you as I am. He has permission to write letters to the school for you, and to talk to the teachers about your achievements.

All in all, he’s more for you than I myself. I don’t want to hide Hans, or disavow him.”

“Yeah, sure, I understand that. But even so, it doesn’t have to become common knowledge. My life’s already stressing enough without this. You always think that accepting homosexuality is easy for every single person on Earth – just because Hans and you know thousands of lesbians and gays. Believe me, the school is a complete desert in this respect. I can already picture the teacher standing in front of me. Her face will be full of spite, she’ll smirk, but, of course, she’s completely tolerant,” groans Alexander.

“Don’t you think you’re overdoing it a little, Alexander?” His father looks at him closely.

“Hans and I’ll get it right. The time will come when your miserable journey through this desert will draw to an end.”

“Okay, then I’ll go and get myself buried. By the way, Hans has pinned the invitation to the Parents’ Evening on the wall,” sighs Alexander.

“Good morning everyone”, Mrs. Steiner greets her class and glances over the pupils’ heads. Alexander squirms restlessly back and forth on his seat. As his eyes meet those of the teacher, Alex stiffens like a stone pillar.

“Now then,” begins the teacher, drumming her fingers on her desk. “Alexander, wouldn’t you like to tell us something about your two fathers, and about how you manage?”

Thirty-two pairs of eyes are fixed on Alex.

“I manage all right” cries out Alex and his voice sounds squawky, raven-like.

“Two fathers? What does she mean? ”, asks Kathrin, who just doesn’t understand when she’s putting her foot in it.

“Alex?” The teacher raises her voice and looks at him provocatively.

“What does it mean?” Suddenly Alex loses his temper. He stares at his classmates, straight in their eyes. “My father is gay. He loves another man. So I have two fathers and one mother.” He wants to make his voice sound proud, but in reality it trembles suspiciously.

“But it’s perverse”, cries out Erkan. “Revolting. In their place, I would hide in the darkest corner of the earth and pray I become normal again, instead of standing out like that. Yuck!”

“My father’s normal,” says Alexander with a quiet voice.

“Are there other opinions about this?” Mrs. Steiner looks around.

“It’s possible to undergo treatment”, remarks Kathrin.

“My father does not have to undergo any treatment,” hisses Alexander.

“He’s absolutely okay, and so is Hans. People like you, who don’t accept this, you are the ones who need a therapy.”

“What do you want?” Erkan stands up menacingly. “What the hell are you saying? Come here, twit, I’ll show you who’s normal and who isn’t, you revolting faggot.” He grabs Alex by the shoulders and shakes him.



The class is still. Mrs. Steiner runs her fingers through her shock of hair, but stays glued on the spot, and drops of sweat form on her brow.

Koray stands up deathly white. "Excuse me" he whispers. "I'm feeling sick."

"Sissy", hisses Erkan at him, and spits in despire on the floor between Koray and Alex. "One more perverse word, man, and you're dead," Erkan warns Alexander, before slamming a powerful punch at him. Alex resists the blow without dropping to the floor through sheer luck.

"That's not acceptable, Erkan", says the teacher, helplessly. "Now you apologise to Alexander and you, Koray please sit down again."

"Me? Ask a perv for forgiveness?" sneers Erkan. "He's the one who must apologise to me, Mrs Steiner, just to make matters clear."

"Nowadays homosexuality is absolutely normal", says Mrs. Steiner uncertainly. "Alexander's father can't help it if he's become that way."

"Alright, I'm leaving now, that's quite enough for me, Mrs. Steiner," whispers Alexander. Before Mrs Steiner even tries to say anything, he has already left the room.

"It's really very nice of you, to receive me on such short notice." Mrs. Steiner, embarrassed, stares at the tips of her shoes.

"Mrs. Steiner, it seems to me that Alexander is in a very difficult position within his class – didn't you ever talk about homosexuality in your class before?"

"It's not part of the teaching programme," replies Mrs Steiner with an almost defiant look on her face.

"Yes, unfortunately", admits Mr. Wyler, the advisor. "So we're agreed. Next week I'll be attending your lessons."

There's absolute silence in the class.

"I'm very pleased to be with you today. I won't bore you with figures, but it's not quite unavoidable – sorry folks. But you don't have to write anything for me", grins Mr. Wyler and some of the pupils, boys and girls, grin back at him.

"About one in every ten young people is homosexual. Hmm... in your class that would mean about three pupils. Imagine you couldn't talk about it to each other, that you always had to hide for fear of being excluded." Mr. Wyler considers the class for a few moments "Some of you must have a very good idea of what it feels like to be excluded, don't you?"

"But you don't have to flaunt it – being different, I mean," says Erkan softly.

"Human beings all differ from one another", says Mr Wyler. "Surely, there are lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transexuals who live openly – who have fought for the right to live like that, to be allowed to marry, and to be able to get common custody for their children. Just as there are homosexuals, bisexuals and transexuals who tell no one about their feelings. Some marry a partner of the other gender and secretly pursue their sexual orientation. There are lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transexuals who live in communities, some who live together without marrying and others who want to live alone, even if they do have a relationship with someone. Not much difference, really, with respect to heterosexuals."

"But the important thing is that two human beings truly do love each other.

That's what's important", Alexander dares to say.

"A nice final word for this lesson", pipes up Mrs. Steiner.

"Just in case one of you wants to talk to me about it, I'll leave my telephone number here."

In the courtyard Mr. Wyler turns around once again. "Hey, you were sitting in that class, right?"

Koray nods. "Thank you, Mr. Wyler. Maybe I'm one of those three. I'd like to come to your counselling hour some day."

"Sure", says Mr Wyler.»



Counselling

(Psycho/social/healthcare professionals)

Bear in mind

If you counsel LGBT teenagers, belonging to your or other cultures, or to their parents, it is very important for you to be clear about your own opinions about homosexuality and sexuality in general. Everyone has their own lifestyle and probably thinks that the lifestyles of others are less appropriate. If you are not aware of your own views on these topics, you will be more inclined to unconsciously view certain lifestyles in a negative way.

To be more aware of your own view on life choices that are different from your own, try to answer the following questions and then read those for the education sector:

- What kind of life do you personally prefer?
- Did you 'choose' your lifestyle freely or were there external factors that steered you in that direction?
- Why have you chosen this specific lifestyle for yourself?
- Is there anyone who disapproves of your lifestyle? Why? How do you deal with this?
- Which life choices are easier for you to respect? Which ones aren't? Why is that?
- More in general, what is your attitude towards diversity in sexual, ethnic, religious, social and financial status?
- Do you know enough about the issues of LGBT teenagers who come from different cultures? (For instance, a person who grew up in a strictly religious context will have a completely different approach to homosexuality than a person coming from a more liberal family).

Keep in mind that there are many different ways to enjoy a fulfilling life. Some may be totally new to you, so don't be surprised if the people you are counselling have original approaches!

Here is some brief information that could be useful for your counselling work:

- LGBT teenagers lack positive role models. This may lead them to feel insecure towards homosexual lifestyles and to adopt stereotypical gay or lesbian behaviours learned from the media. Meeting with an open-minded, informed and non-biased counsellor can give them the opportunity to re-think and re-shape their lifestyle to conform to their own desires.
- Show the teen that there is no objective criteria for the evaluation of lifestyles. It is important to underline that the main criteria people should use for evaluating their lifestyle should be their own happiness and satisfaction.
- Find out about local self-help groups where can meet and exchange experiences and perceptions.
- Some LGBT teenagers may fear that they will not have a family because they are not heterosexual. This fear is often connected to their unhappiness with their current life. Many of them change their opinion when they realise that they can have their own type of family that is just as authentic and fulfilling as any other

Counselling - FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions)

Please also refer to the FAQs for the education sector.

How can I avoid judging certain life choices that I disapprove of?

In most situations, we are judgemental of another lifestyle because we can't imagine what it is really like.

Remember that nobody is asking you to change your choices but just to imagine other possible choices and, hopefully, to be aware that some people may find your way of life strange, too. It is only natural for you to prefer one lifestyle over another and not to perceive lifestyles different than your own as equally suitable to you. However, keep in mind that your own opinions are adequate exclusively for your own life and that things may look completely different from someone else's point of view.

What answers I can give a homosexual person who is unhappy with his/her life?

People who are unhappy with their life often have not had the opportunity to make different life choices because of the personal or societal limits. They need to know that there is not only one way of living as a gay/lesbian/bisexual/transsexual person. Today there are many more opportunities than in the past to live a fulfilling life outside mainstream clichés. One needs to be aware of his/her most authentic needs and desires, to be able to realise that he/she is not isolated and that there is a variety of social dynamics that can meet those needs and desires, but also that one needs to do commit and make sacrifices as the construction of our lives is not "automatic".

How can I help the LGBT persons I am counselling to feel less isolated and learn about available opportunities for social inclusion?

In almost every city, there are many LGBT self-help groups that you can contact to find out more information on events and available services. Today, the Internet is a real goldmine of information on resources available in your local area or within easy reach of it. Start from the links included in the Crossing Diversity Handbook and don't hesitate to pass them on to them.



Counselling - Tools

The Two Chairs

Aim: to explore inner needs and external expectations, and the conflicts that can arise between the two.

Method: arrange two chairs face to face. One chair symbolises external expectations represented by an authoritative and emotionally significant person, while the other one represents personal needs. The person sits first on one chair, then on the other, and tries to express only the needs and emotions that position symbolises. How does he/she feel on the different chairs? Each time, how does he/she feel about what the other is expressing? What would they tell to the person sitting on the other chair?

Please note: whether we feel comfortable with our lifestyle may depend on our degree of sensitivity to social desirability pressures, i.e. to what extent we try to meet the expectations to of others.

The Mirror

Aim: to explore self-images.

Method: the person closes his/her eyes and imagine he/she is sitting in front of a mirror reflecting his/her image. What would he/she criticise about the lifestyle of the person in front of him/her? What would he/she admire?

Please note: this experience works on two levels: physical appearance (this is what most teenagers will do at first) and other characteristics, feelings and behaviours you can help him/her link to the lifestyle. You have to help the person to visualise him/herself as an individual who is actually sitting in front of him/her, and emotionally participate in this experience for the exercise to work.

The Fairy Godmother

Aim: to explore unconscious or repressed needs and fantasies about the future.

Method: ask the person to imagine that a fairy godmother comes to him/her and asks how he/she wants to live.

- 1) Write down the fantasies expressed by the person
- 2) Review together what prevents him/her from actually living as he/she wants.

Please note: it is not important to establish whether or not the fears that the person has about living according to his/her desires are justified. Even if they are not, you have to take them seriously into consideration, otherwise the person will feel you don't understand him/her. One's personal constructions of the self and the world, as well as the relating emotional experiences made over time, reflect a subjective truth that is the background to the present emotional context, where the person's choices and, to some extent, his/her whole life construction stem from.

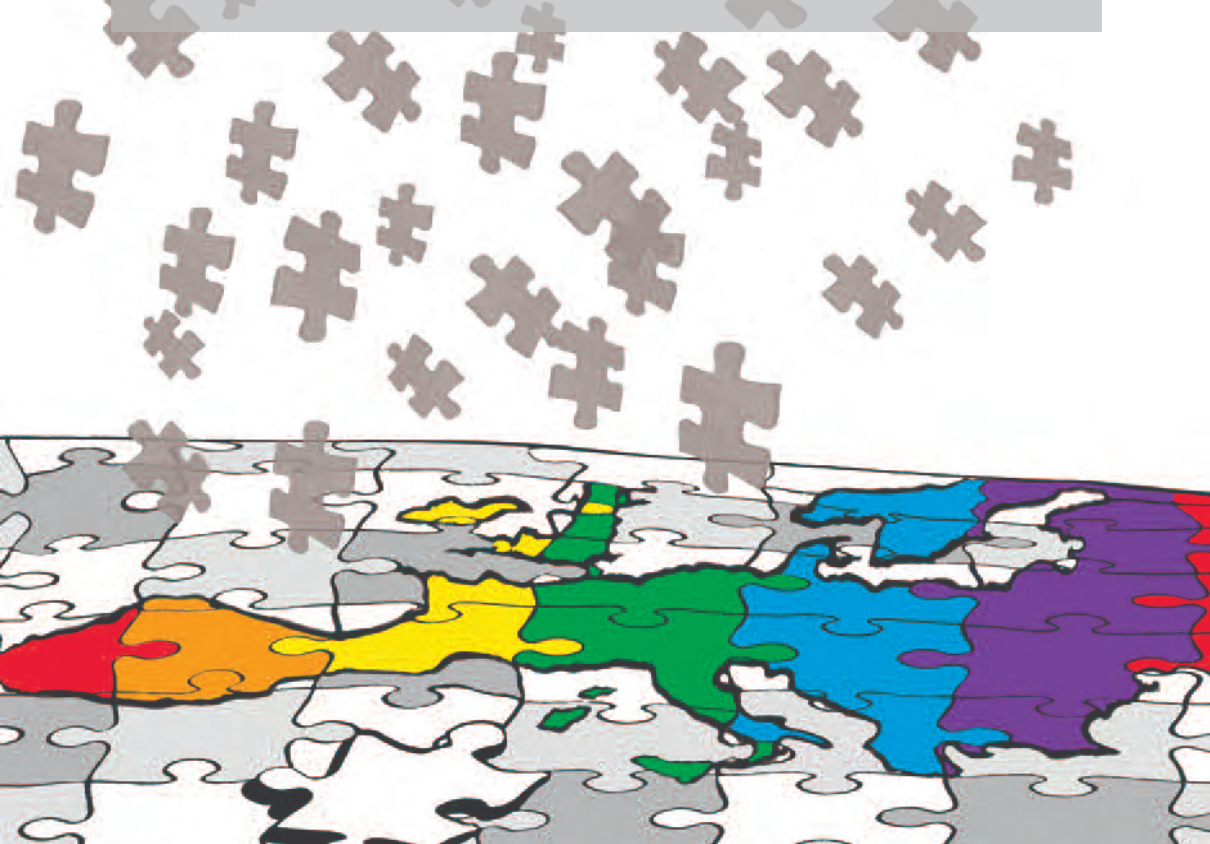
4 Health-Related Psychological Aspects

Introduction

Back in 1973, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) removed homosexuality as a mental disorder from its Diagnostic and Statistical Manual Of Mental Disorders (DSM-II). In 1993, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared homosexuality a natural variant of human sexuality.

Today, psychologists and psychotherapists focus on supporting LGBT persons in understanding and accepting their sexual and gender orientation by helping them to build up a positive self-image and deal with prejudice and discrimination.

In particular, counselling young LGBTs who belong to ethnic groups requires specific attention towards some evolutionary tasks: integrating and harmonising diverse identities and manage the double stigma connected to their belonging to two minorities. These teens may feel as outsiders both in the LGBT community and in their ethnic group and therefore feel pressured to choose between the two groups. On the contrary, this choice is not unavoidable at all and, through counselling, they can learn how to turn their identity – which carries two stigmas – in a positive self-definition and a self-fulfilling way of living.



Minority Stress

An increasing number of studies shows that prejudice and discrimination are relevant and measurable stress factors. These studies show that many homosexuals are subject to chronic micro- and macro-traumatic stress due to hostile social environments, such as for instance stigmatisation and actual or feared violence.

This phenomenon is known as Minority Stress (V. Lingiardi, 20). It can affect members of stigmatised minorities and, in the case of homosexuals, it comprises three elements:

- 1) Interiorised homophobia: a (conscious or unconscious) negative or conflicting attitude towards one's own homoaffective desire.
- 2) Stigma: the higher the social rejection perceived in the environment, the higher is the vigilance level related to the fear of being identified as gay, and the greater is the recourse to often inadequate defensive strategies. This phenomena is also known as "chronic stress loop".
- 3) Actual experiences of discrimination and violence: they may be acute (e.g. actual episodes) and chronic, as they are turned into constant fear of being expelled or rejected by a person or by a group of people. As a matter of fact, such experiences often occur in indifferent or even collusive environments with internalised homophobic stereotypes, thus having a significant emotional impact on the victims that transcends the actual event.

Basic information

Because of Minority Stress, young homosexuals are more at risk for psycho-social distress. Indeed, studies show that they have a higher risk of: depression, attempted suicide, drug abuse, eating disorders, psychosomatic disorders, dropping out of school and running from home.

One of the main challenges for all homosexual adolescents is self-acceptance. Some are so afraid of the social stigma of homosexuality that they live always hidden behind a mask in order to meet other people's expectations and, by doing so, they compromise their well-being. In any case, the fear of extremely negative reactions may be realistic, especially within some homophobic communities. Acceptance problems among LGBT persons can be classified into three levels:

- 1) "Mild" problems (young people who have a good social network in place, supportive family and friends); in these cases, counselling and school awareness programs are the appropriate intervention strategies.
- 2) "Severe" problems (poor social network, negative self-image, fear of contact with gay and heterosexual people, internalised homophobia, strict religious and/or family background); in these cases, it is necessary to provide a more continuous support inside and outside the school system;
- 3) Problems "complicated" by psychiatric and psychological problems like depression, suicide attempts, anxiety disorders. These problems are so severe that they take priority over the acceptance issues and need to be dealt with first. In these cases, it is necessary to provide appropriate social support that will include individual psychotherapy as well as (if necessary) psycho-social support within the school. Indeed, the therapeutic function shows more significant limitations if it is not accompanied by educational and environmental actions aiming at protecting traumatised teens.

Minority stress and coming out

Visibility is another challenge for young homosexuals. As coming out may cause negative reactions from the significant others, teens need to assess their psychological and social resources (see *Theme Map 1*). For instance, disclosing a homosexual identity to parents may cause serious tensions within the family.

In particular, teens who belong to ethnic minorities who have to deal with heterosexism from their families, as well as with possible racism within mainstream Lesbian Gay and bisexual organisations and individuals, may not find the support they need. Moreover, since homosexual issues are not included in school sex education programs, young homosexuals and their needs become invisible. Indeed, for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transsexual teenagers, the first sexual experience may come unexpectedly and thus they need access to information on aspects that are specific to gay/lesbian/bisexual/transsexual life. Information on safe sex and general health (use of condoms and lubricants, prevention of STDs and female cancers) is as important as the information that is usually provided on contraception. Some LGBT organisations provide specific brochures for or make presentations at schools on these topics.

What does this mean for me?

LGBT teenagers who are not comfortable with their sexual orientation and/or ethnic identity will benefit from accurate information, peer support and adequate support actions.

To such end, it could be useful to provide training to counsellors and teachers on LGBT issues so as to provide them with specific and up-to-date information on, for instance, how society and science views homosexuality, bullying and violence against minorities in school/society, identity building and developmental tasks for homosexual teens (relationships with family and peers), the role of counsellors and teachers in preventing and dealing with discrimination, as well as the provision of operational tools.

The socialisation experience for LGBT teenagers should include, as it is the case for heterosexual teens, exchanges with competent LGBT adults. Teachers and counsellors should therefore place focus on the importance of social networks for homosexual young people in order to prevent social isolation (e.g. by informing teens about the existence of youth LGBT groups and associations), emotional isolation (by showing empathy and, hence, the possibility of being understood when expressing one's feelings) and cognitive isolation (showing knowledge of and interest in LGBT-related issues). In this way, teachers and psycho/social/healthcare professionals can actively help preventing the psycho-social problems of LGBT teens.

In addition, counsellors can play an important role in helping people explore their feelings about sexually transmitted diseases and safe sex. Indeed, if a gay/lesbian or bisexual teen feels uncomfortable about his/her sexuality, he/she will probably not take steps to protect him/herself when having sex. Indeed, low self-esteem negatively affects assertiveness when negotiating safe sex with the partner.

Education

(Teachers)

Bear in mind

- How can I change my heterosexual students' attitude towards homosexuality so that I can support my LGBT students?
- Can I invite a openly LGBT person to talk to the class? Will parents and other teachers criticize me?
- How would I feel having a openly LGBT student? How would the other students feel? Will this person be mocked, offended, marginalised, or even physically attacked by the others?
- How can I make everyone feel comfortable?

A possible solution could be to show the class movies which portray positive LGBT characters or invite members of gay, lesbian or bisexual organizations to meet the class.

These organizations usually carry out projects in schools to educate students on LGBT or health issues. This can be a winning strategy; in fact, according to social psychologist Allport's "contact hypothesis", when different groups come into contact with each other, prejudice is definitely reduced. Moreover, this kind of meeting can also give the opportunity to present positive role models to gay, lesbian and bisexual teens, which are important for their self-esteem.

- How do I feel when my students use the word "faggot" or "fairy"? Should I ignore them or is it better to intervene?

Even when some words are used without offensive intent, it is still true that they have an offensive meaning which is derogative for all LGBT persons.

Such words – which are often used automatically and without thinking – can be used as tools. Have the students stop to consider why they choose to use one offensive word instead of another. Have them think about who they may be offending when they use such words.

Education - Tools

Talking about “normality”

Aim: to distinguish between statistical, legal, and moral perceptions of “normality” in order to demonstrate that “normality” is both a relative and a historical concept. An additional objective is to remind students that homosexuality is not a disease but a normal variety of human sexuality. However, some cultures still consider homosexuality to be a disease, thus affecting the psycho-physical health of gays, lesbians and bisexuals who live in these cultural environments.

Method: every boy/girl must fill in a form in which some behaviours or situations are described (e.g. masturbation, homosexual marriage, not eating pork, specific diseases, disability, age, etc.) and must write down whether these behaviours are “normal” or not.

Please note: this is an introductory exercise that will be used to open a classroom debate on historical relativity and on the concept of “normality”.

Brainstorming on health

Aim: to focus on the topic of health and its meaning.

Method: ask the class for the meaning of the word “health”. Collect all the answers, without performing any type of selection, and discuss them first in sub-groups and then all together.

Please note: boys and girls should be familiar with the concepts of “stigma” and “discrimination”. Point out that health does not only concern the body but also the quality of the individual’s relationship with the social environment and his/her ability to cope with problems.

Education - FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions)

Please also refer to the FAQs for the psycho/social/healthcare professionals.

What is the emotional impact of a verbal insult?

An Italian saying says “words hurt more than swords”. Indeed, a verbal insult tends to mock, despise and/or deny a part of someone’s identity. This can cause feelings of shame and guilt, and affects the self-esteem of the victim of the insult. In the case of gay and lesbians, verbal insults are mainly directed at their sexual identity, making the coming out process particularly difficult for them. If a teacher is indifferent to the use of verbal insults, bullies may believe they are authorized to go on using them, while the victims feel unprotected.

Socio-Affective Education: “Do we discuss well?”

Aim: to teach young people to express their own feelings and to relate with others in a way that respects diversity.

Method: in order to be comfortable with ourselves and with other people, we need to learn how to deal with confrontations by expressing our opinion/feelings/thoughts without offending or disrespecting others.

Ask the class whether it is possible to “peacefully argue”. A fundamental point of the debate should be the use of “I” instead of “you”; this allows to use one’s own feelings as the starting point for the confrontation so that the other person does not feel attacked. It is important that everyone can have the chance to talk freely without prevaricating or fear of being judged.

Please note: this is an introductory exercise. Remind students that our psycho-physical health depends on our ability to relate well to others.

The opinions of others

Aim: to learn the impact of the opinion of others on people’s well-being.

Method: suggest movies or books that talk about diversity (cultural, sexual, etc.); have the students discuss the benefits and disadvantages of the diversity issues presented in the movie/book and what feelings they believe are connected to the personal experience of the characters with their diversity; have them exchange views on this topic. You could open up the discussion and have the students talk of personal diversity experiences they are willing to share and their emotions, then also encouraging further discussion on the topic.

One of my students, who I believe is gay, is going through a very hard time but doesn’t talk to me about it; I think he can’t accept himself. Should I refer him to a psychologist?

Sometimes even small acts can provide a lot of support to a boy. In some cases, an understanding teacher can be as helpful as a mental health professional. The teacher may deal with homosexuality while teaching literature, for instance, by presenting a gay or lesbian author, so as to show a positive attitude towards homosexuality in an indirect way. No doubt the student will get the message, feel reassured and might even approach the teacher to talk about himself/herself.

Counselling

(Psycho/social/healthcare professionals)

Bear in mind

Working effectively with young LGBTs is certainly possible, especially if we are willing to identify ourselves with experiences that might not apply to us but are nevertheless basically similar to our own. At the same time, we should not expect to understand everything about the experience because personal, cultural and religious factors have a strong influence on the meaning we assign to our own and other people's experiences. Therefore, it is best to ask the teen about his/her personal experience as an LGBT teen and/or as a member of an ethnic minority group rather than make assumptions.

We should not forget that not every young LGBT and not every individual belonging to a stigmatised minority have specific problems with their psycho-affective orientation. We should not see a problem when there isn't one to begin with, and just allow the teen to freely express his/her issues and concerns, if any.

In order to broaden knowledge on this topic, please refer to the filmography, bibliography, webliography and glossary included in the Crossing Diversity Handbook and contact Groups and Organizations in your area.

Lastly, before you start working with the person you are counselling carefully examine your attitudes and prejudices and review your knowledge of the psychological and health issues of the LGBT community. Be aware of your opinions on homosexuality and bisexuality because they will inevitably guide you during your work.

If the problems arise from belonging to a stigmatised minority, such as homosexuals or ethnic or religious minorities (Minority Stress), it is advisable to provide the student with individual support and, at the same time, to also work with his/her class or even with the entire school. Among the possible actions, you may:

- Determine if minority members are present within the class/school and organise group activities with the teachers which will focus on these minorities.
- Invite qualified members of the LGBT or ethnic community to talk with the students.
- Promote deeper awareness of colleagues and institutions on the topic.
- Favour the creation of study groups or students unions made up by those minorities (as it happens in many European universities) that will carry out awareness-raising activities for students and school staff.
- Have teachers develop a shared methodology for the stigmatisation of homophobic insults and for addressing homophobic and racial harassment, bullying and discrimination.

A STORY...



Today I'll pay a visit to Chloé in Fontenay. We've been together for more than one year, now, and at last I'll be able to see her home.

I remember the day I first saw Chloe. We had been chatting in a Tri-angle youth chat for three whole months before we found out, by chance, that we were neighbours. Not France, Austria, the Netherlands or Italy – not at all, Fontenay and Paris. And it's really only a stone's throw from one another. So, of course, we made a date.

Elsa and Chloé: a meeting in real life Good heavens, I'd been racking my brains, wondering what I would have done if Chloé turned out to be ugly or stupid –one never knows with chats. I preferred not to tell my mother about this chat thing. It's stupid, really, because I chat too and Mum would never imagine that anyone should be scared of me. But now it doesn't matter anymore, Mum likes Chloé, and that's the only thing that matters.

Damn, I really have to go now, otherwise I'll never get to Fontenay today. She grabbed her jacket, quickly checked herself in the mirror, took the key from the hook and rushed out.

Chloé's father is the real problem, she thought two hours later, feeling uneasy.

"You must be back in one hour, is that clear?" he glares at Chloé.

Chloé is so scared that I freeze.

"Come, Chloé." I help her up and we run out as fast as we can.

"Is your father always like that?" Pensively, I throw a couple of pebbles into the pond.

Chloé nods warily. "He loves me, that's all." Her voice sounds sad. "I'm his only daughter – he only means well."

"But it's not right to lock you up in your own home."

"Yeah, I know" Chloé grins, embarrassed.

"You never told me that he spies on you."

"You'd never have understood it. Daddy has a heart of gold, if you only get to know him right."

"I can't really imagine that", I whisper.

"Let's not argue about this please. You'll have to drive back just now, and I've been so happy to see you."

I draw Chloé carefully close to me and kiss her lips.

My body feels electric. I feel her excitement and get flushed all over.

"You disgusting slut." He drags me by the hair, and pushes me roughly towards the pond. "Don't you ever come here again, bitch."

Chloé's desperate eyes meet mine.

And that's the last I saw of her.

"Honey, what's wrong with you?" My mother looks at me worried. "Why doesn't Chloé come anymore? Did you have an argument?"

"It's not because of her, mum."

"Elsa, I think we ought to speak about this. You've lost at least five kilos in the past weeks. Something's wrong with you. I would just like to know what's getting you down."

"I know mum. Sorry, I must go now. See you later!" Quick, I must get away. If I look out the window today, everything is grey. Even though the sun is shining. My breakfast tastes like cardboard. The laughter of the others in the schoolyard echoes in my ears. I hear them speaking to me, I answer at times. But please don't ask me what I feel! Compared to me, a robot seems almost human. I cling onto school

because nothing else makes any sense.

Of course Mummy's right.. Last week we wrote a modern fairytale. My story began this way: "One day an extraterrestrial power put a bell jar over the Earth. But nobody noticed it..." The rest of it was quite scary and it had a fatal ending. I got top marks for it, but that does not help me anymore.

"How much does that fairytale have to do with you?", Mrs. Dupont asks me after class. I shrug.

"You've been down and out for weeks. Trouble at home?"

I shake my head silently.

"Unlucky in love?"

I look at her, surprised.

"It's about a girl, isn't it?", asks Mrs. Dupont softly.

"It's not because of her" I whisper and I let myself go. "It's her father", I sob.

"Elsa, I'll give you the telephone number of people who help young gays and lesbians, the "Ligne Azur". They can certainly help you. Things will be all right, you'll see."

"How do you know of this hotline?"

"You are not the only lesbian girl in this school." Mrs. Dupont winks at me.

For the first time in weeks I feel a little glimmer of hope.

I tell Marie, my counsellor, about the nightmare that has been haunting me for months, and that I can't make out. A monster drowns me into a pond, laughing in an evil way.

And suddenly I see the scene very clearly before me.

"Chloé's father – dragged me away by my hair and then insulted me. He pushed me towards a pond." For the first time I feel the repulsion again, I had quite forgotten it.

"Chloé's father grabbed you? I didn't know that. Maybe your nightmare shows how much Chloé's father has hurt you. Have you ever mentioned this attack to anyone?" Silently, I nod. "Do you think this is why I feel this way? I thought it was because the only thing Chloé talks about these days is suicide, and because I can't help her. I couldn't even defend myself against her father. I feel so bad."

"Yes, I can see why. You've seen how much her father can hurt you. Of course you feel helpless. Exactly as helpless as when you want to help Chloé and don't know how."

"Do you think there is some kind of link between these two things?" I ask with a small voice.

"It is very possible, to say the least, Elsa. If Chloé's father hadn't scared you so much, you could have dealt with the situation much better. Maybe you are feeling exactly as you did then, when you were attacked".

"I felt so ashamed of myself. I felt so dirty. As though he had covered me in spit from head to toe."

"That's just what he did", says Marie. "Talking about it is a good thing. It's the only way to overcome your feeling of helplessness. And once you get over it, then you can start thinking about what you can do for Chloé. What do you say, are you in for it?" Everything that Marie said sounded so logical, and simple and good. I would have never thought that an event like that could leave me so deeply shaken.

But Marie is right. I remember how secure and protected and how open I felt with Chloé. My defences were down, and of course I was also vulnerable. And after the attack by Chloé's father I could not move on. It is only now that I am starting to realize all that.

Counselling -Tools

On most social occasions, people are automatically assumed to be heterosexual and this is one of the reasons why coming out can be difficult for many lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transsexuals. Psycho/social/healthcare professionals can facilitate the coming out process by using a neutral language, without assuming anything about the personal life of that person.

Considering that the term homophobia is used to refer to “negative attitudes against homosexuality” which are passed on by others and by society in general, the psycho/social/healthcare professional needs to determine whether the problems that person is experiencing are connected only to his/her homosexuality, or are also related to other dimensions of his/her life. The counsellor should then establish if it is necessary to deal directly with the issue of sexual orientation, hence placing the focus exclusively on this issue, or perhaps leave this aspect in the background because it is not relevant to the counselling process.

If you believe that the problems of the person who sought your professional help are linked to his/her sexual orientation, you may explore this area by asking questions, however make sure you select and pose these questions tactfully and cautiously so as to respect his/her pace and boundaries, without pushing him/her to reveal his/her sexual orientation if he/she does not deem it fit.

If the person comes from a different ethnic or cultural background, pay attention to both cultural and religious interiorised stereotypes because the problems relating to sexual orientation can have different relevance depending on the influence of religion, culture and family of origin. Therefore, you may focus on the possible struggle between family values, religious values and the cultural norms of the society he/she comes from on the one hand and, on the other hand, the values and norms of the host society in terms of sexuality in general, and (homo-/bi-) sexuality in particular.

Keep in mind that not every lesbian, gay or bisexual person has a problem with his/her sexual orientation. The objective is to find a balance between the exploration of the personal homosexual experience of that person and his/her experience regarding other problematic areas in his/her life.

This can be particularly complicated when dealing with teens who, for evolutionary reasons, are actively questioning their sexuality in general.

Working on self-esteem

Aim: to investigate the impact of interiorised homophobia.

Method: give a piece of paper to the person and ask him/her to write down 10 adjectives that represent him/herself. Then, ask him/her to write down 10 adjectives representing how he/she would like to be. Now ask him/her to mark every adjective with a positive or negative sign. Examine the meaning of the adjectives, compare the two lists and examine the personal meanings.

Please note: this exercise can be used to investigate how the person perceives him/herself. Sexual orientation is not necessarily involved in such self-perception, but it allows you to verify whether it is an issue.

Representations of homosexuality

Aim: to help the person recognise the external influences on how he/she perceives him/herself as gay/lesbian/bisexual.

Method: ask the person the following questions:

- How did the social environment in which you grew up perceive LGBT people?
- Was it accepted or tolerated?
- Were lesbians or gays estranged or condemned?
- What was the first book, TV show or movie you remember that mentioned lesbians or gays?
- What was the tone of this book, show or movie?
- In which way was the gay or lesbian character portrayed? Was it a positive or negative character? Did you talk about it with anybody? If so, in which terms?

Please note: this option can be useful for those individuals who show a high level of interiorised homophobia and who use stereotyped representations of homosexuality.

Counselling - FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions)

Please also refer to the FAQs for the education sector.

Is it true that lesbian, gay and bisexuals have more psychological problems than heterosexuals? If so, why?

There is no causal link between sexual orientation and increased risk of psychological problems. Research studies show that gays, lesbians and bisexuals are more prone to psychosocial problems because they experience Minority Stress. For instance, gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transsexuals who experienced discrimination in their own families are likely to have more difficulties in coping with stress. We must remind them that their sexual orientation is a normal variant of human sexuality and that they might have to deal with interiorised homophobia and possible discrimination.

What do I do with a homosexual teenager who is very depressed and who, I suspect, has acceptance problems? How should I work on his/her internalised homophobia?

First of all, it should be determined whether the depression is in fact due to self-acceptance issues (internalised homophobia) or whether there are other factors involved.

If it is determined that the problem concerns self-acceptance, a useful place to start may be to ask the teen about his/her parents' opinion about homosexuality and how he/she feels about it. In this way, internalised stereotypes can be explored. You can help the teen identify the significant others who hold and perpetuate those stereotypes, as well as the values that have been passed on to them through these stereotypes. At the same time, you can help the boy/girl identify other significant others who, in turn, do not endorse such stereotypes and examine the values held by these people. A further area for reflection is to see if there is a possibility as to whether an affective relationship can develop between these people who believe in different values and on what values could this relationship be based on.

Are gay, lesbian and bisexual migrants more at risk for psychological problems?

If a gay, lesbian or bisexual person belongs to a culture which considers homosexuality as a disease, a sin or a crime, that person is likely to have more difficulties with self-acceptance. For instance, he/she may feel that he/she is a traitor to his/her own family and community values and, as a result, receive inadequate support in a context where social integration is already difficult for him/her.

Moreover, gays, lesbians and bisexuals who come from ethnic minorities may run into some obstacles within the homosexual community as well. Like the rest of society, homosexuals can be racist too.

However, today it is possible to find religious groups of homosexual faithful on the Internet and in some major cities. These groups are gradually taking the debate on LGBT topics into their religious communities. There is also a growing number of publications and books on this topic. Encourage your clients to use these information resources, they will discover they are not as alone as they think.

Should I inform young LGBTs about STDs and HIV?

Recent studies show that the risk of contracting STDs and HIV is the same for young heterosexual and gay men, while it is greater for heterosexual than lesbian women. Therefore, everyone will benefit from accurate information and it would be useful if a counsellor whom they trust and perceive as competent could give them some practical suggestions.

When discussing sexual health, try to stress the positive and joyful aspects of sexuality. It can be difficult to exchange experiences with other teens (this is especially true for young gays and bisexuals), so young people often have to find out everything for themselves.

If you think you need help to teach teens about responsible sexuality, you may invite experts from LGBT associations that work in this field to talk to them. Or you may ask them for informational material that you can distribute in class. Or you may provide a reliable and pre-approved list of organisations dealing with such topics.

Advise teens to use condoms when they engage in penetrative sex.

Encourage teens to use reliable condoms (not the ones which are only good for oral sex, like “fun condoms”) and lubricants. If they are thinking about oral sex, they should be informed that oral sex without a condom can put them at risk of contracting STDs (e.g. hepatitis). If a teen should become infected with a STD or has any other health problem, they should go to a doctor as soon as possible. There is no need for them to feel guilty or ashamed about this – most STDs can be treated.

Are lesbians at risk for HIV and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)?

While the risk of lesbians contracting HIV or a STD from each other is lower, it is still to be considered.

Transmission may occur through the contact between saliva and blood and the mutual use of sex toys. Another risk is the transmission of an infection or disease from a previous heterosexual sex encounter. Many lesbians mistakenly think they don't run any risks, even when they have heterosexual sex encounters. Because of this misconception, they tend not to see a gynaecologist, thus being much more likely to contract female tumours that are not diagnosed early enough for successful treatment, as well as other diseases.

CROSSING DIVERSITY

Learning and Guidance Tools against Discrimination
of Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transsexual People in different cultures

5 Supporting homosexual, bisexual and transexual (LGBT) adolescents and combating homophobic bullying

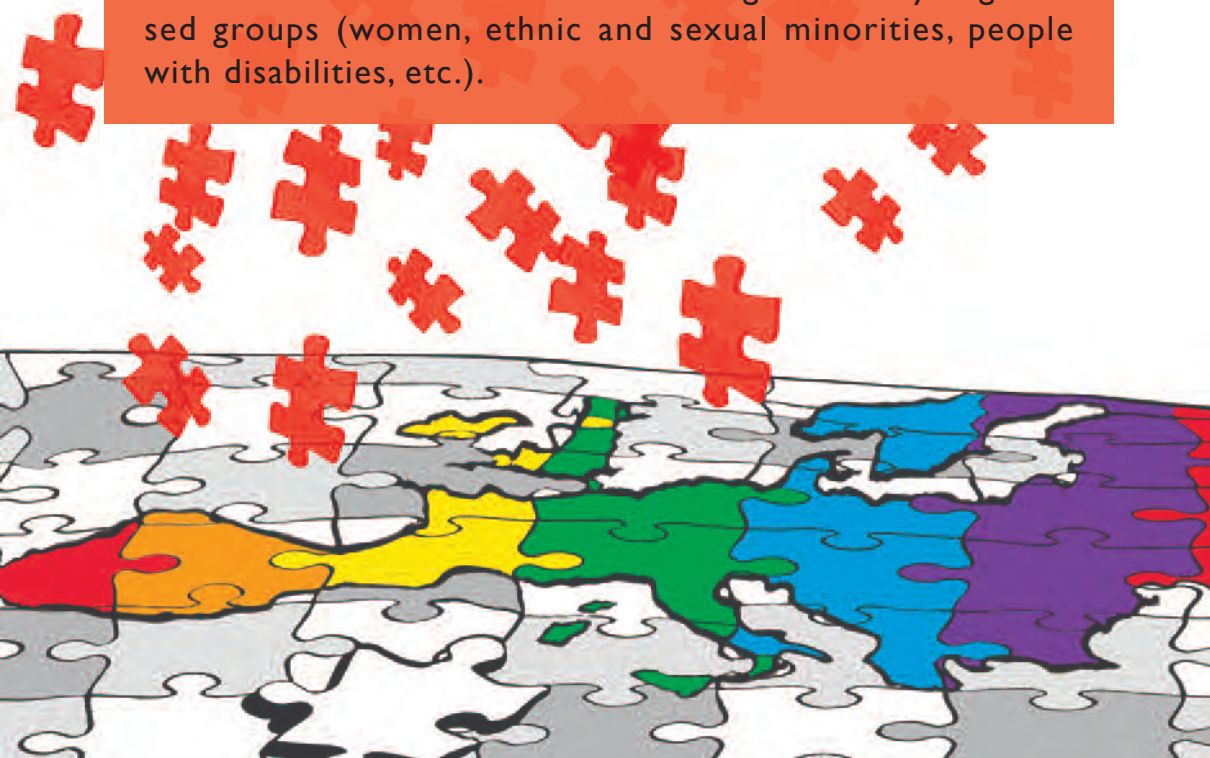
Introduction

First of all

LGBT teens may seek counselling for a variety of reasons. Sometimes their concerns have to do with their sexual orientation, other times they do not. Here some typical questions: “Am I gay?”, “I am also attracted to women, am I bisexual?”, “Whom can I tell?”, “How can I deal with this situation?”.

Moreover, teens often act out their distress, for instance, by dropping out of school, isolating themselves, using drugs, etc. It is hard to reach those teens who do not seek help from youth social services agencies. This is why schools are a key site for reaching a large number of teens and addressing these issues. Indeed, it is the place where teenagers can be educated to respect others and where LGBT teens and those who are not yet sure of their sexual identity can be reassured.

However, schools are important yet complex settings. As is well known, bullying is extremely common in schools and the victims are often those who belong to socially stigmatised groups (women, ethnic and sexual minorities, people with disabilities, etc.).



Basic information

What is homophobic bullying?

This expression designates prolonged behaviours of psychological, verbal or physical oppression of a less powerful person who is incapable of defending him/herself by a person or group that is/are self- or hetero-perceived as being more powerful. Bullying is often downplayed because it is confused with the typical peer conflicts or arguments between teenagers. However, bullying has particular features. The table below summarises the differences between bullying and peer conflict.

What is bullying?	What is peer conflict?
repeated and frequent events, prolonged over time	an occasional event
both the bully and the victim perceive power imbalance, which is often confirmed by the surrounding environment	the people involved perceive themselves as being peers and, everyone can explain their reasons
the bully feels no empathy or compassion	it is possible to put oneself in the other's shoes and, hence, mediate, thus reaching an agreement
the bully wants to harm intentionally	any party can put an end to the argument. No one wants to harm anyone intentionally
the targeted person is always the same	the conflicting parties involved might change

Please note: the most characteristic feature of bullying is that the bullies blame their violent behaviour on their victim, it's not about retaliation (I insulted him because he pushed me), victims are bullied for who they are (I insulted him/her because he/she is black/gay/a geek/poor/etc.).

Therefore, homophobic bullying is an oppressive behaviour motivated by the victim's sexual orientation (gay, lesbian, transexual, etc.).

We must bear in mind that homophobia also includes the comments against LGBT persons commonly used in everyday situations.

Those comments are not only detrimental to LGBT persons, as they are often used to sanction a wider range of behaviours. Indeed, those who do not comply with stereotypes or gender expectations also suffer from this sort of abuse: sensitive or shy boys, expansive or sporty girls, all those who do not fit into the rigid definitions of "male" or "female" and are therefore perceived to be homosexual and verbally abused for this reason. Also people who have homosexual relatives might be oppressed or insulted and may suffer because of that.

There are many different institutional difficulties which may be encountered when proposing specific counselling for gays and lesbians. Teachers who raise this issue may face resistance from both parents and the school administration.

Usually, in order to overcome these obstacles, you just need to incorporate this topic into the wider issue of the prevention of bullying, which has a larger target, concerns many of the social groups that exist within the school community and alarms adults.

Teens constantly express their curiosity about sexuality and adults convey the values that they hold regarding sexuality by talking or not talking about it, as well as through implicit and explicit behaviours. Remaining silent will make the victims of homophobic bullying feel even more isolated. Conversely, the casual use of common words that are, in fact, insulting, such as "queer" or "faggot", etc., strengthens the negative image of homosexuality, so that being compared to a homosexual becomes insulting per se.

Addressing the topic of homosexuality and heterosexuality in a professional way in both schools and health services is not the same as "promoting" it. We must keep in mind that the issue of sexual orientation concerns many teens. Assuming that 5 – 10 % of the total population has a homosexual orientation and that the percentage of same-sex behaviour is even higher, teachers are bound to have at least one LGBT boy/girl in their class.



What does this mean for me?

- There is the need to identify, analyse and combat all forms of bullying inside and outside schools.
- The acceptance of ethnic and sexual orientation minorities and their lifestyles could be promoted through the official documents of the institution (declaration of intent, circular letters, etc.), as well as in work practices.
- Offering a variety of services (prevention, actions, training and education) allows better coverage of the target population.
- Teachers and psycho/social/healthcare professionals can start a reflection in their own institutions on how to cater to, through a targeted approach, the needs of LGBT teens who belong to ethnic minorities.
- Teachers and psycho/social/healthcare professionals may create a network with other professional institutions in order to gain access to the specific knowledge and experience of ethnic and/or sexual minority experts.
- It would be useful to cooperate with local self-help and support groups: sexual minorities need these services especially because they need positive role models.
- It is necessary to pay attention to quality standards (i.e. for a structure offering specific counselling to gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transexuals: mission, type of internal communication, cooperation with other professional health care services, etc.).

Education

(Teachers)

Bear in mind

Homophobia is a form of discrimination that is as serious and devastating as racism, anti-Semitism and hate, yet it is far more tolerated. Abstaining from intervening means legitimating it. If you happened to hear or read on the walls of the classroom the expression “dirty nigger” or “death to Jews”, would you remain silent?

Teachers and youth workers should reflect on the following points:

- What is your personal level of *understanding* of homosexuality and homosexual lifestyles?
- What is your own level of commitment to the issue (try to assess it realistically: How much do you want to deal with this topic? When and where can you speak your mind on this topic? Etc.)
- What is the general level of *acceptance* of homosexuality and homosexual lifestyles within the institution you work for (the attitude of the school administration, of your colleagues, of financiers, of the Board, etc.)
- What is the general level of *acceptance* of homosexuality among parents (and also in the Boards that represent them, etc.)
- What is the *general situation* of LGBT students in your school or youth group? How is their interaction with their peers? Are they bullied?
- Since *bullying* often takes place outside of classrooms or schools, is it possible to enhance the skills of non-teaching staff (secretaries, janitors or security personnel, managers of the café outside the school, etc.) to prevent or combat homophobic bullying and discrimination?
- *Homophobia* does not just affect lesbians, gays, bisexuals or transgender persons, it affects everyone. Anyone of your students, colleagues or friends could have a LGBT relative or friend and could be hurt by homophobic remarks.
- *Silence* on LGBT issues or the *discomfort* with which adults deal with them increases the vulnerability of LGBT teens to abuse and isolation. This could initiate the following vicious circle: the LGBT teens who are bullied, because they are aware that they live in an indifferent or hostile environment, are reluctant to report bullying and don't report it to the school personnel, they isolate themselves and thus are more easily targeted by bullies.
- Tackling bullying and putting an end to bullying episodes and homo-/trans-phobic marginalisation improves quality of life, not only for the minorities involved, but for the class or context as a whole, in that it helps increasing awareness and open-mindedness in all directly and indirectly involved people.

Education - FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions)

Please also refer to the FAQs for the psycho/social/healthcare professionals

Is providing support to LGBT teens included in my duties as a teacher ?

Yes it is. We must bear in mind that teachers are key to the development of young people. In addition to providing support, you may be required to intervene in certain circumstances. For instance, a teenager may suffer from homophobic violence or discrimination in class, or the school performance of a student might drop suddenly and that might depend on the fact that he/she is having problems with his/her family or schoolmates because of his/her homosexuality.

Isn't there a conflict between my role as a teacher who has to grade students on the one hand and as a person who provides students with help and support on the other?

These two roles are perfectly reconcilable. First of all, it is important to distinguish these two roles and make this distinction clear to the student you are dealing with. You can say, for instance, that his/her grades, participation or attitude in class are do not meet minimum standards set by the school, and that it is not possible for you to compromise on such questions. On the other hand, you can offer the teen the opportunity to talk openly about a problem so that you can then work together to find the best possible solution, and specify that his/her grades will not be affected in any way.

As a teacher, I don't feel comfortable talking about LGBT issues. I'm afraid I will lose my credibility with the majority of my students.

Try to assess your own personal level of comprehension of homosexuality. It is possible to communicate a point of view clearly and commandingly without losing credibility when we feel confident and unambiguous about the topic. Of course, some teens can start laughing and making offensive remarks, but this topic often fuels students' curiosity and desire to learn (*also refer to the "Bear in mind" section for the education sector*).

How do I create a trusting setting where LGBT teens are encouraged to talk openly with me?

Start by showing that you are frank and unbiased. Then, make sure that you tell the student that everything he/she will talk about will be treated in strict confidence and that you will not tell anyone, including his/her parents, unless express authorisation is granted by him/her. It can be helpful to remind the student that your confidential talk won't have any effect on his grades. Also make sure to choose a place where you can have a private conversation.

Can I talk to my colleagues or to my boss about a confidential talk I had with a specific student?

No. You are bound to professional discretion and it would be a breach of confidentiality. If you need to consult with others, you may discuss the case anonymously by speaking in general terms, in such a way that the student cannot be identified.



Education - Tools

Stereotypes

Aim: to show participants that stereotypes are characterized by ethnocentrism and that we all tend to attribute positive traits to our own group and negative traits to others.

Method: take a big piece of cardboard and draw a human shape on it. Then ask participants to complete the following sentences written inside the drawing: “Moroccans (Italians, the Dutch) are said to be...”. Then start a group discussion. To what extent do these statements correspond to stereotypes? What is the function of a stereotype? Are stereotypes partly true?


The discussion can then go on to include stereotypes on gay, lesbian, bisexual and transexual people.

Please note: if it is not self-evident, it is better to make it clear that many stereotype-based statements or comments can be offensive. If there is only one person representing a particular ethnic group in the class – for instance, only one person from Morocco – it would be preferable avoiding using Moroccans as one of the examples.

Belonging to a Group

Aim: to prove that we all belong to multiple groups, some of which may be stigmatised. What does it mean, in emotional terms, to belong to a stigmatised group?

Method: ask students to think about all the different groups they belong to (e.g. men, Turks, football players, Boy and Girl Scouts, vegetarians, etc.) Give each student three pieces of paper and



ask them to write on each one: “To which group am I proud to belong?”, “To which group I do not really care if I belong or not?”, “To which group am I ashamed to belong?”

The (anonymous) pieces of paper should be hung on the blackboard and then discussed by the students.

Please note: this exercise is not recommended for small groups or groups where people could be easily recognised. It is very important for the teacher to create a safe and respectful climate in the class before presenting the exercise, since some students may find it difficult to answer the question “Which group am I ashamed to belong to?”

How Will I be Welcomed?

Aim: the game allows participants to experience feelings and behaviours that are typically present when people of different cultures meet (e.g. meetings between migrants and local population; meetings between heterosexuals and homosexuals).

Method: the participants sit in a circle while one volunteers goes out of the room. When he/she comes back, the people in the circle must welcome him/her in a manner suggested by the conductor in the form of a key word (interest, indifference, aggressiveness, openness, etc. ...). Different participants play the role of the guest. The everybody discusses what happened.

Please note: when choosing a student for the role of the “new-comer”, the teacher should select someone who is not already stigmatised by the class and has no difficulties integrating into the group.

A STORY...



*"Oh, would you please be so kind as to clean my bedside locker as well."
Eileen turns around. "I am not the cleaning lady. One day I'll be a doctor."
"Then please call Dr. Mayer. I don't want to be cured by a nigger."*

Without a word Eileen puts the enema on the night table and leaves the patient's room.

"Hello Eileen", says a beaming Kristin. "Hey, how was your day?"

"Great! My mother thinks I'm not capable of looking after people and patients mistake me for the cleaning. And how are you?"

Kristin reels back, frightened. Her heart beats wildly. Just don't say anything wrong again, she thinks.

"I'm so happy to see you," she gives a faint smile.

"I didn't make the world," growls Eileen. "So please don't blame me."

"I didn't mean it that way." Kristin just wishes she could run away. Why is it always so difficult with Eileen? Don't they love each other anymore?

"Come on, I cooked something good today. Could you set the table?"

Eileen takes Kristin by the arm and kisses her slowly and tenderly. "Better now?" she asks softly.

So everything is okay, anyhow. Kristin sighs, relieved.

"Can you please take the fish knives? And the crystal wineglasses. The napkins don't match the plates at all. Don't you see?"

"Hey, it doesn't matter" Kristin throws an angry look at Eileen. "I prefer to eat like this!"

"A nice-looking table is important for a good meal, Kristin. I don't enjoy the food if everything is just thrown on the table."

"It's not just thrown there. It's just my style, not yours."

"Style is not the right word", Eileen mutters. "You don't mean to tell me that this is style?! And do you always have to eat with your elbows on the table?" Eileen is irritated and she changes the glasses and the napkins.

"This is how it's done in the suburbs", answers Kristin in a choking voice. She thinks about the smiling faces in her home, where wine was served in water glasses and lemonade in wineglasses. Or vice versa. It didn't matter.

"Why don't you tell your parents that you are a lesbian?" Eileen draws back a bit, away from Kristin, who immediately pulls the table cloth to cover up to the tip of her nose.

"I'm not ready. My parents wouldn't understand it. I for one haven't completely understood it yet."

"But are you sure that you love me?"

"Yes Eileen, I am quite sure. But that doesn't mean the that entire world has to know. Do I have to be labelled like that?"

"It's not a label, it's an identity. Just like my being black. You carry it with you all your life."

"As me coming from a lower social class?" asks Kristin.

"Why do you always ramble on and on with this idiotic lower classes discussion?


You're not getting insulted because of that, are you?"

"No, but everyone hints that I should be ashamed of myself because at home we don't listen to classical music, I don't wear brand-name clothes, and because I don't understand three-quarters of the foreign words that the teacher uses. And because I've never been to the opera, or to the theatre, or to the States during summer holidays. But I'm not ashamed of my father's job as a factory worker. I love my family."

"So what?"

"If I had this kind of reaction when patients take you for the cleaning lady, or when my classmates ask you where you come from, or where you grew up, then probably you would leave me right away."

"You can't compare the two things. Completely wrong. Hey, I just need to walk down the street



and people yell “nigger” at me. You can’t even imagine how it is and how one feels insecure, all the time and everywhere. Except for Ghana, that’s why I want to go there. You don’t even dare tell your parents that you live with someone like me.”

“It’s not true, Eileen. It’s not because you are black. I can’t make them understand that I love a girl. And I love you, I really do.”

“Really? That’s what counts most of all for me, Kristin. Because I too love you very much.”

“So, everything is all right, isn’t it?”

“Kristin, you have of been daydreaming a bit too much lately, in my opinion”. Mrs. Metz glares sternly over her glasses. “Feeling attracted to girls is normal at your age. One needs to experiment. You’ll see, the right boy will come along after all. We all go through this phase. But school performance must not be affected by that?”

“Sometimes I feel so inferior to Eileen” Kristin dares to take a glance at the face of the advisor.

“Do you think your feeling can have something to do with the fact that you are a few years younger than Eileen? You are only sixteen, at that age it’s often difficult to be a lesbian. Eileen is a few years older than you.”

“We often argue about silly things”, says Eileen. “Ridiculous things such as the colour of the napkins.”

“Perhaps neither one of you has the courage to think about your feelings for other girls yet, and you project your fear into these stupid little things?”

“But I do know that I love Eileen”, protests Kristin. “It’s just the rest that’s so difficult.”

“What do you mean when you say “the rest”, Kristin?”

“Well, for one thing, Eileen is obsessed by her skin colour. And then she thinks I don’t understand her and that I’m not supportive enough.”

“And what does that have to do with the colour of the napkins?”

“Maybe Eileen gets mad with me so much because I have not told anyone at home that we’re together yet.”

“Because you don’t want them to know that you’re dating a nigger.” Snaps Eileen angrily.

“This is complete bullshit, Eileen” yells Kristin. “See? Here we go again!”

“You are two very normal girls, just like the others. The fact that you are lesbians, or in your case black, doesn’t change anything. But the world around you says that your feelings are wrong, because they should be directed towards boys. This judgement by the others makes it difficult for you to have a harmonious relationship.”

“I’m not quite sure” wonders Kristin.

“I couldn’t care less about the people around me” yells Eileen. “The only thing I care about is if Kristin thinks about me.”

“Okay.” The counsellor looks at Kristin. “What do you feel, Kristin?”

“I love Eileen and I think she’s too cold towards me and I often feel inferior to her.”

“And you Eileen, what do you feel?”

“The same thing. And sometimes I think that Kristin doesn’t understand anything about my problems at work, or anywhere else.”

“And where do these fears come from, for both of you?”

“I don’t know”, says Eileen. “That’s why we’re here, isn’t it?”

“Our time for today is up, let’s stop here. If you want, you can come back and we will try to find out together the reasons .. this situation.”

“I don’t think she’s understood us.” Kristin kicks annoyed an empty Coke tin.

“She kept on insisting on something that has nothing to do with us”, says Eileen.

“I don’t know if she believes us when we tell her we don’t have any problem with being lesbian.”

“Yes” smiles Kristin, “Like everybody else.”



Counselling

(Psycho/social/healthcare professionals)

Bear in mind

When counselling LGBT teens, some specific aspects are to be taken into account:

- The teen's psycho-sexual history: family members opinions on homosexuality, bisexuality and transsexuality, messages received by the teen;
- How the teen sees him/herself in terms of his/her sexual orientation: level of acceptance of his/her homosexual or bisexual feelings; the story of the his/her coming out; the LGBT social network, his/her lifestyle, anti-gay/lesbian/transgender violence and discrimination experiences as a victim or perpetrator (see *gay-bashing in the Glossary – Appendix 1 of the Handbook*).

It is necessary to think about these aspects in terms of your own personal history, whether you are homosexual, bisexual or transsexual.

In fact, if you are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transsexual you should think about the effect that knowing this may have for the person you are counselling. Many gays and lesbians need role models and, as a counsellor, for instance, you can be very important in this respect, in addition to being a significant person. Therefore, the most important thing is how you perceive your own sexuality: what has your personal development been like? What about your sexual orientation could be helpful for that individual to know? Remember that he/she should not completely identify with you. Every person has to develop his/her own personal lifestyle and every gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transsexual person has to design his/her own self-acceptance process.

Counselling - FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions)

Please also refer to the FAQs for the education sector.

How much should I involve the teen's family in the counselling process?

It depends very much on the importance of the family in that person's life and the level of acceptance or rejection of homosexuality, bisexuality, transsexuality within the family. Ask that to the teen and also ask if he/she is willing to do involve his/her family. Family is an important part of the social environment, however it could be devaluing and not supportive, i.e. a problem area and not a resource.

Do gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transsexuals need specific counselling?

It is not a rule. They certainly require skilled professionals, focus on and recognition of LGBT issues. Therefore, it is crucial to have a non-judging attitude and to create the conditions that will allow them to be open about their sexual orientation.

Does the effectiveness of the counselling depend on the sexual orientation of the counsellor?

No. However, sometimes there are people who need to feel they are in a safe and unbiased environment in order to be able to open up and, in this case, they could prefer working with a gay or lesbian counsellor; in this case, you may refer them to an LGBT association. If you are an openly gay/lesbian counsellor, you have to be aware that the person you are counselling might take you as a role model. This is usually beneficial for his/her life, however you should be aware of over-identification issues on both sides.

What effects can homophobic bullying have on individuals?

They can vary, be less or more pronounced, and may include the following signals:

- loss of self-confidence, self-belief and self-esteem;
- distracted and/or nervous attitude, concentration difficulties;
- poor school performance;
- school refusal, skipping classes, even symptoms of school phobia;
- tendency to avoid potentially discriminating environments, such as sports teams, extracurricular groups, etc.; self-limitation, missed opportunities;
- actual psychopathological symptoms including: depression, aggressiveness, self-mutilation, agoraphobia and social anxiety, panic attacks, psychosomatic disorders, eating disorders.

All teens are interested in sexuality, why specifically think about LGBT teens?

It is true, LGBT teens are curious and want to learn about their sexuality and that of others, just like their peers. However, for them it is more difficult to find reliable information and positive role models, while at the same time they are more easily exposed to negative attitudes toward homosexuality. Therefore, a competent and informed counselling on this topic is particularly useful for mitigating the sense of vulnerability to which LGBT teens are exposed.

Counselling -Tools

Who am I?

Aim: to help the individual explore his/her sexual identity analysing the meanings and emotions connected with it.

Method: ask the teen how he/she prefers to define him/herself and which meaning does he/she give to this self-definition. Help the teen become aware of his/her sexual identity self-acceptance level: does he/she like him/herself as a gay/lesbian/bisexual/ transsexual? Does he/she wish to make any changes? Did his/her perception of his/her own personal identity change from the past? Is there something that worries him/her? How does he/she think others see him/her? How would he/she wish to be seen?

Please note: one should not take the sexual identity of individuals for granted. Exploring these aspects requires a solid “therapeutic alliance” and long-term counselling.

Gay-Bashing

Aim: to support and help victims of gay-bashing process the experience.

Method: ask the teen if he/she has ever experienced physical, psychological or verbal attacks; if so, were they direct or indirect? Did the attacks involve sexual assault? When and under what circumstances did the attack take place? Who was the attacker? Let the teen express his/her emotions. What was the impact of this experience on the victim's self-image and identity? At the end, discuss the pros and cons of reporting the incident to the police.

Please note: it helps to be familiar with counselling victims of abuse and violence. If you or you together with the teen decide to report the incident to the police, verify the possible attitude of the authorities towards these allegations. In some European countries, police stations have special offices dedicated to these types of violent crimes. Moreover, take into account the gender of the officer receiving the complaint. Keep in mind that a lesbian victim will unlikely be willing to report the assault to a male police officer.

Please refer to the legal departments of LGBT associations which now have specific protocols to address homophobic bullying.

Homophobic Bullying

Aim: prevent and stop homophobic bullying in schools.

Method: in order to enhance the empathy of the teens, have them role play a homophobic bullying incident, based on a true story, where the role of the bully will be played by the homosexual teens, while the bullies play the role of the homosexual victim. In this way, they can work on “putting themselves in someone else's shoes” and have an opportunity to get first-hand experience of the motives and emotions connected to each role.

Since bullying is a group phenomenon, it is important to have participants play all characters involved: bullies, victims and spectators. Indeed, the latter are apparently harmless but by doing nothing, apart from maybe sniggering, they in fact support the group phenomenon by taking the side of the bullies through their behaviour. The anti-bullying exercises are, in fact, especially targeted to the spectators.

Please note: this exercise helps combat the prejudice on which all forms of social exclusion are based. It also helps to shift the level of communication from “value judgement” to “expression”.

Encouraging freedom of expression allows to “make room for diversity” without judging.

6 Sexualities

Introduction

First of all

Long gone is the time when classical culture considered Eros as the union of spirit and sex, of poetry and carnality.

In most cultures, love is still separated from sex, sexuality is a taboo subject and easily associated with “sin”.

It is something to be done in private and is not talked about, unless when making sex jokes, because it is often linked to shame. This is true also in Western cultures, where TV programs and magazines deal with sex even too often, trivialising it.

If sexuality may be a difficult topic to tackle, talking about “different” sexualities is even more complex. Often, the questions asked about homosexuality exclusively focus on sexual intercourse. There is plenty of curiosity about this. Thus, the lives of people are reduced just to sex, and the affective and relational components are ignored or downplayed.

We are educated in an apparently heterosexual culture, and other forms of sexuality that do not fit into such orientation are easily perceived as strange or perverted.

This view can change when we consider sex as one of the basic ways in which individuals can express themselves to the world and establish an intimate and profound communication with themselves and the other through pleasure. In this perspective, sexual behaviour is a component of one's identity-building process. Indeed, it is a personal journey in search of the self that goes on and changes over time; it is a knowledge-building experience separated from the reproductive function and from any dichotomy, including the male-female, active-passive, dominance-submission, heterosexuality-homosexuality ones.



Basic information

For LGBT people there are many ways of having sex which, notwithstanding their specific differences, share the common goal of expressing intimacy and finding mutual erotic pleasure in the relationship with the other. The only difference between homosexuals and heterosexuals is that homosexual intercourse cannot lead to procreation. Gays and lesbians still have to protect themselves, not in order to avoid unwanted pregnancies, but rather against Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs).

Studies report that gay men are more likely to have more sex-partners than lesbian women. This difference doesn't have so much to do with a difference between gay people and heterosexual people, but rather with differences between men and women and how they experience their sexuality, based on traditional stereotypical models of "masculinity" and "femininity". For (heterosexual or lesbian) women, sexuality is more connected to affective intimacy, while men are more inclined to have sex just for the sex. Therefore, this is a difference connected to gender, not to sexual orientation. So, if two men or two women have sex, the way they experience that sexuality will be exclusively "male" or exclusively "female". In other words, in gay or lesbian sex there can be a doubling of the male or female experience of sexuality, depending on the stereotypes internalised by each partner. Since men tend to separate sex from intimacy, they will more likely have sex with multiple partners over time, or even during a stable relationship. Similarly, two lesbian women are more likely to be monogamous as women as women seem to prefer a combination of sex and intimacy. However, that also in the lives of homosexual people, there is a large scale of different behaviours, both within stable couples and when looking for a partner.

Explaining differences in sexual behaviour from the gender point of view and not from the sexual orientation one makes it easier teachers, but also for psycho/social/healthcare professionals as well, to LGBT sexuality, because it will be easier for them to empathise with experience of each person, as man or a woman, regardless of his/her sexual orientation.

What does this mean for me?

We have already seen that talking about sexuality is quite difficult in a culture that is still sex phobic. Moreover, our sexual life is part of our intimate sphere, and makes us particularly vulnerable and sensitive when talking about it. Sometimes, even when we are talking about it in general terms, we fear we are disclosing something about our personal life. These statements might seem in contrast with young people's behaviour, as they experiment with sex and are often very outspoken about sexuality, although this might be a sort of self-defence, hiding their embarrassment and, at times, shame.

Therefore, when discussing sex with teens, it is extremely important to address the topic in a professional yet not "aseptic" manner.

All teens, regardless of whether they define themselves as gay, lesbian, bisexual or heterosexual persons, need information and guidance as they grow up and explore their body and sexuality. For those adolescents who have erotic thoughts or feelings for same-sex partners, this support may be even more important.

Aspects you may take into account when working with gay, lesbian and bisexual teens, are as follows:

- When talking about sexuality, the possibility of same-sex experiences is often "forgotten" or is only briefly mentioned out of political correctness. When speaking about love, sexuality or living together, you could present homosexual sexuality as a natural and legitimate way of expressing feelings and living together with others, just like heterosexual sexuality.
- Try to increase your awareness about your sexual experiences and your vision of (homo-bi) sexuality.
- Provide teens with brochures, leaflets, etc. that contain supplementary information on any type of sexuality and the addresses of counselling institutions where they could go to talk about any sexuality-related problem. Make sure to also include associations for LGBTs.

Education

(Teachers)

Bear in mind

Before starting to talk about homosexuality and sexuality in general in class, it is important to take a few considerations into account. Boys and girls can be very interested in sexuality, especially during puberty. Moreover, they tend to think in terms of black-and-white: things are either good or bad. Remember that talking about sexuality requires authenticity and a certain level of intimacy, so be prepared to be asked personal questions about your own experiences and views. Take the time in advance to think about what information you wish to share with your students and what information you do not wish to share. Both you and your students have the right to protect your private life. We suggest you consider the following questions to prepare yourself for discussing this sensitive topic with your students:

- What were you taught about (homo-/bi-) sexuality, at home and at school?
- What do you imagine when you think about gay and lesbian sexual behaviour? Do you think you have any prejudice when it comes to sex between two men or two women? What are your prejudices? Can you guess where they come from?
- Have you already had any sexual experience?
- When did you start having your first sexual experiences? Do you consider them as positive or negative?
- Have you had or imagined to have any sexual experience with same-sex partners? If so, how would you define them?
- What do you personally consider as an “appropriate” age for young people to have their first sexual experiences?

Education - FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions)

Please also refer to the FAQs for the psycho/social/healthcare professionals

Is it true that homosexual behaviour exists among animals?

Researchers have observed homosexual behaviour in more than 470 species of animals (chimpanzees, dolphins, swallows, butterflies, amphibians, reptiles, fish and domestic animals like cows, sheep, pigs, rabbits, horses, dogs and cats). It is interesting that, in the animal kingdom, sex is not exclusively aimed at reproduction but also can have social functions. Many animals are sexually active outside the mating season and are able to feel pleasure having sex. Monkeys engage in different types of sexual practices, including fellatio. Male black swans pairs are very good parents to their cygnets. During the summer period, killer whales spend 10% of their time in homosexual activities. Thirteen species of lizards in the American Southwest have exclusively female populations that are able to reproduce on their own (for further information, refer to the references section included in the Crossing Diversity Handbook).

I sometimes hear my Arabic-speaking students insult each other with the word "zamel". This seems to be a sexual insult. What does this mean?

You are right. "Zamel" is a derogative word for a man who takes the passive role when having sex with another man (the same concept is expressed by the Turkish word "ibne"). The word refers to the sin of "liwati", which is having anal sex as a "passive" partner. In many cultures, it is considered humiliating for an adult man to be "passive" during anal sex, while it is not as reproachable for a man to take an active role. In Muslim cultures, the concept of an equal relationship between two men does not exist, so some people equate "liwat" to "homosexuality" and 'zamel' to "homosexual".

Who plays the male role and who plays the feminine role in gay or lesbian relationships?

Studies show that there are no fixed roles in homosexual couples; the traditional rules and models of heterosexual couples do not apply to same-sex unions. Moreover, even in heterosexual couples there is a wide variety of behaviours which are dealt with only in art and scientific literature. The link between gender and sexual behaviour does exist but be careful not to reinforce stereotypes! Homosexual sexual relations between men are often talked about as bestial or brutish behaviours. Sex between men is said to be very "hard" and "dirty, with reference to anal penetration. In general, sex between two women is rarely talked about, as there is no stereotyped erotic imagination; female homoeroticism is usually said to be a little bit softer and gentler, although equally "disgusting".

The preconceived ideas and prejudice that characterise such stereotypical images make it difficult to investigate and discover one's own sexuality in an autonomous manner. Teenagers who are insecure about their sexuality tend to attach excessive importance to norms and don't allow themselves or others to deviate too far from them.

Do all gays like anal sex? Does it hurt?

Anal intercourse is not exclusively practiced by gay men. Some heterosexuals and even lesbians do it as well if they feel comfortable with it. The anal region is very sensitive and can provide pleasure (especially for men if the prostate gland is touched gently). However, there are many gay men who don't like anal intercourse at all. As it happens with vaginal penetration, anal penetration can hurt, especially if it is practiced in a vehement way without thinking that it could hurt. Anyway, it is recommended to use a certified condom and water-based lubricants in order to be protected against STDs and HIV.

Education - Tools

General remarks

Sex education should not be restricted to biological facts but should also address the emotional sphere. You can introduce the topic through literature, social sciences, history or the arts (music, painting, etc.). If you work in tandem with a colleague of the opposite sex, you will be able to present a different gender point of view to the class. Separate boys and girls if you have the impression that it's not easy for the students to speak openly in front of everybody. After they have spent some time working apart, bring them back together in one group and let the teens speak about what they talked about and what they liked about working in separate groups, maybe having them select a "brave" mouth speaker, who can answer the question while others might add some remarks and details. An exchange of "opinions" should then follow.

When discussing sexualities, it is important to include homosexuality by presenting it as one of the expressions of sexuality, one of the possible outcomes of the normal affective development of an individual. Bear in mind that, since teens feel insecure about sexuality, they often talk about it in a very provocative manner.

When introducing the topic of sexuality, it's better to use concrete examples and to have the students reflect on their own interests, preferences and fears.

It might be useful to invite gay and lesbian guest speakers and/or people trained in conducting sex education projects (see Appendix 2 of the Handbook), but make sure that you do not completely delegate the task to someone else. The teens could see this not only as a signal that you are embarrassed by the topic or unable to deal with it, but also as your personal disagreement regarding that topic and, in order to please you, they might not get involved in the activities.

Carousel Game

Aim: overcoming embarrassment and shame and encouraging teens to talk about sexuality.

Method: write 25 questions about sex on a set cards. Prepare one set of cards for each student.

The questions should be varied: some should ask for facts and some for opinions, ranging from very simple to more difficult and from impersonal to personal. Be sure to include a good number of questions about homo/bi-sexuality. Have your students sit in two circles or rows facing each other in pairs.

Explain the game: "Each person gets a pack of 25 questions about relationships and sexuality. Read the question and ask yourselves, first, if you would answer that question. If you would not, put the card back in the pack and take the next card. When you find a question that you would answer yourself, read it to the person sitting in front of you. This person also gets the chance to decide if he/she wants to answer that question or not. If they don't want to answer, they say: 'Next question'. Otherwise, they go ahead and answer the question. After one question is answered, you swap roles and the other person starts asking the questions. This goes on until I will say 'Shift!' I will do this every five minutes. After the shift, everyone sitting in the inner circle (or in one row) will move to the chair on their right. The two new partners will start with the new questions." After about half an hour or five shifts, stop the game.

Ask the students how they experienced the game. Was it fun, difficult or both?

Can they say something about why they chose not to answer some questions? Be careful to respect all the reasons teenagers might have for this, embarrassment should not become something to be ashamed of!

Please note: during the game, participants might get too "carried away"; so, make sure confusion does not prevail, with people laughing and joking, for instance. In groups where cultural norms make it difficult for women to talk openly about sex with men,

consider doing this game in same-sex subgroups.

An extension of this exercise could be to ask the girls' group to ask questions to the boys' group and vice versa. A spokesperson of the girls will read the questions to the boys. The boys discuss the questions as a group and agree on a final answer together, then one of them reads the answers out loud. In this way, attention is placed on the group and not on individuals, so students may express themselves freely without feeling embarrassed and can satisfy their curiosity about how the opposite sex thinks about important issues.

Sex Education and Homosexuality

Aim: to promote discussion about homosexuality within sex education programs

Method: this exercise has three steps. Tell the students you want their input in developing better sex education programs. The first step is asking them what they know about sex and where they are currently getting information about sex. If they only reply by giving normative information (e.g. that you should use a condom), then stress that you would also like to know who helps them form their opinions and feelings about sexual issues. The second step is to focus on what they need from school sex education. Here too, take care that they do not just talk about 'neutral' needs (such as more classes dealing with this topic). The third step is to ask how the school should teach sex education in order to take into account cultural minorities. If they don't understand this question, give concrete examples regarding multicultural contexts (e.g. showing that both genders have specific needs, that roles and norms are different in the various cultures) and sexual/gender minorities (gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transexuals). If the students focus on intercultural issues but would like to skip over and ignore to the issue of sexual and gender minorities, ask them why and where these minorities may get information on sexuality if the school does not provide them.

Please note: this exercise will work best in schools, associations, groups that encourage learning from experience. If the school or its delegates are only focusing on cognitive results, the shift from the discussion of opinions to personal growth will be more difficult. Be sure that you take the final step: together with your colleagues, discuss on how to use the inputs received from the teens to improve the way you teach sex education!

From Discrimination to Sexuality

Aim: to promote a discussion about sexuality that is not focused on sex.

Method: this exercise has three steps. The first step is to ask the teens if they can give some examples of discrimination. In multicultural groups, racist examples will usually come up. The second step is to steer the discussion towards gender. Ask for example: "You mentioned examples of discrimination by people who really don't know each other very well. Is there discrimination as well between people who know each other well, like discrimination within romantic relationships?". This question will likely lead the teens to bring up examples like intimate partner violence and the different expectations of men and women. The third step is to steer the discussion towards diversity in relationships. For example you can ask the students: "Can such problems be solved by reorganising the relationship?" and "Do you know of examples of 'other' kinds of romantic relationships? How do you think these problems change in a gay or lesbian relationship?".

Please note: this exercise requires that teachers have good discussion skills. You have to listen closely to the students and adapt to their needs, while at the same time steering the discussion towards a specific direction. Of course, this process cannot be planned ahead in detail – just schedule at least one and a half hour for this exercise.

A STORY...



<Antonio> I am in the right chat, the one for young gays and lesbians, right?

<Almira> Hi Antonio, nice to meet you. Yes you're in the right chat. Where do you come from?

<Antonio> Young lady, never give out this kind of info in a chat! :-) I live in Italy.

<Almira> And I live in Germany. Here there are also people from other European countries.

<Antonio> So you have been on this chat for a long time?

<Almira> Yes.

<Mark> Hello everyone.

<Koray> I'm also new here, good morning.

<Elsa> Hi guys.

<Mark> How are you Elsa? Is everything okay with Chloé, I miss her.

<Antonio> A warm hello, especially for Koray ;-)

<Koray> Likewise.

<Elsa> Chloé's still not OK, but I'm slowly getting better.

<Mark> Sorry guys, but I must chat with Elsa for a while – if it bothers you, we'll retreat to the whisper corner, okay?

<Almira> I'm interested.

<Koray> Join us.

<Antonio> I have got a thousand questions, I am sitting on burning coals, but I'll be patient ;-)

<Mark> I'm happy to hear that. Elsa, did you get anything out of the counselling?

<Elsa> Yes, the woman is really great! She helped me a lot. I hope that Chloé will join the chat today, then we could see together how to help her. That would be good. I'm really not feeling as helpless as a few weeks ago. How are you Almira?

<Almira> The advisor of the support group spoke with my parents. Now they know that I'm a lesbian and they have accepted it without making a big fuss. The main thing is that they won't lose me. But it's still a long way to go.

<Elsa> Sure. I think about you. All the best.

<Almira> thx

<Koray> I didn't understand, but I wish you all the best ;-) What questions do you have?

@Antonio

<Antonio> Ok, I'll cut to the chase ...

<Antonio> I've been living for the last two years with a guy, and I really love him...

<Mark> Congratulations.

<Koray> Oh, if only I could have a relationship like that :-)

<Antonio> Wait guys, the best is yet to come.

<Antonio> I have been extremely attracted to a girl for the past six months. At first I didn't want to believe it. Admitting to myself that I'm gay was hard enough. And now I have to re-define everything from the start, I just don't know how to do it.

<Koray> Are you absolutely sure about that?

<Antonio> Yes, absolutely.

<Elsa> And you still live with your boyfriend?

<Antonio> Yes, of course, I love him.

<Mark> Does your boyfriend know that you are attracted to her?

<Antonio> To be honest, he does not.

<Mark> That's not good, I'd say.

<Elsa> Does she know about him?

<Antonio> Yes, she knows everything

<Koray> So what are you going to do?

<Antonio> If I only knew... I thought that perhaps you might have some suggestions for me!!

<Mark> You should speak to your boyfriend.

<Almira> This is a chat where there is no counselling. But there are chats – maybe also in Italy, I don't really know – in which counsellors participate and can help you.

<Antonio> The worst part of it is I don't know if I should stay with my boyfriend.

<Koray> I understand. I'd be happy if I had fallen in love with a girl – but it looks as though I am one hundred percent gay.

<Mark> Same here. I just don't feel anything for girls.

<Elsa> I really don't understand you, Mark. I think that girls are spectacular :-)

<Almira> I agree with Elsa.

<Koray> What about telling your boyfriend the truth?

<Antonio> Yeah, but what's the truth?

<Mark> That you're probably bisexual?!

<Elsa> It may sound old-fashioned, but I don't trust people who sleep with guys and girls at the same time.

<Antonio> Why not?

<Elsa> They want to have it all, without having to make up their minds. I think that's cowardly.

<Mark> Hey Elsa, what are you talking about?

<Almira> I understand Elsa, if Julie suddenly came to me saying that she was attracted to a guy, I would leave her immediately. I can't even think about something like that.

<Koray> If I fell in love with a girl I think it would be okay ;-) but if my boyfriend did... no way!

<Mark> Exactly, Antonio. What would you say if your boyfriend came to you and told you a thing like that?

<Antonio> Sorry, I have to think about all this. I'll be back later. Thx and bye.

<Antonio> Hello, I'm back again.

<Aaron> Hello Antonio.

<Koray> How are you, Antonio? Have you decided to do something?

<Antonio> I spoke with Paolo and I told him everything.

<Mark> I am holding my breath.

<Koray> Tell us about it.

<Antonio> Like Almira predicted, he left me.

<Mark> WHAT? Oh, I'm so sorry, Antonio, really.

<Aaron> What happened? Tell us, please.

<Antonio> I'm probably bisexual but my boyfriend doesn't accept it.

<Aaron> I'm sitting in front of the monitor and I am shaking my head. What really matters is that two people truly love each other, isn't it?

<Antonio> But in my case it's more like three people.

<Aaron> What was the problem? Was it because you told him too late or because it was a woman that Paolo couldn't accept it?

<Antonio> Both.

<Julie> I would like to say what I think, Almira told me about you. For me, the most important would be that everything would be out in the open and that I'd be informed. Then I could deal with it.

<Antonio> That's so easy to say, Julie. But I was so upset, I couldn't even find words for my feelings.

<Julie> If Almira were to fall in love with a boy I would expect her to tell me about it before starting anything with him.

<Antonio> Yeah, right. And what would you do after that, Julie? If only I hadn't started anything with that girl!

<Julie> We would have to decide together how to create a situation in which all parties involved would feel secure.

<Antonio> Do you really think that it would work?

<Julie> I think that's the only way!

<Aaron> I am almost certain that everyone basically can fall in love with men and women. We are the ones that define sexual orientations so rigidly. There's nothing to be ashamed of. I think it's really a good thing to be able to love different persons. I admire your courage, Antonio.

<Julie> Let's keep this in mind as an utopian goal and let's help each other on the way there!! Maybe one day it will come true!!!

<Antonio> I agreed. Thx to you all, guys!



Counselling

(Psycho/social/healthcare professionals)

Bear in mind

Counselling entails a meeting between two individuals that takes place in a given space and time, i.e. in a specific historical and cultural context. From the constructivist point of view, we can say that any given society in any historical period “forges” specific meanings of sexuality. Counsellors and the people they counsel exchange views about them, thus developing a common ground for working together.

The rise of the middle-class family in Western cultures coincided with the development of specific views on gender roles, love and sexuality. At the same time, the term “homosexuality” was invented to distinguish same-sex behaviour from the heterosexual one, which was considered as being the “norm”, not only statistically, but also in terms of “normality”.

In recent years, the homosexual movement claimed the right to self-definition and suggested the use of terms that don't are not based on sexual behaviour but on affectivity and on the sense of belonging to a group. For example, LGBT activists prefer the use of the terms “gay” and “lesbian” instead of “homosexual” to underline the importance of gender diversity and also because the word “homosexual” in the past was linked to a paradigm that pathologised homosexuality. Terminological issues are not just a matter of form but have an impact on the content that is conveyed; they are indicators of the values and emotional world of the speaker, which also awaken significant emotional experiences with the listener.

Counselling sessions are also influenced by the communication and relational dynamics that develop between counsellors and the people they counsel. One competence a counsellor needs to have is authenticity, since the counsellor's own convictions will inevitably influence the counselling process. However, authenticity requires a certain degree of self-awareness about doubts, unanswered questions and “blind spots” that should be discussed with colleagues and during supervision. Counsellors should take time to think about these themes and ask themselves how their own views could influence the relationship with the people they counsel. Useful questions they might ask themselves are:

- What do you know about same-sex lifestyles and relationships? Where do you know this from and with whom do you exchange your views?
- What did you learn about same-sex lifestyles during your professional training? What do you know about the difference between sexual orientation and gender identity? (see the *Identity and Sexual Orientation* section in the *Crossing Diversity Handbook*).
- What attitude do you have towards women who have relationships and sex with other women? To what extent do these attitudes differ from those you have towards men who have relationships and sex with other men?
- During your sexual development, have you ever had a homosexual experience? How do you view this experience today?
- What meaning or value do you think sexuality has for the identity of a lesbian woman? And for the identity of a gay man?
- What experience do you have in counselling LGBT persons?
- Do you think that LGBT persons would prefer to work with a LGBT counsellor? If so, why and in what way do you think the identity of a gay and lesbian counsellor will affect the counselling setting or process? If not, why and what would be most useful for heterosexual counsellors?

Counselling - FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions)

Please also refer to the FAQs for the education sector

How can I react if a person is scared because he/she has sexual experiences and/or fantasies with people of both genders and he/she cannot understand who he/she is anymore?

People who define themselves as heterosexuals can also have same-sex fantasies or experiences.

Similarly, gays and lesbians can have sex with persons of the opposite sex. Encourage the person you are counselling to think about love or attraction (regardless of gender) in a positive way and help him/her to express these feelings in an appropriate way. Bring more flexibility into mainstream sexual categorisation. The boundaries between heterosexuality, homosexuality and bisexuality are rather fluid and we do not find them defined as such in “Nature”, as they are the expression of by men’s culturally produced needs. These categories are therefore “artificial” and can be changed if they no longer suit our current needs. Individual don’t have to conform to these definitions, it’s the definitions that need to change and adapt to the feeling of individuals!

For instance, if a person has sexual relations with both sexes, it is not always necessary or advisable to define him/her as a bisexual person. There are people who identify as heterosexual and have sex with partners of the same sex. At the same time, there are also people who define themselves as homosexual and have erotic experiences with partners of the opposite sex. You should focus on the person’s needs without stressing the need for clear identification, and help them enjoy the apparent contradictions of human life.

How should I react if a person who wants to try sex with a same-sex partner tells me that he/she is afraid of specific sexual practices?

Sex between two women or two men can be as fulfilling as heterosexual sex. There is no predetermined or compulsory set of good sex practices. People of both orientations can engage in more or less the same range of practices but everyone can have different preferences. Male-to-male sex is not limited to anal penetration or oral sex. Similarly, two women can decide if they want anal or vaginal penetration or not and how to do that. The sex practices that two men or two women want to try have to be negotiated between them, just as those between a man and a woman, and no predefined conventional rule applies.

How can two women have sex since they don’t have a penis?

This is a question often asked by young people. The stereotypical image of sexual intercourse defined as vaginal penetration by a penis is persistent. Boys especially find it very hard to imagine how sexual pleasure and orgasm can exist without any penetration of a penis into a vagina. As already mentioned, penetrative sex is not limited to heterosexuals. The point is not the “lack of penis” but the fact that feeling someone inside you may be arousing, both for heterosexuals and homosexuals. On the other hand, penetrative sex is not the only way to experience fulfilling sex, also oral or manual stimulation can be very pleasurable. Most importantly, pleasure comes from the whole of one’s body and, hence, from the emotional involvement of an individual in the here-and-now of his/her relationship. There is a wide range of ways to get involved, and that is a personal choice.

Counselling -Tools

My Body

Aim: helping teens to better understand their emotions about sexuality and their self-image.

An essential component of a man or woman's gender identity experience is the image he/she has of his/her own body and the awareness of his/her own physical and emotional needs. The feelings, thoughts and behaviour of an individual exist as they are embodied, as they are the expression of movement and the endless transformation of our existence, as body interacting with the environment.

Method: as an essential part of a man or woman's identity is the image he/she has of his/her own body and the perception and fulfilment of his/her own needs, it will be interesting to ask yourself or the teen the following questions:

- What importance does clothing have for me? What do I feel when I undress or I am naked?
- How do I react to the images of gay men and lesbian women that are out in the public?
- What part of my body do I find the most beautiful?
- What parts of my body are of special importance to me?
- Which parts of my body do I dislike? How come? How do I handle my feelings?
- What did I learn from my mother and father about the way that the body is considered? What did I learn from them about nakedness and sexuality?
- How did my mother and father react to my outer appearance? Did their reaction help or hinder my development?
- Which parts of my body do I connect to sexual desire/happiness/pain? How do I care for/treat them?
- How has my relationship to my body developed: in my childhood, in puberty, today?

Please note: this exercise can be used by counsellors and the people they counsel as a tool for self-reflection.

It is helpful to use this method in-between sessions as a kind of homework assignment.

As the reflection process continues, it's likely that people will begin to see how the attitudes they learned from their family conflict with their own individual values. For gays and lesbians, this conflict is difficult for two reasons: first, because they lack positive role models and, second, as in order to build their identity they might feel the need to keep at a distance from the dominant heterosexual norm in order to build up their own identity through negative or anti-identification.

Sexuality:Yesterday-Today-Tomorrow

Aim: helping people to reflect on their past, to become aware of their personal values and express their wishes for the future.

Method: you will need one poster-sized paper, one A4 sheet, coloured marker pens, scissors and glue.

The person being counseled divides the poster paper into three equal parts by drawing vertical lines. One section of the poster is reserved for each one of the following questions, from left to right: How did I see my sexuality during puberty? How do I see it today? How would I like to see it in the future?

Let him/her write down the answers in their own words. Next, have him/her cut off the part of the poster that contains their wishes for the future. Glue the A4 sheet to replace the piece that was cut and then glue the "future" section next to it (making a link between the present and the future).

He/she will write the answers to the following questions on the poster:

- In the shift from puberty to present, which desires related to my sexuality have I fulfilled? Which resources have I used?
- If I think of my sexuality, the way I wish it to be, what prevents me from making this vision come true?
- What resources can I use to accomplish my wishes for the future?
- What would help me to overcome such obstacles?

Please note: this exercise helps the counsellor to get information about people's views on their sexuality. It also explains how they see their future and helps them identify the resources that are available to them to achieve these goals. Based on this information, the targets for the next sessions can be defined. In addition, the counsellor and the person he/she is counselling can decide how much they can and want to continue working on the person's sexuality issue.

Three-Chairs-Exercise

Aim: helping people reflect on their sexuality by trying to determine how they judge their own way of living it.

Method: add three more chairs in addition to the ones where the counsellor and the person being counselled are sitting. First, the person is asked to choose three significant persons in his/her life, one from his/her family, one among his/her friends and one among his/her partners. The names of these persons are written on a sheet and placed one on each of the three chairs. Then, the person is asked to stand behind each of the three chairs for five minutes and the counsellor asks him/her the following questions: "If I asked this person to say what they thought about how you live with your sexuality and how satisfied you are with it, what would they say?"

Please note: for the exercise make sense, the person should be willing to conduct an in-depth exploration of his/her sexuality. When the perspective is changed, reflecting on one's own sexuality becomes easier: it is also easier to distinguish between one's own desired behaviour, attitudes and judgements and those of the others.

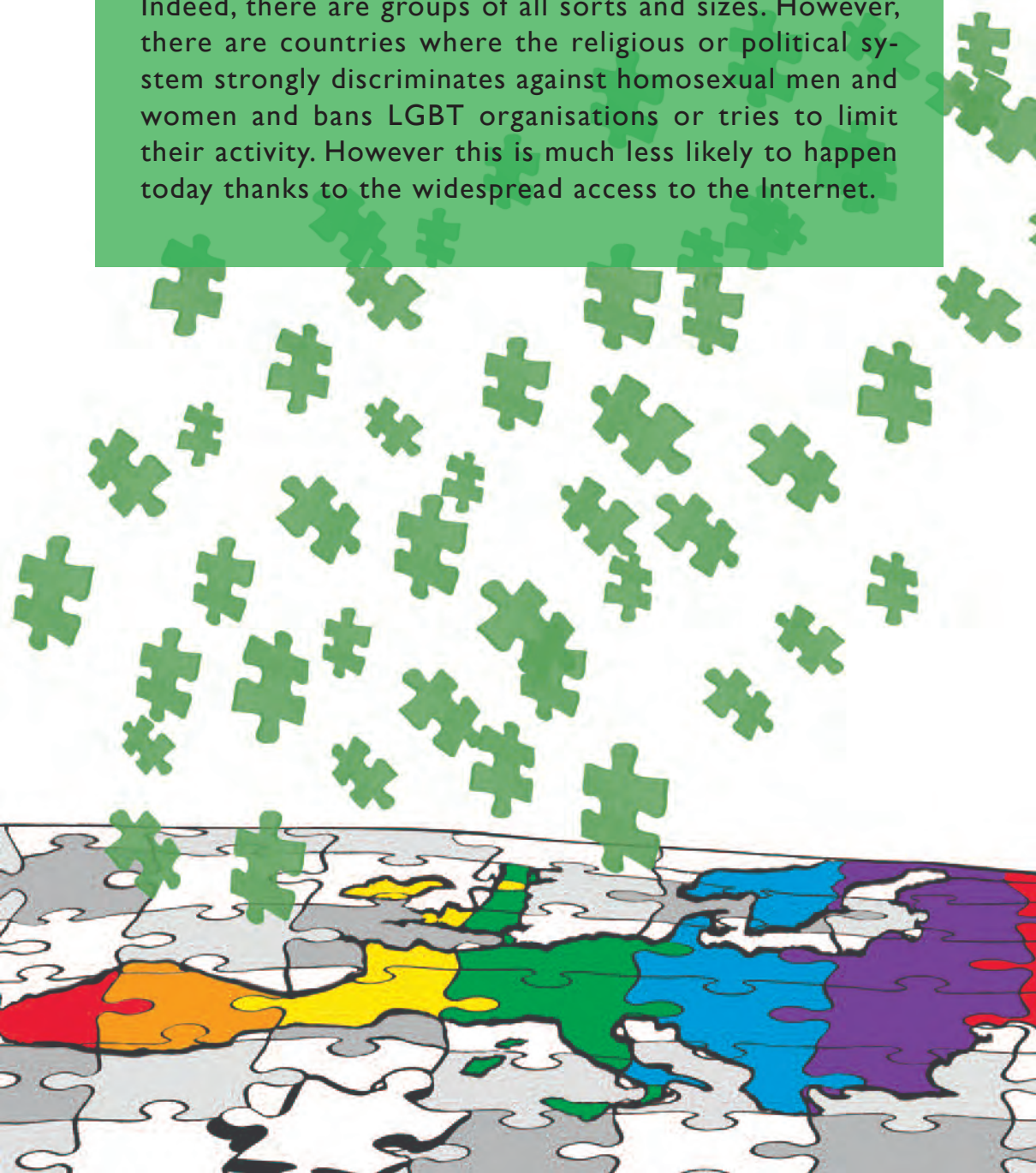
Once the exercise is completed, the person should have a better idea of how to improve the way he/she lives his/her sexuality and should be able to identify the most effective methods to implement change.

7 The LGBT Community

Introduction

First of all

As gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transexuals had to face discrimination in many aspects of their lives, they have created their own groups and communities all over the world. Indeed, there are groups of all sorts and sizes. However, there are countries where the religious or political system strongly discriminates against homosexual men and women and bans LGBT organisations or tries to limit their activity. However this is much less likely to happen today thanks to the widespread access to the Internet.



Basic information

Sometimes groups dealing with LGBT-related topics are gender-specific groups, i.e. groups for gays, groups for lesbians, and groups for transexuals only. However, most groups are open to both. Here, gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transexuals can meet and find support, discuss individual experiences on their coming out to their families and friends, share ideas and fears. Other groups are engaged in political or social activity and advocate LGBT persons' rights, for instance the right to marry or have registered partnerships and anti-discrimination laws. Other groups concentrate on the education sector, e.g. they go to schools to talk with students about their coming out and what it is like to be gay, lesbian, bisexual or transexual.

Over the past several years, many groups have been set up in response to special interests, including sports associations, recreational groups, groups that publish magazines and periodicals, volunteers' associations, confessional groups, etc.

What we must realise is that these groups, with their diverse styles and interests, can offer LGBT persons an opportunity to develop their self-awareness and get to know their local LGBT community. In this way, they have the chance to overcome loneliness.

In addition, there are many LGBT bars, restaurants, clubs, etcetera, where people can enjoy a relaxed atmosphere because LGBTs make up most of the clientele, they can meet their friends or go out with their partner without feeling looked at in a cautious way by other guests or having to explain themselves. Taken together, these groups, bars, clubs, counselling centres and associations make up the LGBT community.

There are many opinions and stereotypes about this community. For instance, some parents, teachers and sometimes even young LGBTs themselves find the community "strange" or frivolous or regard it as a sort of ghetto where they might lose the contact with "normality". Conversely, most LGBTs who know the community find it pleasant and see its meeting spots just as completely "ordinary" places which happen to have a mostly, but not exclusively, LGBT clientele.

Moreover, these locations can in fact be a place of support and encouragement, a sort of protected space where LGBTs have access to alternative role models and thus don't have to fear being looked at or insulted for displaying their affection in public.

Today, there is a wide range of guides to LGBT communities worldwide. These guides are available on the Internet, in specific sections of many newspapers and magazines, in bookshops and, of course, in LGBT meeting spots, i.e. cafes, bars, restaurants, centres, etc. Some of these venues have become local institutions because of their often troubled and glorious past, as well as because they are popular sites for political and social debate. These venues and clubs seem to be quite similar to each other and constitute an international community.

Although the situation in general is improving, most institutions, groups and bars of the LGBT community are based in large cities. That's why many young gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transexuals who live in the suburbs or in the country often visit these cities and make plans to relocate there. They hope that the anonymity of large cities will protect them from prejudice and discrimination and they also hope to find more support and opportunities there.



What does this mean for me?

You could check out the LGBT clubs or facilities in your city in order to get an idea of what they are like. This is the only way you can recommend young LGBTs a location or organisation with a safe conscience, and only if it seems to be appropriate to you. Some LGBT bars are open to everyone, gay and heterosexual men and women are welcome. You can go there, see the location, meet new friends and find a place where the “intersections of diversity” and multiculturalism are not a slogan but principles that are practiced daily.

In large cities, there are even gay, lesbian and bisexual groups for ethnic minorities where people can meet with other people who do not only share their sexual orientation but also their cultural background (see *Appendix 2 of the Crossing Diversity Handbook*).

Education

(Teachers)

Bear in mind

What do you personally think about the LGBT community? Do you have ideas what it may be like? Why do you think this community exists? What benefits does it hold for the teenagers?

For many homosexuals, bisexuals and transexuals, the community is a social network where they are able to meet other gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transexuals, spend their spare time and learn something more about them.

The community provides protection against some widely held behavioural stereotypes and frees its members from the obligation to behave according to traditional gender roles. Generally, gays and lesbians feel comfortable in the community because they can behave in ways that are consistent with what they feel and they do not need to explain or justify themselves. Try to imagine how you would have felt as a teenager if there had been only a few places of your town where you could have been absolutely sure nobody would have criticised for your love or sexual orientation.

The acquaintances made in the community can lead to lasting friendships based on genuine and sincere relationships. The exchange of similar experiences and mutual support can help gays and lesbians to cope with negative reactions to their coming out in the family or at the workplace.



Education - FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions)

Please also refer to the FAQs for the psycho/social/healthcare professionals

Why do gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transexuals create their own places? Isn't that a kind of ghetto?

From a very young age, LGBTs are raised as heterosexuals and are taught that homosexual feelings and relationships are not valued in our society. In order to build up their own identity and self-esteem, they need their own spaces where they can express their feelings without being afraid of receiving unpleasant stares or comments.

For a person who is not used to the LGBT community, it may seem like a kind of “ghetto” lifestyle. The LGBT community is not a ghetto but it is perceived as such because we live in a society where the heterosexual norm prevails.

How can I learn more about the local LGBT community?

The easiest way is to look for information on the Internet. Another, and possibly better, way is to visit the local LGBT organisations and ask the members for more information about the activities they are involved in.

Are the meeting spots of the LGBT community open to anyone?

Yes. Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transexual centres are generally open to anyone who is looking for information on their activities and people will usually be pleased to answer your questions (see the webliography included in the Appendix of the Crossing Diversity Handbook or personally look for the centres closest to you). Most cafes, pubs, bars and restaurants are open to anyone, only some nightclubs are “men only” and some lesbian venues are open to women only. If you are not sure, just call and ask before you go.

Education - Tools

Fact and Prejudice Web

Aim: to explore the facts and prejudices surrounding the LGBT community.

Method: ask the students what they think of when they hear the term 'lesbian community' and 'gay community'. Write their comments on the blackboard, connect them with lines that represent associations between them, creating a sort of 'web'. Use different colours to highlight negative and positive comments (e.g. negative = yellow and positive = green). Ask why there are more yellow comments than green ones (which is the most probable outcome) and explore which of these comments are facts, which are stereotypes (judgements which are not congruent with facts), and which are personal opinions or feelings. Check which facts are known about the LGBT community and how the young people learned about it. Explain facts about the LGBT community and its history as you go. Close the session by asking the students if the discussion made them change their minds.

Please note: be sure to prepare yourself so that you can provide adequate information about the local LGBT community. You may consider inviting speakers from a local gay/lesbian/bisexual/transsexual organisation to provide the young people with inside information on local activities. Also prepare yourself for questions from the students about the homosexual "ghetto" and public displays of sexual orientation.

Gay Pride Parade

Aim: to explore the need for visibility of LGBT people.

Method: show a picture of a Gay Pride parade and ask the students if they know what it is about. Encourage them to contribute their own comments. You will probably get some strong negative remarks (for some students, the visibility of homosexuals or some ways of making themselves visible are unacceptable). Discuss the effects of discrimination and pride on a person's identity. Explain the history of Gay Pride (see also *Theme Map 8 "History and Cultures"*). Compare ethnic pride with gay pride.

Please note: many people are shocked by the lifestyles shown at Gay Pride events which, of course, attract a large amount of media attention. During the discussion, take into account the distorting influence of the media and the great variety of homosexual lifestyles which at the end reflects the variety of lifestyles of society in general.

It's a Straight World...

Aim: to explore the effects of heterosexism and to explain the meaning of the LGBT community.

Method: explain that we are all raised to be heterosexual. Also explain that, as a consequence, LGBT teens find themselves in a particular situation and that this work is meant to explore how they may feel. Give the students a few moments to think about this question: "If the world were not heterosexually oriented, but gay/lesbian-oriented, would you go to a 'straight' bar?". An additional question could be: "What would the 'normal' gay population think about this?" Let students share their thoughts and feelings. As the discussion progresses, you could try to steer it and focus it on how the students would like that situation to be. Then draw conclusions which relate to the current situation: how should heterosexuals think about the LGBT community?

Counselling

(Psycho/social/healthcare professionals)

Bear in mind

Ask yourself what you know about the LGBT community, where you got this information from and if you have ever visited the community yourself.

When you counsel young LGBTs, consider that the sense of belonging to the LGBT community might be an integral part of that individual's identity and everyday life. However, some gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transexuals may not feel comfortable with some commercial aspects of the community because they feel a certain pressure to behave and dress "conventionally" and don't (yet) have enough self-esteem to follow their own inclinations. The LGBT community does not solve everyone's problems, it can have both a positive and negative influence on people. Even those who don't often interact with the community are part of this community and are conditioned by its norms and values and, in turn, they will influence the community.

If you are not gay, lesbian, bisexual or transexual yourself, you should at least visit some of the institutions of the community, such as a counselling centre and/or one of the most popular venues. The persons you are counselling may not always be willing to explain every detail of the LGBT community to you, but they might assume you are familiar with it.

If you work in the suburbs, make sure you have some contact addresses to pass on to the people that come to see you for counselling. You can also contact a "coming-out support group" that you can recommend to them or a LGBT organisation that could refer people to you for counselling.

A STORY...



This is complete and utter madness.

I would never have met Patrizia if we hadn't been fighting in the school playground and if Mrs. Gazzì hadn't summoned me to her office because of that. And here I am now, waiting for her, with butterflies in my stomach and wobbly legs. When I see her face in front of mine, I feel a rush of heat through my body.

Teresa pictures those deep brown eyes as they look at her with a sparkle, and then narrow to thin slits with joy. Teresa breathes deeply, or else she won't be able to stand up because of all the excitement. The others mustn't find out about them, even their gay or lesbian friends. Her sexuality is her business only. As well, of course, as Patrizia's. She looks down at the courtyard. She kissed Patrizia for the first time during the Techno Party three weeks ago. Her heart still twinges when she thinks about it. Nothing else matters to her, she just wants to be by her side. Teresa sighs. She would never have thought the world could be so crazy. Her story with Patrizia is so complicated that nobody would ever make sense of it. Teresa lets her eyes drift across the crowd in the café. The lesbians and gays here are really nice people. Mrs. Gazzì was right. There is indeed a gay and lesbian centre here in Bologna and she hadn't even known about it. How ridiculous.

Her love affair with Patrizia has started here. The first time she went there, her hands were sticky with sweat because she was nervous and she was blown away when she saw Patrizia sitting by the window, in the back. Patrizia, of all people. She's a lesbian, thought Teresa, between excitement and shock. She had never realised. Patrizia was like a ray of sunshine illuminating her across the room. Teresa didn't look away.

She simply asked "So finally you found out".

"I would never have thought that you..." Teresa doesn't finish her sentence.

"Lesbians are not all alike" comes the laconic reply from Patrizia. "You have a lot of prejudices in your head".

"But Franca is my best friend. And she's straight. So what?"

"So, nothing." Stumbles Teresa.

"Will you come to the Techno Party with me next Friday? Just you and me?"

Patrizia stares at her for some time, with a little sparkle in her eyes that Teresa would learn to understand later on.

Yes, that's how it all started. But that was the end of a long story. Teresa plays the story in her mind.

The girls of the tenth grade are in the schoolyard, giggling as always. The only one that Teresa likes is Patrizia, but she wouldn't be caught dead ever admitting it. On the contrary, she often taunts Patrizia when she meets her. "So, the little lady has squeezed herself into the supertight jeans again and dipped her little face into the paint box?"

"Stop it, Teresa, get out of my way. Your presence is not welcome here!"

"I really couldn't care less, Patrizia, you know."

"Come on", says Franca "don't pay any attention to that witch says. Why doesn't she leave you alone?"

"And you, do you really have to butt in? ", growls Teresa. "Cause you're the one who looks like a real whore."

"Get lost Teresa, before I lose my temper !" Patrizia's voice sounds dangerously quiet. "Cut it out, save your provocations for someone else. All right?"

"I was only telling you how ridiculous you look and how absolutely stupid your con-

versation is.”Teresa raises the tone of her voice. “Hey look here, isn’t that guy simply adorable? Yesterday in the courtyard he even smiled at me.” She resumes her normal tone. “That bothers you, doesn’t it?”

“You’re just jealous because guys don’t look at you”, says Franca.

“Wrong, Franca, I just don’t want to waste my intelligence on a guy, like you and the other girls do.”

“So why are you still standing here? If our standards don’t suit you, get lost”.

Patrizia pushes Teresa back. That was the last straw.

“Stop fighting. Have you gone completely mad? Patrizia, Teresa, I want you to back off immediately!” Mrs. Gazzì holds the girls apart.

“She started it, she always does”, pants Patrizia.

“Of course”, sneers Teresa. “I always do.”

“Patrizia is telling the truth. Teresa should leave us alone once and for all”, declares Franca and stares at the math teacher.

“Teresa, report to me after the class.” “I would like to show you something. It’s in my office, okay?”

Teresa has always liked her math teacher. She understood something about Teresa, something that no one else noticed.

“You really like Patrizia, don’t you?”

“How can you imagine such a thing?” Teresa feels she was caught off-balance.

“You remind me of myself when I was your age.” Mrs Gazzì winks at her.

“Oh really?” Teresa plays it cool.

“Here we are. Come in. Would you like to sit down?”

“You wanted to show me something?”

“Precisely. A brochure about the Gay Games – just a second.” The teacher rummages through a drawer under the desk. “I thought that, since you are into sports, you’d might want to compete there next year. They’ll certainly need good volleyball players”

“Hey, just a moment” Teresa looks squarely at the teacher “Are you a lesbian?”

“Yes. Does that surprise you? Why don’t you go to the Gay and Lesbian Centre, and try to meet other lesbians? You’re always hanging out alone.”

“I just don’t want to feel looked at like a sex object.”

“Who told you that lesbians are like that?”

“Everybody says it.”

“So you believe everything they say. In any case it’s not true. Gays and lesbians have many interests. They create sports groups, meet to spend time together, for instance to discuss politics – you can share with them whatever you want.”

“Volleyball is a good starting point.” Teresa turns and turns the brochure in her hands.

“Okay. Then I’ll give you the address of the Gay and Lesbian Centre. Do you have Internet?”

“Sure.”

“Here are some websites that could be of interest to you. You can start with these and go on looking from there. My colleague has just told me about a chat for young lesbians and gays that should be very good. I’ll write it down for you. So you can see what is going on in real life. You’ll see, nobody will consider you a mere sex object.”

“And you? Are you part of the scene?”

“Scene may not be the right word. I have many lesbian and gay friends but I usually don’t go out to bars and clubs.”

“I see. Thank you very much!”

“I am glad I could help. And have fun with sports.”



Counselling - FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions)

Please also refer to the FAQs for the education sector.

Where can I find information about psychological support, self-help or counselling services provided by the LGBT community in my area?

You can find many links on the Internet, if you use a search engine you will find many resources in your area. If you plan to refer the person you are counselling to a specific institution, it's important that you are well-acquainted with it. Get to know more by making personal contact with that particular institution.

How should I deal with those who have a bad opinion about the LGBT community?

The gay and lesbian community is more than a cliché. What are their specific interests? It may be they have a negative view because they have not found the support structure they are looking for yet. Encourage them to continue looking for and exploring new areas and services of the community (see also the first question in the “Counselling” section).

Is it always advisable to recommend a person to get involved in the LGBT community?

Generally, the community is very supportive but there can be situations when the person should concentrate on resolving his/her internal and/or external conflicts through individual work. In these cases, you should determine if he/she would benefit from individual or group counselling and refer him/her to a psycho/social/healthcare professional or other appropriate resources.

To avoid disappointment, he/she should be informed exactly on what he/she'll find and where to find it.

How can I handle a person who is afraid of the LGBT community?

Discuss his/her needs in detail and work on different ways to satisfy them. Visiting the LGBT community is only one way of solving problems, and it is neither a “cure-all”, nor “the route to happiness”. It may take time before a person finds the right place, association or group which best meets him/her needs.



Counselling - Tools

Think about the following questions:

- How can you help a person to work through conflict and use the resources available if he/she feels isolated?
- How can you help a person to work through conflict and use the resources available if he/she is interested in the LGBT community but has some concerns about it?
- What other communities do you know apart from the LGBT one?
- Do the activities/services offered in the LGBT community of your city suit the cultural and individual background of that person?
- To which specific groups does that person belong to besides the homosexual group (e.g. religious, ethnic, sport, gender groups, etc.)?
- Are there groups in your area whose members belong to two or more minorities at the same time (e.g. a group for Turkish gay man, Jewish lesbians, etc.)?



A LGBT Social Network

Aim: helping the person you are counselling to reflect on his/her position within the LGBT social network.

Method: try and find out what images that person has of the LGBT community. Does he/she feels part of the community? Why or why not? Does he/she associate the community with negative imagery? Does he/she meet socially with other LGBT persons outside the community?

Please note: bear in mind that LGBTs who belong to ethnic minorities often do not take part in the community. This may be because they fear they might feel uncomfortable by being once again in a minority position. It can also be due to prejudice and discrimination encountered within the community.



8 History and Culture

Introduction

First of all

Homosexual romantic and sexual relationships have always existed. Only their form and the conditions under which they have and still are experienced have changed over time, depending on the meaning each culture attributes to sexual orientation.

Today, for instance, multiple identities exist side by side and they can't always be classified using a specific term (e.g. lesbian, gay, bisexual, heterosexual, transexual, queer, transgender, etc.) In European history, homosexuals have been persecuted for a long time because of social prejudice. This persecution was first justified with theological arguments ("sin") and later with pseudo-scientific evidence that led to label homosexuality as a disease or as a mental disorder. In fact, the term "homosexuality" was coined in the 19th century and transformed the "sin" and/or the "crime" of homosexuality (which, in some cases carried the death penalty) into a disease.

Today, scientific research has proved that gays and lesbians are as healthy as heterosexuals and that their problems do not derive from their sexual orientation but from the discrimination by and the culture of the environment they live in.

Criminal prosecution of homosexual acts has been abolished in all European countries – initially in France in the late 18th century and then in the remaining countries during the 20th century. At the end of the 19th century, several political and social organisations for homosexual men and women were created. In the 20th century, the women's liberation movement and the gay and lesbian movement promoted more openness in general about constraint-free sexuality and contributed to the creation of a positive gay and lesbian identity.

It is worth pointing out that history, as it is told in books, is a man-dominated history and that is why we know just a few historical female figures and, especially, lesbians. In fact, the low visibility of lesbians is one of the specific types of discrimination homosexual women have to deal with in everyday life.

Basic information

In specific historical periods and in the different societies, same-sex relationships took on many different forms and meanings. Some societies don't talk, and neither did in the past, about homosexuality but only make a distinction between active and passive sex, where the latter is devalued. This value judgement is based on the traditional sexist division of male and female gender roles, highlighting the higher valuing of whatever is traditionally associated to men over women. In this cultural construct, so-called "passive" men are seen as if they were a sort of women and therefore this "feminisation" makes them "inferior" to "active" men.

All these forms differ quite a lot from 'modern homosexuality', i.e. same-sex relationships between adults who identify as gay or lesbian. In these 'modern' relationships, the sexual behaviour and the division of tasks is subject to negotiation and is not traditional.

Culturally accepted forms of same-sex relationships

In ancient Greece, same-sex relationships were accepted and encouraged on the condition that they

were carried out between adult men and boys. Relationships between men were a means of reinforcing the rules and customs of male power, of transmitting philosophical knowledge but also of reinforcing the personal bonds between warriors.

Native Americans had a special respect for the so-called 'two-spirits' or 'Berdaches'. These people were considered neither men nor women. They were often revered experts in medicine and the arts.

"Berdachism" had a mystical and spiritual dimension, whilst in the Western and modern notion of homosexuality a person identity's core is sexual orientation.

Some Native American cultures consider sexual orientation and gender identity as being unrelated. Another conception of same-sex relationships may be seen in the original Indian religion where, before the onset of the current patriarchal philosophy, aversion against same-sex relationships was unknown. There even were homosexual divinities, as can still be seen in temple sculptures and in epic books, poetry and literature.

The influence of the monotheist religions

In countries where the three biggest monotheist religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) were predominant, homosexuality has been strongly stigmatised for millennia. Although same-sex relationships have always existed in Europe and the Middle East throughout history, Christianity considered homosexual behaviour as illegitimate.

In the Middle Ages, for instance, women were sometimes denounced as witches when they were too independent, particularly when they lived with other women.

In 16th-century Italy, sexual relations between young men were very common, while sex with a woman before marriage was strictly forbidden. In those times, it was quite common for masters, servants and friends to sleep in the same bed.

In the 19th century, the new scientific approach to sexuality partially shifted same-sex relationships from the theological into the medical realm.

Even now, people have very different views on homosexuality. Next to openly gay and lesbian lifestyles, there are many others. For instance, in the Mediterranean region, homosexual practices are very common, however they cannot be publicly mentioned. In some Islamic cultures, same-sex attraction is seen as natural and is considered very seductive. As long as Muslims do not display such behaviour in public, many homosexual practices are allowed, especially because heterosexual sex before marriage is forbidden. Despite the claims of many fundamentalist activists, homosexuality can in no way be thought of as an entirely novel or as a "Western" or "colonialist" phenomenon.



What does this mean for me?

The historical development of sexual and affective customs (including same-sex relationships) may be an important topic to discuss both in schools and during counselling. Understanding how cultural definitions and identities changed over time is important. However, this is not just a philosophical exercise: historical and cultural definitions help to shape the present. Reflecting on the changes in historical and social development can make young people more aware of the origins of current lifestyles. It can help them understand how some social definitions have developed over time and allows them to contextualise behaviours, norms and definitions within a given historical period and see that they are not absolute truths but a function of the historical context.

Education

(Teachers)

Bear in mind

Historiography is not an objective science. The interpretation of history has often been used as a means of promoting or opposing change. By becoming aware of historical developments and influences, we could learn to recognise how the present has been shaped by the past and, in this way, it could be easier to find the resources to change it. What do you think about that?

Many specialists believe that values, ideals and customs concerning sexuality and the differences between men and women change over time and play an important role in social control. Do you agree?

Do you believe that some historical developments influenced your own way of having sexual and relational experiences? And the ways of your parents and grandparents? Which factors have limited or fostered your self-consciousness about their and your gender identity and role, sexual orientation?

Sexuality and homosexuality are interesting and controversial aspects of our social and cultural history.

In what way could the historical and social aspects of homosexuality and sexuality in general be covered?

In your view, what is important for your students to learn from these classroom lectures?

Education - FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions)

Please also refer to the FAQs for the psycho/social/healthcare professionals

Where can I get information about gays, lesbians and bisexuals in history?

You can find a lot of interesting information on the Internet at the Wikipedia sites. Please also see the pages dedicated to your Country in Appendices 3 and 4 of the *Crossing Diversity Handbook*. They will provide you with a starting point for a very interesting and surprising exploration.

Which historical figures were homosexual or bisexual?

There were many. To name a few: Sappho, Socrates, Plato, Alexander the Great, Aristotle, King David and Jonathan of Israel, the Roman Emperors Hadrian and Trajan, Richard I (the Lionheart) of England, Erasmus, Montezuma II of the Aztecs, Edward II of England, Henry III (King of France and Poland), James I of England, Louis XIII of France, Karl XII of Sweden, Christina of Sweden, Peter I of Russia, Frederic II of Prussia, Christian II of Denmark, Statholder William of Orange (later King of England), Alexander I of Russia, Ludwig II of Bavaria, Christina of Sweden and the last Chinese emperor Pu Yi.

However, the homosexuality/bisexuality of the majority of these figures was not historically relevant, in the sense that their feelings or orientation did not in themselves make a difference for history as such, and the same goes for famous heterosexuals in history. Still, many gays, lesbians and bisexuals perceive these historical figures as important positive role models that strengthen their own identity and self-esteem.

How much do I have to know about the historical and cultural aspects of sexuality in order to be able to teach them to my students?

You don't need a lot of information. The most important thing is to know and to be able to convey the variety of emotions, values, attitudes and practices which have existed in different times and places. Of course, it helps to have some examples of that at hand. Also the students can help you find them. Involving students in a research project on contemporary homosexual figures is a very good way of showing that today homosexuality is a visible and ordinary feature of the life of many persons who play a prominent role in their own communities.

What happened at the Stonewall Inn?

An important historical turning point in gay rights was the outbreak of riots at the Stonewall Inn, a very popular bar for gays, lesbians, and transvestites on Christopher Street in New York City. This was the first case of organised resistance against ongoing harassment and raids by the police. The bar was regularly raided and the managers and patrons were insulted and arrested by the police. The police often gave the names of the arrested to family and employers, which often exposed these people to social isolation and made lose their job. During a raid in June 1969, the Inn's manager and patrons rebelled against the police. The next day, the gay movement in New York organised a demonstration which ended in a fight with the police and resulted in riots going on for several days. This event is celebrated in many countries with an annual gay and lesbian parade called Gay Pride parade or, sometimes, "Christopher Street Day".

It is remarkable that most of the people have forgot that the first to react was a group of transvestites, which included a number of African Americans.

Education - Tools

Stories

Aim: to make teenagers aware of the way they were raised to perceive sexuality.

Method: ask students how they were educated on gender identity and roles, as well as sexuality. Ask them as well what information – which they deem important – they did not receive and how they compensated. An alternative approach could be to ask the students to ask their parents and grandparents (or whoever raised them) information on how they (the family members or caretakers) learned all this. Have them ask them as well what information and values they wanted to convey to their own children, what difficulties they were confronted with, and whether they think they succeeded.

In the second stage, the students can discuss which differences they see between their stories.

Make them discuss conflicts that may arise between educators and pupils. How were they resolved?

Another follow-up can be to ask the teens how they intend to deal with these topics with their own children. What will they do if their children have opinions that differ from their own? What if their child was homosexual?

Please note: bear in mind that the student may feel embarrassed about disclosing certain elements about their private, personal, and family lives, and, possibly, their sexual orientation. Moreover, parents and grandparents who are interviewed on subjects such as sexuality might feel uneasy and they might perceive the questions as a provocation from the young family member, or unwanted school interference. Prepare the students for this beforehand and take care they don't violate the personal boundaries of the adults.

Heroines and Heroes

Aim: to explore the importance of historical figures as role models for young LGBTs.

Method: ask the students to list famous historical figures they consider as role models in some way. Explore why these people are important as examples of creativity, independence, strength, honesty ... Pay attention to which role models are chosen by minority students and explore whether this has something to do with their condition.

Then tell the students that having role models is especially important for minorities. Ask them why (because minorities are marginally appreciated, positive role models and examples help correct negative images) and help them express their opinions.

Extend the discussion to homosexuality by asking which role models are important for gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transexuals. You may also choose to discuss historical figures that are important to LGBTs (see FAQs), or discuss more recent examples like Virginia Woolf, Oscar Wilde, Marcel Proust, Freddy Mercury, Pedro Almodovar, etc. Alternatively, you could show a picture of a non-European role model for gays, lesbians and bisexuals, such as Oum Khalsoum, the Egyptian female singer.

Please note: depending on the intellectual level and interest of your students, you could go into a more personal discussion about current gay, lesbian and bisexual role models (e.g. pop stars) or into a more academic discussion about why gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transexuals feel the need to know about historical figures that bear witness to the homosexual presence throughout history.

Another option is to analyse the representation of gays and lesbians in movies by showing a movie or documentary (see *Appendix 6 of the Crossing Diversity Handbook*) and then discussing their content with the teens.

A STORY...

My friend from the gay/lesbian Jewish group “Sjalhomo” is probably the only person I can talk to about this,” thinks Aaron to himself as he makes his way to the meeting centre. The thoughts in his head are so mixed up that he can’t make sense of them anymore. He really likes his teacher, Mr. Lanssen, who teaches his favourite subjects: History, Philosophy, and Dutch. He has often wondered whether his teacher’s ability to understand so many things has

anything to do with him being in a wheelchair and therefore constantly having to fight the stereotypes against disabled people. Since Aaron realised he was gay, he started being more and more interested in finding out which famous male and female figures in history, philosophy and literature were homosexual. How could Mr. Lanssen skip over such a crucial thing? Maybe he was crazy to give homosexuality such an important place in his life, but everything had changed since he realised that he was gay. In many ways, gays see the world through different eyes. That’s why he had to know if any of the free thinkers, freedom fighters or great writers had been gay, too. At any rate, in school nobody had ever talked about this. He had always excelled in History and Philosophy, however, over the last six months, he had distanced himself more and more from classroom study and his classmates. When he’s sitting alone in his room, he has no problems studying, but his class attendance is now close to zero.

...

“Aaron, I’ve noticed for some time now that you haven’t been participating in class. Are you having problems at home, or maybe love problems? I have always been honest with you. What’s going on?”

“Will my grades stay the same even if you’re not satisfied with my participation in class?”

Aaron stares at his shoes, embarrassed.

“Of course not. Since I know that something is troubling you and that that’s why you’ve become so quiet, I’d like to make you an offer. Prepare an oral presentation on a Philosophy or History topic of your choice. If you can make a great presentation, you’ll be back on track, OK?”

“Thanks, Mr. Lanssen.”

To go to the university, you have to have good grades on your final exams. But could he risk including the theme of famous homosexual personalities into his oral presentation?

What if Mr. Lanssen did not agree?

Aaron is certain that there have always been gays and lesbians throughout history, but that these cases have been passed over in silence. He just had to find them!!

...

“Shalom, Aaron, you seem lost in thought!” Josef takes him in his arms with a big smile. “Is there anything wrong, my love?”

“Oh, Josef, I have to do an oral presentation in front of my class.” And then Aaron tells him the whole story.

The other members the “Sjalhomo” Jewish gay group come closer, one by one, to listen to him.

“I’ve been wondering which famous women in history were lesbians. It’s important to know, and besides, it’s exciting,” commented Yael.

“Have you already tried the Internet?” asks Dani, who always looks up everything on the Web.

“Good idea,” said Aaron. “Can you help me?”

“I’ve already written a very thorough essay on this topic, Aaron. After all, I’m a student of Philosophy.”

Aaron turns to stare at Josef.

“But you never told me!” exclaims Aaron, surprised.

“Better late than never,” joked Josef. “Now, Aaron, if you want to pass History and Philosophy, I suggest you choose Erasmus. He was born in 1469 and lived until 1536. He was a revolutionary in its time and was very modern as a theologian but also a pedagogue. Basically, he was much more of a humanist than a theologian and he was famous in his time. He even fought for women’s rights. He promoted the liberation movement at various levels. And the best part is that he was gay. Choose

him as your essay topic, Aaron. It will be great, you’ll see. I can help you.”

"All right," said Aaron with a smile.

"Mr. Lanssen, I'm preparing my presentation and I wanted to discuss the topic with you. Only if you have time, of course."

"I'm glad you took up my offer so quickly. What's the essay about?"

"It's essentially about Erasmus. The name must surely mean something to you."

"As indeed it should. Erasmus is considered the founding father of enlightened thought."

"Did you think that maybe Erasmus had a very personal motive for representing the humanistic school of thought?"

"No, to be honest. Did you think about it?"

"Yes, that's why I chose him. Did you know that he was gay?"

"Oh...! No, I didn't know that. And you think that his homosexuality played a major role in his thinking?"

"Unfortunately, it's too late for me to ask him – it's just a theory. But that's the basis of my essay."

"It's unusual and it will perhaps make you interested in my lessons again"

"Yes, I didn't want to keep my homosexuality a secret from the others any more."

"A very personal motive, then" says Mr. Lanssen with a smile. Even if I agree with your choice of topic, Aaron, I would like you to keep in mind that in Erasmus' time, homosexuality was not as accepted and talked about as it is today, and it definitely wasn't called that way. It's always very tricky to force a definition on someone who can't say anything about it any more. I'll accept your topic with this one limitation, is that okay?"

"I'll have to think about it a little longer, then" answers Aaron.

"May I take a look at what you've already written?"

"The introduction is already finished. The part about Erasmus still needs to be refined. And the last part will talk about homosexuality today. This is why I'll need another week."

"That's fine," said Mr. Lanssen, as he began to read.

History is like a field of flowers in the spring, filled with memories of past journeys and lives that, from the past, want to tell a story. One can always find what he is looking for. Throughout the centuries, millions of personal stories have been told and in many of these stories people have asked themselves the same questions about love and being loved, about pride, about being accepted or persecuted. These events have already occurred many times, sometime, somewhere... For a long time, ancient Greece – home of the ancient poet Sappho – was seen by gays, lesbians and bisexuals as a sort of paradise. But precisely at that time in history, Athens' laws introduced restrictions on homosexuality. Public opinion felt that a man should have a wife and children. A relationship between a man and a boy was accepted provided that was part of the boy's education. Sometime this relationship was passionate, sometimes it was more for educational purposes. But for the lovers, growing up was hard.

The first persecutions of homosexuals began at the time of the early Christians.

During the later Roman Empire, some Emperors subjected gay men to castration; in the Middle Ages homosexuals were even burned alive. Some examples of homosexuality reappear in the 12th century with "amour courtois" (chivalrous love), which was not limited to heterosexual affections.

Although we don't know much about the homosexual aspects of "amour courtois", We know the Pope declared that such romantic relationships were not to be of homosexual nature. This implies that there were indeed chivalrous homosexual affairs.

During the Renaissance, some artists expressed their homo-erotic feelings more visibly. The writings of Plato were translated. Although homosexuality was still officially forbidden at this time, some men were gay, including Leonardo da Vinci. At the age of 24, he was prosecuted because he had a relationship with a 17-year-old boy. Later, he had a relationship with the young Caprotti which lasted for 25 years.

Michelangelo was proud of his homosexual identity and his work was an ode to the love for men.

"I just can't wait to see how it continues," said Mr. Lanssen. "I'll finish reading it next Friday."



Counselling

(Psycho/social/healthcare professionals)

Bear in mind

We all live in cultural and historical contexts whose values determines, at least in part, our ways of thinking and feelings.

The influence exerted by history and culture should be taken into consideration and analysed, especially by those professions whose primary work tool is building relationships with people (e.g. psychologists, social workers, teachers, doctors, etc.). Always keep in mind that your own personal history has an influence on the way you relate with people.

To which particular culture do you belong? Do you believe your culture influences your professional behaviour? How?

Even scientific theories are subject to historical and cultural changes: for instance, until a few decades ago, psychiatry, psychology and psychoanalysis ignored or misunderstood homosexuality, up to the point that they considered it as an affective disorder.

Over time, this theory was discarded based on new evidence produced by scientific research, which was in turn stimulated by a new emerging cultural sensitivity. Indeed, homosexual men and women have gradually stopped hiding and started showing the world the serenity with which they lived their romantic and affective relationships. This process was all then linked to the fight for human rights and respect for diversity. These instances emphasised the need for more rigorous and unbiased scientific research and widened the range of possible results, allowing science to recognize that homosexuality is one of the natural and possible outcomes of the psycho-affective development of human beings.

It is not always easy to talk about sexuality in counselling but it is very important to encourage people to consider some important points including, for instance: what were you taught about sexuality when you were growing up? What was the history of homosexuality in your culture? Were there homosexuals in your community, and how did they express themselves? How has it changed over the years? If you will have the chance of working with persons who come from different cultures from your own, you will be surprised by how many different and interesting stories exist in the world.

During sessions, you might encounter openly homophobic attitudes: make sure you carefully select your response and remember that respect for cultural diversity should not be confused with acritical acceptance of the many cultural variations of crime and injustice. Anyway, countering homophobia in a given culture does not mean imposing one's own "modern" culture, but rather making human rights the cornerstone of your personal and professional value system and, basically, helping the person to gain greater social inclusion. Instead, when you detect signs of interiorised homophobia that do not allow that person to enjoy a harmonious affective/sexual life, remember that you have the professional duty to help him/her overcome this evolutionary obstacle and achieve greater personal integration.

Counselling - FAQs

(Frequently Asked Questions)

Please also refer to the FAQs for the education sector.

How to deal with cultural differences when counselling LGBT persons?

It is more important to be frank than to have a lot of knowledge. A bit of background information and factual knowledge (for example using the “right” words) can break the ice. Don’t be afraid to be honest about what you don’t know.

Can counselling be effective when the counsellor and the LGBT person come from different cultures?

Yes, it is. Obviously, mutual understanding will be easier when the counsellor will show that person that he/she does not see his/her own culture as the paradigm to which that person must conform but just as one of the many possible cultures. That person will feel at ease if he/she will perceive the authentic curiosity of the counsellor towards the meanings, values and customs that are rooted in his/her own culture. This normally reduces the person’s need to defend him/herself and in turn stimulates the same level of curiosity for the differences of others or of the host society. Keep in mind that cultural exchange is an exciting game, that the nature of every human being is characterized by plasticity and by the capability of learning and adapting. Cultural exchange is the main driver of human evolution and everyone of us takes part in it, even during a counselling session. When you think that it may be preferable to refer the person you are counselling to a colleague who specialises in LGBT issues, try contacting the gay and lesbian associations in your area and they will surely provide you with a list of specialists.

Counselling - Tools

Identifying Historical and Cultural Messages about Homosexuality

Aim: to explore historical and cultural messages about homosexuality which are relevant to that person’s personal situation.

Method: give the person you are counselling something to read about views on homosexuality in different historical and cultural moments. Ask him/her what messages about sexuality and homosexuality did he/she receive as a child and as a teen. Explain that the way gays and lesbians perceive themselves and their identity is influenced by their own history and culture.

Compare this with another story that shows a different view on homosexuality (it is particularly useful if you can find a story from that person’s own culture).

Please note: whichever reading material you choose, it should somehow be linked to the current situation of that person. It could give examples of role models, it could help to relax rigid opinions or it could foster the contextualisation of the heterosexual norms that limit his/her living conditions, thinking or behaviour.

An Extended Family Tree

Obiettivo: Aim: exploring historical and cultural messages about homosexuality that are relevant to the situation of the person.

Method: let the person draw an ‘extended family’ tree (with all people who are affectively relevant for Him/her) with these questions:

1. What is the relation with the persons he/she has drawn or how are they related?

What can I do in cases of double or multiple discrimination (e.g. the person is discriminated for being gay/lesbian/bisexual/transsexual and Muslim)?

In these cases, the aim should be to help the person integrate the contradictory aspects of his/her identity. This is possible if the person will understand, with your help, that he/she is first and foremost a human being bearing the right to life, freedom and personal safety. Moreover, he/she has the right to freely live his/her personal orientation and to pursue his/her own happiness. Even if that person lives in a very repressive culture or has low self-esteem because of the homophobia and/or racism he/she experienced, he/she will surely perceive you as an ally in the pursuit of his/her own wellbeing. This work, which may take a long time, can lead to the creation of a sort of bi-culturalism, a new and personal organic integration of his/her “cultures” that allows him/her to move between them. The ability to use multiple cultural codes allows that person to use the resources of each culture according to his/her needs.

Culture is definitely not something unchangeable; actually, it is continuously changing, adjusting, crossbreeding, and synthesizing.

How do I deal with the issue of sexuality with individuals who have a strong sense of decency?

Dealing with sexuality means dealing with the most intimate sphere of people. You need to build up a good alliance with reference to the ongoing process. A good method consists in letting the person ask you the questions he/she more cares about, instead of you asking him/her. If it is really necessary to ask questions, you better ask them in a less direct manner, always giving the person the opportunity of stating that he/she does not want to answer. In particular cases, you can invite the person to write about sexuality instead of talking about it. This show of respect will surely encourage gradual building of trust and rapport.

2. Where do they come from, where were they born?
3. Which of these people had an important role in your personal and sexual evolution?
4. Which of these people gave you messages about homosexuality? What kind of messages?
5. Which of them support you?
6. How do you deal with people, if any, who don't support you or have a negative attitude?
7. How can you add more people who will support you to your extended family tree?

Please note: this exercise may take several sessions. Don't push people to answer the last questions when they are not psychologically ready for it. Many homosexual migrants will feel such a loyalty to their current social network that it may be difficult for them to imagine alternative choices. In some cases, coming out to their family might have opened a crisis or created a rift with some of their family members, hence proceed with caution.

Suggestions for intercultural communication

- You can win people's trust by showing them that you are interested in their family and are not judgemental. Many cultures place great importance on family ties.
- Be honest about your lack of knowledge of the traditions and customs of a specific culture, and ask for information without devaluing what the person tells you.
- Be aware that in some those who tend to the health and psychophysical wellbeing of others are prestigious and authoritative figures.

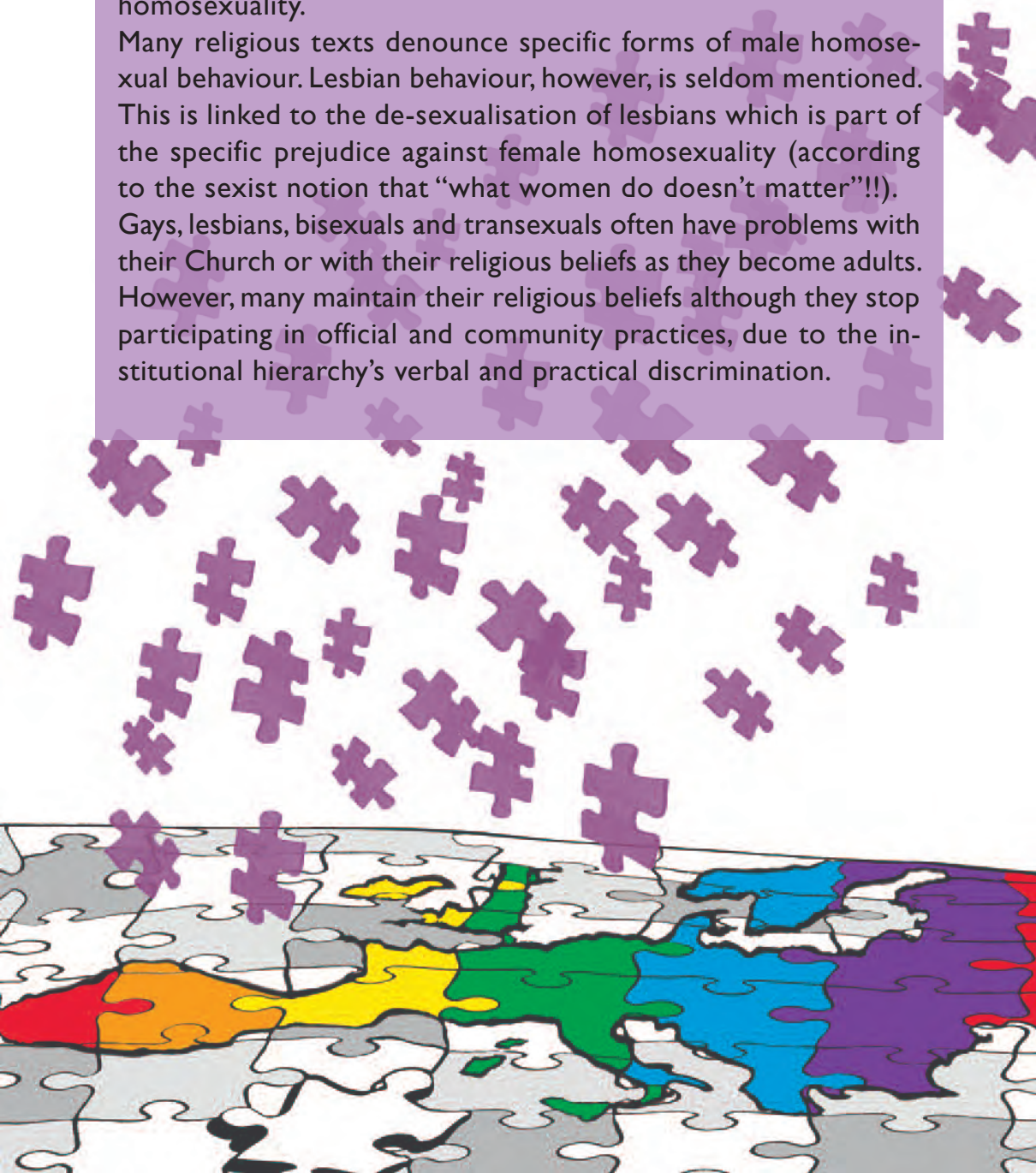
9 Religions

Introduction

First of all

It is widely believed that all religions are against homosexuality. Although the texts of some confessions seem to condemn homosexuality, in practice it is mainly fundamentalist and other traditionalist believers who are the most intransigent opponents of homosexuality.

Many religious texts denounce specific forms of male homosexual behaviour. Lesbian behaviour, however, is seldom mentioned. This is linked to the de-sexualisation of lesbians which is part of the specific prejudice against female homosexuality (according to the sexist notion that “what women do doesn’t matter”!!). Gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transsexuals often have problems with their Church or with their religious beliefs as they become adults. However, many maintain their religious beliefs although they stop participating in official and community practices, due to the institutional hierarchy’s verbal and practical discrimination.



Basic information

The attitude of the Christian Churches towards homosexuality

In its official statements, the Roman Catholic Church condemns homosexuality. According to the Church, homosexual acts contradict the true meaning of sexuality, i.e. procreation. On this point, Catholic moral is still strongly influenced by a notion of nature and “natural” that has been fully developed in the 19th century.

The current Catechism of the Catholic Church states that there is a predisposition to homosexuality that is not changeable. From this point of view, one is supposed to consider people who have this “disordered disposition” with “respect and sensitivity”. However, homosexual behaviour per se is still condemned as a serious sin. Homosexuals should – “perhaps also by means of a selfless (i.e. not sexual) friendship” – live in sexual abstinence.

In the past years, some Protestant Churches in Western and Northern Europe started a debate on the question of dealing with and pastoral care for LGBT persons. Some sectors of the Protestant Church (including one American branch of the Church of England) are very open and allow the appointment of gay and lesbian ministers and the blessings of same-sex unions.

However, there are also so-called Evangelical Free Churches and parishes that take a strictly conservative position similar to that of the Roman Catholic Church.

In both the Catholic and the Protestant confessions, there are always individuals, groups or theological orientations that do not agree with official positions and statements and have a more conservative or a more liberal approach (e.g. liberation theology). Therefore, one should therefore be very careful in judging a Church and the diversity within the institution should be taken into account.

The attitude towards homosexuality in Judaism

In Judaism, as within Christian religions, there is a big divide between Orthodox and liberal movements on homosexuality. Orthodox Judaism generally prohibits homosexuality, on the basis of the condemnation seemingly expressed in Leviticus 18:22 and in the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. However, it is unclear whether this ban applies to homosexuality as such: some commentators have argued that the ban concerned only prostitution, rape, or sexual intercourse with both men and women at the same time. Some American and Israeli Jews have contested, even within Orthodox movements, the official interpretation of the abovementioned texts.

Reform synagogues are generally more open about homosexuality and some European Reform rabbis now officiate at same-sex union ceremonies (some are even openly gay or lesbian themselves).

The attitude of Islam towards homosexuality

Although Islamic law condemns homosexuality, there are many allusions to male homoeroticism in Islamic literature. Same-sex body contact (holding hands and kissing in public), often misunderstood by foreigners as a sign of homosexual orientation, is a common behaviour and more likely a result of gender segregation that leads people to turn to one's own gender when the other cannot be reached very easily. Because of stronger social restrictions, women rarely talk about sexuality in public and there are very few historical sources about female sexuality.

Orthodox Islamic views on homosexuality are mostly negative. They openly condemn it and contain threatening statements against this “great sin” that must be punished. However, the Koran can also be interpreted in a more liberal way. Based on the sacred text, the condemnation of homosexual love, as it is currently promoted, cannot be justified.

The Hadith, instead, have a more open stance toward homosexuality. They are a collection of stories, of which only some are ascribable to Mohammed.

Islamic law (Sharia) raises an important issue. Most Islamic schools of law provide the death penalty for anal intercourse between men (liwat). Islamic legislation, at least the Criminal Code, does not necessarily have a religious value for Muslims, because it was written by men and not by God. This argument may help some Muslim gays and lesbians to reconcile their sexual orientation with their religious beliefs.

Hinduism

Indian culture is marked by strong social divisions. Social behaviour is defined by what one may and must do within the limits his/her own caste. Practically no one is allowed to deviate from the norm. A patriarchal and heterosexist order is predominant in all social classes and castes, although this order is being slowly eroded in urban centres. Even in the Kama Sutra, the ancient Indian text on human sexual behaviour, homosexual practices are clearly ranked lower than heterosexual ones. It should be pointed out that the dominant current of Hinduism assigns sexuality to the realm of Maya, i.e. to the world of appearances and illusions, and therefore it is of lesser value. Tantrism, however, offers different perspectives.

Buddhism

The main aim of Buddhism is to free people from dependence. The less one has sex, the less one depends on the world, and therefore the freer one is to discover one's inner truth. But this path to the true self is based on individual choice. The only prescriptions concerning sex are exclusively directed towards monks, and not to others. The main recommendation, the basic ethic principle is that one should not harm others and this applies to sexuality as well.

In the Pali Canon, the sacred Buddhist text, homosexuality between monks is condemned, but is not thematised per se.

What does this mean for me?

Religion is an important aspect of a person's value system and cultural background. Usually, religious identity is already formed before people become aware of their sexual orientation. Therefore, faith is a core aspect of personality.

Religious spokespersons sometimes give one-sided views of religion and of the meaning of sacred texts – also on sexuality – and this contributes to create social and internalised homophobia. A possible counter-argument is represented by the fact that constitutionally guaranteed human rights include the right to freely and fully develop one's personality, including therefore sexual orientation.

In health and psychophysical well-being counselling and at school (or more generally in education), it is important to present the different points of view and explore what religion means to young people on a personal level.

It is always useful to help someone develop a clearer understanding of their feelings. Especially when teens live in environments that morally condemn homosexuality, they need to be supported and counselled in acknowledging their needs and distinguishing strictly religious views from social and cultural norms. If they take a position which condemns homosexuality, it is important to remind them that respect towards diversity is a key human virtue which is the cornerstone of a civilised society. Try to understand how to deal with the different points of view about norms and values, help teens develop their own ethical code and not only abide to the rules imposed by others.

Education

(Teachers)

Bear in mind

Faith takes many different forms of religious belief. In all religions there are fundamentalists who believe the holy texts present precise instructions for a living a righteous life in all times. Conversely, others take into account the fact that those texts reflect the ideas, opinions and moral judgements of the times in which they were written. More liberal groups place greater emphasis on personal responsibility for the definition of “proper” and “improper” behaviour. Such diversity of views is reflected in the variety of approaches to the teaching of each religion. Fundamentalists (and “conservatives” in general) tend to teach religion in a dogmatic way that excludes personal interpretation and any type of adjustment to changing cultural and social conditions. More liberal groups accept the principle of personal freedom and responsibility and, at times, they even criticize the role of priests, ministers, rabbis and imams who believe they have the right/duty to tell others what is right and what is wrong. Most people try find their own way between such extremes, one that values the rules of the holy texts, as well as cultural-religious norms, while at the same time also taking personal orientations into consideration.

Where would you place yourself on this continuum? Where do you think your students would place themselves? What does this imply for your relationship with teens? What is your view of homosexuality? How do you behave with students who don’t agree with you on such issues?

Note that in many religions, believers have different opinions on many moral questions (e.g. on war and peace, on environmental protection, on the treatment of refugees, etc.), even within more traditionalist groups. Usually, when dealing with these topics, people show different degrees of acceptance of the opinions of others. Why, then, is there less acceptance when the different views have to do with sexuality?

Education - FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions)

Please also refer to the FAQs for the psycho/social/healthcare professionals.

What does the Bible say about homosexuality?

The answer to this question depends on the interpretation of the Bible and on the way one understands it. Two interpretations of the Bible have become popular over time. The first takes into account the historical, cultural and religious context in which the Bible was written. Not all the prohibitions and rules of the Holy Scriptures are considered as relevant today: for instance, the prohibition to wear clothes made of mixed fibres (Lev 19:19) or various rules requiring animal sacrifices. This shows that societal evolution influences and overcomes the rigid interpretations of sacred texts. Conversely, orthodox interpretation takes every verse of the Bible “literally” and requires faithful compliance, regardless of social change, what is important is that the interpretation matches traditional ideology and helps strengthen a conservative perception of the world.

Beyond interpretation traditions, it must be said that in principle it is problematic to look for clues on these topics in the Bible because the word “homosexuality” and its meaning date from modern times. When the Bible was written, the sexual identity theoretical construct did not exist, whereas today it is the central premise of any discussion on homosexuality.

What does the Koran say about homosexuality?

Contrarily to common belief, the Koran is not a “book of laws”. In this “holy book” there is no mention of “homosexuality” and also no word for men or women who feel attraction for or have sex with persons of their own gender. However, many Muslim scholars and laymen are convinced that the Koran clearly condemns and forbids homosexuality. In order to prove this point, the story of Lot (Arabic: Lût) and his people is often quoted (this story also appears in the Bible, namely as the story of Sodom), but this story condemns insult, rape, injustice and the violation of the right to hospitality, and not anal intercourse that is automatically associated with homosexuality. The theme of the story is not sexuality or homosexuality, nor is it love and relationships. Hence, this story cannot be used to condemn homosexuality.

Anyway, the Koran does not explicitly mention sex or homosexuality, pederasty or anal intercourse. The men accused are married and can not be compared to gays and lesbians, as we understand them today.

How should I deal with religious prejudice in my class?

Explain that there is a great variety of religions, each including a wide variety of beliefs and attitudes ranging from orthodox to less conservative liberal beliefs, with liberal and fundamentalists ones being at the two extreme ends. Start a group discussion on diversity. Promote a mutually respectful behaviour between students and encourage self-reflection and dialogue.

Education - Tools

A letter to Christina

Aim: initiating a discussion about the relationship between homosexuality and the Catholic Church (for instance) and promoting empathy.

Method: tell the students the following story. "Christina is Catholic and deeply religious. At the same time, she feels very attracted to women. Recently she fell in love with Charlotte and now she has no more doubts about her feelings. But she finds it very difficult to combine these feelings with her religion and fears the reaction of her parents and of her friends.

At this point have the students write a letter to Christina where they will try to freely express their ideas and emotions.

Then go on with the story telling that Christina wrote an anonymous letter to the Question & Answer column of a national magazine: "My parents and my own Church condemn lesbian relationships. But I read that in some Protestant Churches, lesbians can marry. I am confused. Who is right? And what should I do?"

Now, ask the students to write another letter and to try to imagine they are offering Christina help and new ideas. Open a debate on the opinions and feelings brought by this exercise.

Please note: the students will probably come up with several different types of advice for Christina, ranging from denial to acceptance of her feelings. Focus on the students' letters. Discuss their opinions about the relation between religion and cultural and social intolerance. This exercise will work best in multi-religious groups.

Accepting others

Aim: to encourage mutual respect and acceptance in a religious context.

Method: start by explaining to the students that the concept of "nei-

ghbourly love” is important in all world religions. Ask them first if they share this value. If they do, invite them to discuss how to apply this concept to gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transexuals.

Please note: it is advisable to know the arguments and counter-arguments students may use in the discussion (for instance, loving your neighbour can imply not letting your neighbour commit sins; in this case, you could reply that caring for your neighbour should not limit her/his freedom of choice). Do not allow the discussion to be limited to religious texts or rules. Focus instead on the spiritual and loving aspects of religion.

It is important to treat students with equity in this discussion and to take care to avoid ‘preaching tolerance’.

It may happen that students will recognize the importance of respecting and accepting others, in principle, while at the same time still having negative feelings towards homosexuality. In that case, accept their feelings and explore how they deal with them.

The “Cure”

Aim: to explore the myth that homosexuality can be “cured”.

Method: start by telling the students that some fundamentalist Christians think that homosexuality is a mental disorder that can be “cured”. Ask them what they think of this idea. Have them look up this topic on the Internet and search for information about alleged “therapies” for homosexuality and ask them to write a paper describing their findings (if you use the search terms “homosexuality” and “remediation” on the Internet, you will find a series of recent debates on this issue).

Please note: use this exercise keeping in mind you run the risk of exposing students to anti-gay propaganda. Provide students with correct information on the so-called “cures” for homosexuality, clarifying that it is not possible to steer the sexual, emotional and romantic orientation of a LGBT person towards heterosexuality/bisexuality.

A STORY...



<Teresa> Are we talking about religion today?

<Aaron> Yes, that's the topic.

<Almira> I think it's great that you've chosen this topic!

<Julie> Before we start – and also because it's part of the topic: which of you wants to go to the next Europride?

<Koray> If you tell us what it's about, I could think about it ...

<Julie> Gays and lesbians from all over Europe meet within the framework of the Gay Pride Parade and organise an intercultural week on different subjects. One of them could be religion, I think. But I don't want to go there without you.

<Koray> You mean that we would prepare a topic and then organise a cultural event together there?

<Julie> That's right.

<Aaron> Through the Internet, without knowing each other?

<Almira> I don't have the feeling that I don't know you. Think about Elsa and Chloé – at the end they met through the chat.

<Aaron> Right, I'm in. So, who starts ?

<Kristin> I come from a very religious Christian family. I think that's why I never found the courage to tell my parents that I am a lesbian.

<Koray> What would happen?

<Kristin> I have no idea. Strict Christians refuse homosexuality.

<Julie> My parents feel that God must have had a reason when He created homosexuality. They think that everything has been created by God and so they fairly accept it.

<Kristin> Ok, but God has also allowed evil, my parents would say. Adultery for instance is forbidden, and so is murder.

<Julie> In any case homosexuality is not prohibited by the Ten Commandments.

<Kristin> I will have to talk about it at the HuK. Good argument, Julie!

<Aaron> What is the HuK?

<Kristin> The organisation Homosexuelle und Kirche (Homosexuals and the Church). I have been there a few times. They are nice people. They fight for equal rights. They argue for instance, that Jesus never specifically said anything about homosexuality. Neither in a positive nor in a negative sense. They also say that, for example, Saint Paul could not have spoken about homosexuality because the concept of homosexuality appeared only in the 19th century. In any case, they support the freedom of choice. ;-)

<Koray> Sounds reasonable.

<Kristin> Sure, but strict Christians interpret it in a different way, of course.

<Koray> Also my parents don't know that I'm gay – but for me it's not really important and then I have other problems that are a lot worse.

<Aaron> And do they have anything to do with religion?

<Koray> It's more about the behaviour of non-Muslim homosexuals towards us Muslim homosexuals and also with the whole Muslim world's reaction towards homosexuality.

<Aaron> Does that mean that you don't belong to neither of these groups?

<Koray> Yes, that's the way I see it. Just imagine, you meet a non-Muslim gay man and tell him that you are a Muslim. He'd be baffled and would reply "That can't be: either you're gay or you're Muslim".

<Kristin> Why?

<Koray> I'm afraid it's the same all over the world. In Austria, in any case, I am first and foremost a foreigner, who could never be gay anyway. That's the way many people see it in the gay community. If I add, on top of it, that I'm Muslim, that's it: no gay man will ever look at me.

<Aaron> Yes, I can understand that. There are awful stereotypes everywhere, even in the gay and lesbian community, right?

<Koray> I don't know how it is with you Jewish people. With Christians, at any rate,

I have the impression that the family isn't all that important. That's why for most Christians coming out isn't as difficult. But my family is really very important to me and I am important to them. The social ties are simply too strong and important for us all, especially because we grow up in a host culture and I think that this is the way it should be: families should always stick together.

<Aaron> Koray: Never underestimate a Yiddish mother ;-). We'll talk about it later. What do you want to do about it?

<Koray> I think that my family is more important than the nicest gay community (but please don't take it personally). I'll probably get married and still keep my partners. Tell us, Aaron, what happens with your Yiddish mother?

<Aaron> Yiddish mothers are hard to ignore. There is this syndrome of over-protection. They always want the absolute best for their children. It's hard to contradict her. But back to you once again, Koray, is there no Muslim gay group near you? Surely you're not the only one!

<Koray> No, of course I'm not the only one. But I think there is no such organisation here.

<Aaron> A friend in Germany told me that he's an activist in the Türk-Gay group – check it out on the Internet – they have their own website.

<Koray> Good idea, thanks.

<Almira> I'm also Muslim, but I am a Bosnian Muslim. In Kosovo, where I am to be deported, I would probably have to wear a headscarf and get married. Being homosexual there can even mean death.

<Koray> Oh dear, then you'd better stay here, don't you think?

<Almira> Yes, I think so. My parents know now that I'm a lesbian. At first I too was convinced that they would disown me forever, but they didn't, Koray. Maybe your fear is a bit exaggerated?

<Koray> I'll talk to these people from the "Türk-Gay" group and I will keep you posted, okay?

<Julie> Okay, Koray. Will you go to the Europride next year?

<Koray> I'm working on it, Aaron, now you tell us something, it's your turn.

<Aaron> I'll tell my parents and I also think that they'll understand. For me it's important to be able to trust them, and for them to trust me. Keeping it a secret would have terrible consequences in the long run. Neither one of them would ever want that. And about being Jewish, it is not a matter of nationality. Just to be clear. Some in our gay/lesbian group are religious, others not. But we're still Jewish, because our parents are Jewish.

<Kristin> Would you like to say something about homosexuality and faith, anyway?

<Aaron> Of course. Orthodox people of any religion are against homosexuality, I think. The three monotheist religions do not differ at all. But in the Jewish world there is a very strong liberal/progressive current, which involves about 60%, or perhaps more of all Jews.

I suppose it's the same for Christians, and I hope that there is a similar evolution in Islam. But I'm no great expert on the other religions, as I said earlier on, so I think it would be better if the others said something about that, because I can only talk about what happens in Judaism, okay?

<Kristin> Sure, I would like to focus on liberal Christian movements, may I? I've also read something about liberal Muslim movements. Many Muslim feminists are fighting for liberal values.

<Aaron> Thank you, Kristin. Apart from the fact that men and women have equal rights in liberal Judaism, there is also a great openness with respect to homosexuality. In New York for instance, there are LGBT communities with 3,000 members.

<Julie> Wow, that's great!

<Aaron> Yes, and in London there is a College in which are trained only those men and women Rabbis who do not have any problems with homosexuality. They undergo a very rigorous selection process before being admitted.

<Almira> Sounds wonderful. Will you tell us about it at our big event at the next Europride?

<Aaron> I'd love to, I'll be there.



Counselling

(Psycho/social/healthcare professionals)

Bear in mind

Physical health

Some people think that psycho/social/healthcare professionals should be able to distance themselves from their own religious convictions. What do you think? Is this 'objectivity' possible for you?

If they tacitly condemn the moral position of a person that came to them, how will this affect their ability to listen to that person? To what extent do you think your religious convictions influence your behaviour towards those who come to you for support? For instance, do you think it is possible or acceptable to advise someone to totally abstain from sexual relations?

If you are a physician, you are certainly seen as an authority figure and you may have a strong psychological impact on a young person. Even though you may think this is not very relevant because you are mainly focused on physical health, your influence is probably greater than you think. Consider, for instance, how you react to questions on safe sex in general and, in particular, with gays and lesbians. It is important for you to be aware of your own religious background and of how religion influences our own morality, even if you are "just" taking care of the physical health of people.

Mental health

As we grow up, religion becomes part of our moral code; its role is to help us distinguish between what we should and shouldn't do. When religious topics emerge during a counselling session, it is of the utmost importance for counsellors to acknowledge their own religious convictions; attempts to appear "neutral" can complicate the interaction between the counsellor and the person he/she is working with.

However, the counsellor should ensure that their personal religious beliefs won't have a negative influence on the counselling process. For instance, if someone's conflicts with their homosexuality derive from their religious convictions, and if these are (consciously or unconsciously) echoed by the counsellor's own beliefs, this could cause damage to that person's mental health. Are you able to recognise your own religious convictions? What moral codes are important to you? What role do these codes play in your profession?

Every counsellor carries his/her own set of norms and cultural expectations. In the course of the session, conflicts on cultural or religious values may arise and the counsellor may decide that it's useful to discuss them openly. Do you recognise possible unresolved inner conflicts you may have concerning your own religion? How do you deal with them in your sessions? How do you deal with a person whose religion differs from yours? In which situations do you think it is better to continue working with someone who may be difficult to coach, and when is it better to refer them to a colleague of the same religion or who is not influenced by his personal religious beliefs?



Counselling - FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions)

Please also refer to the FAQs for the education sector.

How should I behave if the religion of the LGBT person who asked for my professional help prohibits homosexual acts?

It is very important to understand the place that religion occupies in the life of that person in order to understand whether it is possible for him/her to distance him/herself from traditionally prescribed behaviour patterns. A solid therapeutic alliance is required when working on conflicts relating to homosexuality/bisexuality/transsexuality. A counsellor needs to understand how many conflicts originate from religious prohibitions and/or from parental and cultural expectations. Discuss with the person what it means for him/her to take sacred texts literally.

My religious beliefs condemn homosexuality. Do I have an obligation to counsel a gay or a lesbian person?

In therapy, religious convictions will come into play, as do all aspects of a counsellor's personal background. Counsellors who disapprove of homosexuality or homosexual behaviour because of their religious beliefs should probably abstain from treating LGBT persons and refer them to a colleague. Therefore, it is essential for counsellors to be aware of their stance on homosexuality and of the responsibilities imposed upon them by their profession.

Is it possible to practice your religion and to live openly as a homosexual/bisexual/transsexual at the same time?

Yes, it is. Many gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transexuals are able to balance their private life and their religion. Some have even joined particularly progressive Churches or groups (this is especially true for some Protestant and Jewish denominations). Sometimes these Churches bless gay and lesbian marriages, perform commitment ceremonies and have openly homosexual ministers or rabbis. There are also secular gay and lesbian organisations that deal with the theme of the conflicts between homosexuality and religion.

Counselling - Tools

The Spiritual Guide

Aim: understanding the importance of religion in the life of the person you are counselling and identifying the problems it entails with reference to the topic.

Method: ask the person to imagine a situation in which, together with a friend, they meet a priest, rabbi, imam or a spiritual guide. Give him/her some time to imagine the situation and then ask him/her talk about it. What happens during the meeting? If the person is not able to imagine such a situation, then he/she could imagine a close friend asking him/her key questions about his/her life or needs.

Please note: this exercise can be used in group, as well as in individual counselling sessions. Be aware that, for some people, the image of a religious authority may evoke rather negative feelings. Let the person choose a figure who he/she perceives as a true spiritual guide.

Balancing Sex and Religion

Aim: to explore the role religion plays in the life of the person you are counselling. The exercise should help him/her to establish a personal balance between the expression of his/her sexuality and the profession of his/her religion and values.

Method: ask the person to talk about the place religion has in his/her life. Next, examine together the attitudes of relevant present and past religious figures towards homosexuality.

Discuss the historical and cultural relativism of religion as a combination of spiritual and social aspects, as well as a means of social control. Try to understand if religion is an important aspect of that person's identity. If that is the case, suggest he/she to get in touch with homosexual religious groups (if possible). This may help the person find a support network and a group with which he/she can identify.

Please note: this exercise can be used in group, as well as in individual counselling sessions. In a group session, "religion" can be dealt with and discussed as a central theme if it is an important issue for all the participants. This does not mean that everybody should have a religious belief, as atheists could also be interested in discussing this topic. In this discussion, it is crucial to distinguish between religious norms and spirituality. Norms usually address the relationships between persons, spirituality refers to the personal relationship with the Divine. In cases where religious norms are very uncompromising on homosexuality, emphasis should be placed on the personal relationship with the Divine, without taking away the hope of changing the norms.

Role-Playing: Dialogue Between a Cleric and a young LGBT

Aim: to address the conflict between religion and homosexuality, bisexuality and transsexuality.

Method: one person plays the role of a young lesbian woman and another plays the role of a cleric (i.e. a Catholic priest). The girl wants to talk about the conflicts she is facing and ask him for spiritual guidance (naturally, other possible roles are the young homosexual, bisexual or transsexual person). The rest of the group observes the scene. Anyone who wishes to play a part can do it. When the discussion between the girl and the priest seems to offer no new points of view, ask the components of the group to talk about their impressions and how they felt as actors and as spectators.

Please note: if people are hesitant to play the role of the young LGBT, play that part yourself first. It will help if you play the part in a somewhat 'inadequate' manner; this may encourage others to improve on your performance.