

THE COMPLEXITY OF SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Sexual orientation
Social Norms
Sexuality
Homophobia
Biases
Discrimination
Violence
Gay
Lesbian
Bisexual
LGBT / LGBTI
Asexual

- ✓ 1. To show sexual orientation as more complex and varied than the available categories.
- ✓ 2. To show sexual orientation as fluid and subjective.

45 min - 1 hour

Worksheet: 'Sexual Orientation Identification' (provided).

PROCEDURE

- 1 Tell learners that they are going to answer a questionnaire about identifying **sexual orientation** in other people.
- 2 Tell them that the questionnaire is quite difficult, but that they should try to answer all the questions. They will not be graded on their responses.
- 3 Distribute copies of the **Sexual Orientation Identification** sheet, one per learner. Allow 10 minutes to complete the questionnaire silently.
- 4 Once learners have had a chance to answer all questions, ask them to call out the answers to each question one by one. In smaller classes you may ask learners to call out their answers, but in bigger classes you can ask for a show of hands.
- 5 Whilst they will probably agree about the first item, disagreements should emerge quite quickly thereafter.
- 6 Continue item by item, highlighting different views and opinions amongst learners. These differences should focus on whether **sexual orientation** should be defined by behaviour, desire, self-identification, or some combination of the three. If this does not emerge, you may want to pose these questions yourself.
- 7 Conclude by saying that these questions are also difficult for people whose identification, identity, or desires do not match traditional **norms** as well as people who study **sexuality**.

TEACHER TIPS

General

An exercise like this works best if it is carried out before learners are introduced to sexual orientation and homophobia. It allows them to 'organically' identify and challenge their own biases.

Sexual orientation is a controversial topic and some teachers may feel uncomfortable talking about it. As a teacher it is important that you create an environment of respect and understanding for all your learners, and that your personal views or religious beliefs do not prevent you from doing this. Remember that discussions about sexual orientation are not about moral judgement, or religious views, but about treating people equally and fairly, and respecting other people's right to engage in mutually consensual relationships of their choice, as afforded to them by the law.

Teaching about sexual orientation may help learners be more empathetic to other people who they see as 'different'. Remember that young people need accurate information and opportunity to discuss issues that may be difficult for them. They should be encouraged to share their feelings, but reminded that discrimination, hate and violence are always wrong.

As you lead this activity, remember that there are probably gay, lesbian, bisexual, and teens questioning their orientation, in your class. It is important that you make LGBT learners (whether they have 'come out' or not) feel acknowledged and understood. You will not know the sexual orientation of every participant, so be very sure to use inclusive and affirming language. For example, say 'we,' 'all people,' and 'some people,' not 'they' or 'people like them.'

Never ask learners to disclose their sexual orientation.

Here are some tips to facilitate discussion:

- If learners argue that sexual orientation is defined only by behaviour, ask whether virgins have a sexual orientation. What about people who are not attracted to anyone (asexual)?
- If learners argue that sexual experimentation should not be considered, ask how much experimentation is permitted before it 'counts'?



Making the Link with Gender and Violence

Alert your learners to the fact that those who are seen as 'different', are often more vulnerable to violence. Remind them how media objectifies women making it easier for men to perpetrate violence against them. Similarly, seeing LGBT people as 'others' or abnormal, makes them easier targets for violence. In order to curb violence against all vulnerable groups, we need to focus on what we have in common, and how we each have value, and how no person is less than another.



Assessment Ideas

This is not a good exercise for assessment as it is intended to solicit learner's feelings about sexuality, difference, and normativity as the basis for further discussion.

References:

Adapted from: Plous, S (2013) *The Complexity of Sexual Orientation* <http://www.understandingprejudice.org/teach/activity/orient.htm>

SEXUAL ORIENTATION IDENTIFICATION

For each statement, check the box corresponding to whether the person is heterosexual (H), lesbian (L), gay (G), bisexual (B), or asexual (A).

1. A woman who has had a number of romantic relationships with women and who is not interested in pursuing relationships with men.

.H .L .G .B .A

2. A man who has had several romantic relationships with women and men, though he strongly prefers relationships with men.

.H .L .G .B .A

3. A man who is more attracted to men than women although all of his sexual relationships have been with women.

.H .L .G .B .A

4. A man who has self-identified as gay since his teens but who has twice had sexual encounters with women.

.H .L .G .B .A

5. A woman who has self-identified as heterosexual all her life but finds herself sexually attracted to a new female co-worker.

.H .L .G .B .A

6. A man who married a bisexual woman one year after his male partner died.

.H .L .G .B .A

7. A woman who self-identifies as a lesbian, is active in the gay rights movement, but has a sexually monogamous relationship with her husband.

.H .L .G .B .A

8. A woman who had a sexual relationship with her college roommate a decade ago but has since then had sexual relationships only with men.

.H .L .G .B .A

9. A woman who psychologically, emotionally, and socially prefers the company of women but whose sexual experiences have been exclusively with men.

.H .L .G .B .A

10. A man who has never felt sexually attracted to anyone or had a sexual relationship.

.H .L .G .B .A