

Education

Tools

Me / Not Me-Game

Aim: Experience the different layers of being in a majority or minority. Find out similarities and differences.

Method: Prepare a list of words with “who“-questions (for instance, 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 woman? Who has ever kissed a boy or man? Who knows personally a lesbian girl/ woman or a gay boy/ man? Who would enter a lesbian café? Who would go to a gay nightclub? and other questions concerning the topics of love, partnership and sexuality). The participants walk through the room and are asked these different questions. Two opposite walls in the room are marked with the possible answers “Me“ and “Not me“, each one on a sheet of paper. An “in between” answer is not possible. The participants are asked before the exercise to choose one side even though it can be difficult. The pupils are asked not to talk or make comments during the exercise. It is more about perceiving the situation created by answering to a specific question and experiencing the picture of people distributed in the room.

The participants have to separate after each question into two groups: On the one side those who answer by “Me“ and all the others on the opposite “Not me“-side. Every participant considers the image, looks at who is on the other side and who is next to him/her, and pays attention to what she or he is feeling inside. Then everybody walks in the room until the next question is asked. Important note: the students should be allowed to lie, which means that nobody is forced to tell the truth when answering a question. Which is why the last question should be: “Who has lied at least once during this game?“ After the questions there should be a group discussion dealing with the feelings of the participants during the exercise, if they noticed something or if they felt surprised at a certain moment, etc.

Please note: In this game pupils can experience the situation of those lesbians, gay men and bisexuals who are hiding an important part of their life. It is important for the teacher to play along and answer the questions by moving to one side of the classroom. The teacher should also 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 pupils will not dare to say that they lied perhaps once or twice themselves.

V.I.P. Guessing

Aim: To find out why people are interested in the sexual orientations of others.

Method: The pupils have to identify V.I.P.s (Very Important Persons – rock stars, actors, politicians, etc.) that they know are gay, lesbian or bisexual. Where did they get this information? Was the V.I.P.’s career affected after their sexual identity was made public? Was it the V.I.P.’s own decision to come out in public? Why are the pupils interested in that?

Please note: The teacher does not have to know whether the V.I.P.s named by the students are indeed gay/lesbian or not. The exercise is more about how someone knows (or thinks she/he knows) that a V.I.P. is for instance a lesbian and why this is considered to be interesting to others. It is very important to mention that this method is NOT about outing V.I.P.s.

Imagine...

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

Method: Pupils divide into small groups of boys or girls. In these groups, they have to imagine what would change in their life if they were gay or lesbian. Give the small groups time to think about this. How would they deal with it? How would their friends react? Are these positive or negative images? Why? Why not?

Please note: This method can be embarrassing for homosexual pupils, especially if they have not come out, so this method should be used carefully. If someone has difficulty imagining being gay, tell them to imagine that everyone was homosexual and only a few people were straight. What would that be like for those few people?

Alternative suggestion: have the students read an extract of an autobiography by a gay or lesbian author.

Education

Tools

Love story

Aim: to explore the representation of gay or lesbian relationships in the media, to educate pupils about the influence of media on public opinion

Method: Find an example of a homosexual love story in a youth magazine (ask your pupils to bring an example to class; if they cannot find a story, a photo can be used to get started). Take a critical look at the content of the story contents and discuss this in class. Questions: What is the general function of a love story in general? How are homosexual relationships represented in this story? What information concerning gays, lesbians and their relationships does it provide? Does it stereotype certain people, certain roles? Etc.

Please note: The exercise works well with pupils aged or 14 or older. The exercise fits well inside a larger sequence of lessons about the media. Journalism should be critically analysed in its function and appearance: Who writes texts for magazines? How? Who gives them information? What is “good” journalism?

If the pupils criticise the story as being too conventional or as portraying stereotypes, they can develop their own story with their own photos.

Hetero, Homo, Bi: Pros, Cons, and Stereotypes

Aim: Identifying stereotypes, comparing different forms of partnership

Method: Split the pupils into small groups and distribute a paper divided into the following categories: Man-Woman Relationships, Two-Man Relationships, and Two-Woman Relationships. In the small groups, the pupils 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 pupils aged 14 years or older (this exercise works best if they have had relationships of their own or if they have observed the experiences of others). The teacher can go deeper into the pupils’ replies by asking “Where have you seen examples of this?” The stereotypes should be questioned in a critical way and the restrictions of human perception should be explained.

The Joneses, the Johnsons and the Johns

Aim: To recognise that the concept of family can take different forms

Method: There are different families with similar sounding names (for instance Jones, Johnson and John etc.). All families have the same number of members (father, mother, son, daughter, etc.). Every pupil receives a card with an identity written on it (the Johnson father, the Jones daughter, etc.); the identities are memorized and the cards handed back. When the group is given the sign to start, the members of the same family have to find each other and then pose for a family photo. Every family demonstrates its pose in front of the others; the pupils outside the group can then try to guess who represents who in the family. A second round of the exercise is then held. This time some cards are changed unbeknownst to the participants. Some families now have different combinations: in one family there are two mothers or two fathers, others are single-parent families, in another the ex-lover of a family member can be integrated. Possible questions for a group discussion include: What was your reaction when you realised that there were two mothers or two fathers in your group? Do you know someone who lives with two mothers or fathers? What is a family? What is important for you in a family? What different forms of living together do you know of? What is necessary for you to feel “at home”? How do you want to live later in your life?

Please note: The exercise is suitable for pupils aged 11 or older. It is very important that the pupils don't realise that the identities written on the cards have been altered for the second round – to avoid discovery, you might want to use a second set of cards. In the second round, the pupils may initially be irritated if they think the teacher has made a mistake with the identities (“you put too many mothers in one group!”) You may have to tell them this was planned in advance.

Education

Tools

Defining normality

Aim: To clarify the relativity of the concepts of “normal” and “abnormal”, “in-group” and “out-group” and to discuss the risks of exclusion based on declaring someone an ‘outsider’.

Method: Collect a series of pictures of different men and women. Ask the pupils to arrange in a line so they constitute a continuum from “normal” to “different”. Discuss where the division between normal and abnormal lies (this will usually differ from person to person). Discuss why this differs. Steer the pupils toward a discussion of the definition of ‘normal’, ‘abnormal’ and ‘different’. Explain the concepts of “in-group”, “out-group”, “insider” and “outsider”. These are all subjective standards. As we define who is an insider and who belongs to the in-group, we automatically exclude others. Discuss the effects of exclusion and how to deal respectfully with differences, including differences relating to sexual preference.

Please note: This exercise is suitable for youngsters who are able to take a step back from their own view and for those who are used to thinking from an individual viewpoint. Those pupils who have formed ‘collective’ cultures will find this difficult and will look to the reactions of others. To counter this, the discussion can focus more on differing group or cultural opinions.

Integration of diversity

Aim: To integrate lesbian, gay and bisexual issues into regular school subjects.

Method: In your subject area (math, history, geography, literature, social sciences, health) try to integrate examples of lesbian, gay and bisexual lifestyles within the regular lesson. For example, in a mathematics exercise, you can use the example of two women living together who have to calculate the number of tiles they need to finish their bathroom. When possible, mention homosexual historical figures or cultural examples of lesbian, gay and bisexual lifestyles (see also the map ‘History and Culture’). In a health curriculum, go into the fun and risks when gay boys and lesbians have to deal with coming out issues.

Please note: This kind of integration is only possible when your school already accepts homosexuality, at least to some extent. Otherwise, mentioning such examples will create quite a stir in the classroom and will require a specific discussion. It is usually necessary to begin with a general discussion on homosexuality before you can use such examples.

Labelling exercise

Aim: To explore the mechanisms of stereotyping and labelling and to find out how labelling reinforces stereotypical behaviour.

Method: Glue a label with a stereotype (e.g. 'lazy', 'rude') on the back of every participant. Don't let the labelled participant see what is written. Pupils may look at other people's labels, but should not reveal them. The 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, they have to react towards each other in accordance to the stereotype which is on their back, without actually telling each other what is written there. Stop the exercise after a few minutes and discuss the effects. Usually the participants get very frustrated and many start to behave like their label says. This is how stereotypes work. Expand the discussion towards lesbian, gay and bisexual labels.

Please note: This exercise works best when the students know and trust each other to some extent. With new groups, there is a risk of disrespect or giving intentional or unintentional offence. Do not give the most negative stereotypes to people who are already excluded within the group.

Education

Tools

Talking about “Normality” (group exercise)

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. A secondary objective is to remind pupils that homosexuality was once considered a disease and some cultures around the world still believe this to be true, thus affecting the psycho-physical health of the people coming from these cultures.

Method: Every boy/girl must fill in a form where some behaviours or situations are described (e.g. masturbation, homosexual marriage, not eating pork, diseases, disability, age etc.); he/she must say whether these behaviours are “normal” or not.

Please note: this is an introductory exercise.

Brainstorming on Health (group exercise)

Aim: Through this technique, the group is invited to deal with the topic of health and its meaning. Point out that “health” does not only concern the body in itself, but also the quality of the individual’s relationship with the social environment and his/her ability to cope with problems. Stigma can affect self-esteem and can therefore impact one’s health. Stigmatised groups have fewer social resources to handle these problems.

Method: Ask the class for the meaning of the word “health”. Collect all the answers 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”.

Socio-Affective Education: “Are we quarrelling well?” (group exercise)

Aim: to teach young people to express their own feelings and to relate with others, in particular with those who are “different”. Psycho-physical health depends on our ability to relate with others.

Method: In order to feel good about ourselves and our relations with others, we need to learn how to behave well when we are having an argument, that is to say, without offending or disrespecting others.

The teacher should ask the class whether it is possible “argue in peace”. If so, what form would this take? One main point in the discussion should be the use of “I” in a quarrel instead of “you”; and thus the use of one’s own feelings as a starting point for a difficult discussion so that the other person does not feel attacked. It is important that everyone can talk freely without any apprehensions or judgement.

Please note: this is an introductory exercise.

Group discussion: The Effects of People's Judgement upon One's Own Well-Being

Aim: The exercise stresses the effects of social judgement.

Method: Read the extract from Toni Morrison's book "The Bluest Eye" where the main character, who is of African origin, says she wants blue eyes. Ask the group why the girl wishes for a different eye colour. Are blue eyes better than brown ones? Where did she learn that blue eyes are better/more "right"? Which doors are opened by having blue eyes? Which advantages are connected with blue eyes?

Please note: Having the pupils read the entire book would be useful, or the story can be read out loud by the teacher who then discusses it with them.

Education

Tools

Ethnic Stereotypes

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

Method: Take two pieces of cardboard, draw a shape and then ask the participants to fill in the shapes by answering the question: “It is common knowledge that Moroccans are ...” (Italians are..., the Dutch are ...). The answers should then be discussed in the group. 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 gays and lesbians.

Please note: Make it clear that these are just stereotypes and that they can be offensive (this may not be self-evident). If there is only one person representing a particular group in the class – for instance, only one person from Morocco – it would be preferable not to use Moroccans as one of the examples.

Belonging to a Group

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

Method: Ask the students to think about all the different groups they belong to (e.g. men, Turks, football players, Scouts, brothers, etc.) Give the young people three pieces of paper and ask them to write on each one of them: “Which groups am I proud to belong to?”, “Which groups do I not want to belong to?”, “Which groups am I ashamed to belong to?” The (anonymous) pieces of paper should be hung on the blackboard and then discussed in the group.

Please note: This exercise is not recommended for small groups or other 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 proposing 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 typical feelings and behaviours which are shown when people of different cultures and identities meet (e.g. meetings between immigrants and resident population; meetings between heterosexuals and homosexuals).

Method: The participants sit in a circle while one person volunteers to go out of the room. When he/she comes back, the people in the circle must welcome them in a manner suggested by the leader in the form of a key word (interest, indifference, aggressiveness, openness...). Different participants can play the role of the “newcomer”.

Please note: When choosing a pupil for the role of the “newcomer”, the teacher should select someone who is not stigmatised within the class and has no difficulties integrating into the group.

Education

Tools

General remarks

Sex education should not be restricted to biological facts but should also mention emotions. You can gain access to the subject through literature, social sciences (history) or the arts (music, painting, etc.). Try to teach as a team with a colleague of the opposite sex, at least part of the time, and separate the boys and girls if you have the impression that the students don't dare to speak openly in front of each other. After they have spent some time working apart, bring them back together in one group and let the pupils tell each other what they talked about and how they liked working separately.

When discussing sexualities, it is important to include heterosexuality and homosexuality at the same time and not to rank one better than the other. Since young people feel insecure about sexuality, they often talk about it in a very provocative manner. When dealing with this subject, refer to concrete examples and touch on the experiences that the young people have had so far. The reflection on their interests and fears is a part of their sexual experiences, and it is important to remember that everyone has had experiences, not only those who have already had a sexual relationship.

It might be useful to involve lesbian and gay guest speakers, for instance peer projects that offer sex education (see References), but make sure that you do not pass the topic of homosexuality completely on to someone else. The young people could see this as a signal that you avoid treating homosexuality and that you feel embarrassed about it.

Carousel Game

Aim: To overcome shame and to encourage youngsters to talk about sexuality.

Method: Write 25 questions about sex on cards. Make as many sets of these cards as there are pupils.

The questions should be varied: some should ask for facts and some for opinions, ranging from very simple to quite difficult and ranging from very impersonal to very personal. Be sure to include a good number of questions about homosexuality.

Put your students in two's on chairs opposite each other. The chairs should be in a circle or row. Explain the game to the young people: "Each person gets a pack of 25 questions about relationships and sexuality. Please read the first question before you ask it to your partner. Decide if you would like to answer it yourself. If you would not, put the card back in the pack and read the next question. When you find a question that you would answer yourself, read it out to your discussion partner. The partners should not answer right away; they also get the chance to decide if they want to answer the question or not. If not, they say: 'next question'. If they do, they go ahead and answer the question. After one question is answered, the two people swap roles. Now the second partner looks for a question and the first one passes or answers. This goes on until I say 'shift!' I will do this every five minutes. After the shift, everyone sitting in the inner circle (or in a row) will move one place to the right. Then we go on looking for questions with our two new discussion partners." After about half an hour or 5 shifts, stop the game. Ask the pupils 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, shame should not become something to be ashamed of!

Please note: During the game, take care that the participants' enthusiasm does not overtake them in such a way that they lose their personal limits. In groups where cultural norms make it difficult for women to talk openly about sex with men, consider doing this game in same-sex sub-groups. An extension of this game could be to ask the girls' group to formulate questions to

the boys and vice-versa. Then, a representative of the girls reads out the group's questions to the boys. The boys retreat and answer the questions as a group. Afterwards, one of them reads out their group's answer. In this way, less attention is placed on the individual, which should circumvent some feelings of shame, while the students can still satisfy their curiosity about how the other sex thinks about important questions.

Sex Education and Homosexuality

Aim: To open up a discussion about homosexuality within sex education; to encourage participation of the pupils in the school programme.

Method: This exercise has three steps. Tell the pupils you want their input in developing better sex education lessons. The first step is to ask the teenagers where they are currently getting their information and opinions about sex. If they only reply by giving factual 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 their needs for sex education in school. Here too, take care that they do not limit their needs to 'neutral' facts. The third step is to ask how the school should deal with sex education aspects that might be different for minorities. If they don't understand this, give examples from the intercultural context (special needs for girls, boys, specific facts and norms in different cultures) and from sexual minorities (gays, bisexuals, lesbians, transsexuals). If the pupils ask for specific attention to intercultural issues but would like to skip over or pay no attention to the issue of sexual minorities, ask them why and where minorities should get alternative information, if the school does not provide this.

Please note: This exercise will work best in schools that are already paying attention to the larger social situation. If the school is only focusing on cognitive results, elaborating the discussion from facts to opinions and personal growth will be difficult. Be sure that you take the final step; together with your fellow educators, try to find ways to integrate the results of the discussions so as to improve the sex education curriculum, otherwise you are not taking your pupils' input seriously.

From Discrimination to Sexuality

Aim: To open up a discussion about homosexuality without focusing on sex.

Method: This exercise has three steps. The first step is to ask the young people if they can give some examples of discrimination. In an intercultural group, racist examples will probably come up more easily. The second step is to steer the discussion towards gender. Ask for example: "You mention 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, like within relationships?" This question will likely bring up examples like the lack of power balance in relationships 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 pupils: "Can such problems be solved by reorganising a relationship?" and "Do you know of examples of 'other' kinds of relationships? How do you think these problems are solved within a lesbian or gay relationship?"

Please note: This exercise demands good discussion skills from the educator; you have to listen closely to the students and adapt to their needs while at the same time nudging and coaxing the discussion in a certain direction. Because this process cannot be planned very well, this might take some time. Schedule at least 1 hour for this discussion.

Education

Tools

Fact and Prejudice Web

Aim: to explore the facts and prejudices surrounding the concept of subculture.

Method: Ask the young people what they think of when they hear the term 'lesbian community' and 'gay community'. Write their comments on the blackboard, forming them into a 'word-web' which shows the association lines. Put negative comments in a different colour from positive comments (e.g. negative = yellow and positive = green). Ask why there are more yellow comments than green ones 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 lesbian or gay community and how the young people learned about them. Explain facts about the local community and its history as you go. Close the session by asking whether the exercise made pupils feel differently.

Please note: Be sure to prepare yourself so that you can provide adequate information about the local community. You may consider inviting speakers from a local gay/lesbian/bisexual organisation to provide the young people with inside information on local activities. Also prepare yourself for questions from pupils about 'separatism' and overt demonstrations of homosexuality. In intercultural groups, such questions can be challenged by exploring the more general dynamic of integration. Most minorities find it helpful to have meeting places or a protected room where they can feel comfortable and assert their identity. Thus they may 'integrate' more easily into their surrounding rather than 'assimilate'.

Gay Pride Parade

Aim: To explore the need for visibility of gays and lesbians.

Method: Show a picture of a gay pride parade and ask the students if they know what it is about. Ask for comments. You will probably get some strong negative remarks (for some students, the visibility of homosexuals is unacceptable). Discuss the effects of discrimination and pride on a person's identity. Explain the history of gay pride (see the section on "History & Culture"). Compare ethnic pride with gay pride.

Please note: Many people are shocked by the very special lifestyles sometimes shown at gay pride events and which, naturally, attract a large amount of media attention. During discussions, take into account the distorting influence of the media and the great diversity in homosexual lifestyles.

It's a Straight World...

Aim: To explore the effects of heterosexism and to place the lesbian/gay/bisexual community in this context.

Method: Explain how everyone is raised to be heterosexual. Tell the students this creates a specific situation for lesbian, gay, and bisexual teens and that this exercise is meant to explore how this may feel to them. Give the pupils 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?" As additional questions, you could ask: "What would the 'normal' gay population think about this?" Let the pupils share their thoughts and feelings. As the dialogue progresses, steer the discussion towards how the pupils would like such a situation to be. Then draw conclusions which relate to the current situation: how should heterosexuals think about lesbian, gay and bisexual community institutions?

Please note: This exercise is only possible within the context of a relatively safe group. You can integrate this exercise into a regular subject by asking the students to draw or paint their feelings (arts) or to write a paper on it (language). This personal approach makes it easier to try this exercise in less safe groups, but it demands more of the pupils' artistic or language skills.

Education

Tools

Storytelling/Oral history

Aim: to make teenagers aware of the way they were raised to perceive sexuality.

Method: All pupils tell something about how they were raised. Question them on how they learned about gender identity, sex roles and about sexuality. Ask them as well what information they missed and how they compensated. An alternative could be to ask the pupils to interview their parents and grand parents (or guardians) about how they learned this. Have them discuss as well what messages they wanted to give to their own children, what they found difficult about that and whether they think they succeeded. As a second stage, the pupils can discuss which differences they see between these stories. Make them discuss conflicts that may have arisen between caretakers and children, or between people in the same generation. How were these resolved?

Another follow-up can be to ask the students how they want to raise their own children. What will they do when their children have opinions that differ from their own? What if their child thinks she/he has lesbian or homosexual feelings?

Please note: Bear in mind that the student may be embarrassed to disclose some elements about her or his private life or sexual orientation. What's more, for the parents and grandparents, being interviewed on subjects such as sexuality may be a bit disturbing and even confrontational. Prepare the pupils for this beforehand and take care they don't transgress the adults' personal boundaries.

Heroines and Heroes

Aim: to explore the importance of role models in history for people with gay and lesbian feelings.

Method: Ask the students to list famous historical figures they consider as role models. Explore why these people are important: as examples of creativity, independence, strength, honesty and so on. Check 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 and help them formulate their opinions. (Because minorities are seen as weak or bad, positive role models help correct negative images.) Expand the discussion to homosexuality by asking which role models are important for lesbians, gays and bisexuals.

You may also choose to discuss historical figures that are important to lesbians, gays and bisexuals (see FAQ). Alternatively, you could show a picture of a non-European role model for lesbians, gays and bisexuals, like Oum Khalsoum (Egyptian singer). You could also discuss more recent examples like Virginia Woolf, Oscar Wilde, Freddy Mercury, Dusty Springfield.

Please note: Depending on the intellectual level and interest of your students, you could go into a more personal discussion about current lesbian, gay and bisexual role models like pop stars or into a more academic and historical discussion about why lesbians, gays and bisexuals feel the need to know about gay or lesbian historical figures – for example, why it was so important for many lesbians, gays and bisexuals to say that homosexuality was 'normal' among the ancient Greeks. Another powerful option is to go deeper into images of gays and lesbian in media or film (for example the documentary 'The Celluloid Closet') and discuss it with the students.

Education

Tools

Write to Christina

Aim: to initiate a discussion about the relationship between homosexuality and the Church and to promote empathy with people's problems.

Method: Tell the pupils this story: "Christina is Catholic and deeply religious. At the same time, she feels very attracted to women. Recently she fell in love with Mary-Ann, and now she has no more doubts about her feelings. But she finds it very difficult to combine these feelings with her religion and the reactions of her parents and some of her friends. She writes anonymously 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. What should I do?'"

Have the students write a letter to Christina where they try to offer help and ideas. Discuss the merits of the different types of advice given.

Please note: The pupils will probably come up with several different types of advice for Christina, ranging from denying her feelings to accepting them. Focus on the pupils' letters. Discuss their opinions about personal feelings and the relation between religion and cultural/social intolerance. This exercise will work best in multi-religious groups.

Tolerance

(you may choose to use another title like Universal Human Rights, Humanitarianism)

Aim: to encourage mutual respect and tolerance in a religious context.

Method: Begin by telling the pupils that the concept of "neighbourly love" is an important virtue in all world religions. Ask them first if they share this value. If they do, ask them to discuss how this relates to lesbians, gay and bisexuals.

Please note: It is advisable to know the arguments and counter-arguments pupils may use in the discussion (for instance, loving your neighbour can imply that you not let her/him sin – the care for your neighbour shouldn't limit her/his freedom of choice). Do not allow the discussion to concentrate on religious texts or on religious rules. Focus instead on the spiritual and 'warm' aspects of religion. It is important to treat pupils as equals in this discussion and not to 'preach tolerance'. Accept negative feelings about homosexuality and explore how pupils deal with these feelings, even if the pupils feel that respect and tolerance are in principle important virtues.

The “Cure”

Aim: To explore the myth that homosexuality can be “cured”.

Method: Start by telling the pupils that some fundamentalist Christians think that homosexuality is a mental disorder that can be “cured”. Ask them what they think of this idea. Let them research this viewpoint as well as alleged therapies for homosexuality by searching the Internet and have them write a paper describing their findings (if you use the search term “gay cure” on the Internet, you will find a range of recent debates on this issue).

Please note: Only try this exercise if the subject has been raised in class because you expose students to fundamentalist propaganda. Provide pupils with balanced information on the so-called cures for homosexuality. Basic information should at least make clear that “changing” homosexual feelings into heterosexual feelings is not possible.

Counselling and Health Care Tools

A Lesbian Woman/ A Gay Man Is...

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

Practical Advice: Suggest to the teenage client that they say the following sentence out loud: “a lesbian woman/ gay man/ bisexual is...”, and then have them complete it by adding whatever comes into their mind. The client repeats the sentence several times until a variety of statements have come out. This allows the teenager to work on the stereotypes and prejudice they have internalised. For instance, one lesbian teen said to her counsellor: “A lesbian woman is ... not feminine; that’s disgusting”.

Please note: before using this exercise, it is necessary to establish an interaction to help the person feel at ease so that she/ he can be open; it is useful to start by saying that anything the client is going to say is acceptable.

The Two Chairs

Aim: work on an individual’s 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. It also looks at the feelings related to those reasons.

Method: Put a chair in front of the young person 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 they should come out, and leads him/her to hide their sexual orientation. The client must then address this alter-ego. Afterwards, the client moves and sits on that chair him-/herself and try to explain how they feel after listening to the other self.

Please note: Be sure that the client looks at both the positive and negative sides of their possible coming out.

This exercise may be suitable when a client has already questioned the cognitive aspects involved with coming out but still has problems dealing with the emotional aspects. It cannot, therefore, be used as a starting exercise.

Coming Out in the Family

Aim: to work on the decision to come out.

Method: Let a gay/lesbian client imagine they come out to their family. How would they do it? What would they say? What do they think their parents’ reaction would be? How would they react themselves? How do they feel while doing the exercise?

Please note: Do not try to convince the client that they should come out. Even if this method works well for them, it still has to be the client’s own decision. This exercise is limited to focusing on cognitive aspects.

Counselling and Health Care Tools

Question of Scales

Aim: These questions help the couple to formulate their expectations at the beginning of the counselling process.

Method: Independently from each other, two partners give their responses to a series of statements according to a scale graded from 1 to 10 (1 = lowest value, 10 = highest value). First they give their own reply, and then they also indicate what they think their partner would reply. The scales can be prepared on a flip chart by the counsellor before the session. Some examples for possible statements (these need to be reformulated into two phrases – one for each polar opposite):

- 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/are few
- after the common counseling sessions, our problem will become bigger/smaller (easier to deal with/more difficult to deal with)
- I can personally 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 do they think I think?) For this to be effective, it is important that counsellors pose the questions in the same way to both partners. The answers to these questions show in which direction client-oriented counselling can continue. If the partners formulate different opinions, it is important to work on their common aims. In the second step, changes can be anticipated by asking the partners what could happen if a rating on the scale changes (i.e. if a rating goes up). 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 had already happened.

Social surrounding as support

Aim: Represent the social surroundings of gay and lesbian couples and work on 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 persons belonging to their social surrounding (members of both families, particular persons that are important to one or to both partners, their children, former partners, counsellors, etc).

2nd step: Perception

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

3rd step: Questioning

- 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?
- Who would benefit the most if the partners' relationship was stabilised during the counselling process?

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 place. What exactly would change then?

Please note: This exercise focuses attention on the human resources available to support the couple.

The representation of real persons with neutral symbols should not lead to interpretations of each individual's role. The point of the exercise is to look at the system as a whole.

Counselling and Health Care

Tools

To start off, here is some information about the diversity in lifestyles of lesbian, gay and bisexual teenagers that counsellors should be aware of:

- Lesbian, gay and bisexual teenagers lack positive role models. This may lead them to feel insecure towards homosexual lifestyles.
- On the other hand, to be a lesbian, gay and bisexual teenager can be a positive challenge. If a young person does not fit in with heterosexual role models, they should re-think their lifestyle. They may discover that a lesbian/gay lifestyle can give them much more personal freedom than fixed role behaviour does.
- Lesbian, gay and bisexual teenagers often look for role models that suit them. This may lead to stereotypical gay or lesbian behaviour.
- Show your client that there is no objective rating of lifestyles. It is important to make it clear that the main standard for their lifestyle should be their own happiness.
- Find out about local self-help groups where people with the same lifestyle can meet and exchange experiences.
- Many young lesbian, gay and bisexual teenagers fear that they will not have a family like heterosexuals do. This is often connected to their unhappiness with their current life. Many of them change their opinion when they realise that they can be very happy the way they are.

Two Chairs

Aim: To explore inner needs and external expectations, and the tension between the two.

Method: Arrange two chairs face to face. One chair symbolises external expectations, the other one represents inner needs. The client sits first on one chair, then on the other, and tries to feel only the things that the chair symbolises. How do they feel on the different chairs? What would they tell a person on the other chair?

Please note: Whether you feel comfortable with your lifestyle often depends on the expectations of your environment and whether you try to live up to them or not (this is especially true when you are a lesbian, gay or bisexual teenager).

The Mirror

Aim: To explore self-images.

Method: The client should close his/her eyes and imagine sitting face to face with their own reflection in a mirror. What would he/she criticise about this person's lifestyle? What would he/she admire?

Please note: This method works on two levels: You can relate to the physical look of your client (this is what most teenagers will do at first) or you can relate to characteristics, inner feelings and behaviour, which may be more important for dealing with the subject of lifestyle. You have to make sure that the client visualises him-/herself as the opposite person in order for the method to work.

The Fairy Godmother

Aim: To explore unconscious or oppressed needs and fantasies about the future.

Method: The client should imagine that a fairy godmother comes to him or her and asks how he/she wants to live. How does this feel and what prevents your client from really living like this?

Please note: It is quite important to check if the fears of your client correspond to a reality. Even if they don't, you have to take these fears seriously, otherwise your client will feel misunderstood.

Counselling and Health Care

Tools

In our social climate, where people are automatically assumed to be heterosexual, coming out can be difficult for many lesbians, gays and bisexuals. The counsellor can facilitate the coming out process through the use of respectful language. Do not assume anything about your client's personal life.

Counsellors should in any case strive for an open attitude about sexuality. A first step is to try to normalise remarks about sexuality in general; this should then open the door to talking more specifically about homosexuality and/or bisexuality.

If you suspect that a client's difficulties come from problems linked to their sexual orientation, you can explore this by asking questions. Make sure you ask the questions carefully and don't force the clients into "confessions" about their sexuality.

You can be a significant other in the client's social environment.

You can provide information about safer sex and support groups.

If the client is from another ethnic or cultural background, the problems relating to their sexual orientation can be much more significant because of religious reasons and the influence of the family. Make sure that you provide space for the client to talk about the struggle between family values, religious values and the common norms around (homo/bi) sexuality in the society they live in.

Keep in mind that not every lesbian, gay or bisexual person has a problem with his or her sexual preference. The challenge is to find a balance between ignoring it when it is a problem and stressing it too much when it isn't one. This can be particularly complicated when dealing with a young target group of people who are actively questioning their sexuality in general.

Work on self-esteem

Aim: to investigate the impact of interiorised homophobia

Method: Give a paper to the client and ask her/ him to write down 10 adjectives representing himself. Afterwards, ask her/ him to write down 10 adjectives representing how he/ she would like to be. Now ask the client to mark every adjective with a positive or negative sign. Examine the meaning of the adjectives, compare the two lists and investigate whether they are connected to sexual orientation.

Please note: This exercise can be used to investigate how the client perceives her- or himself. This does not necessarily imply that sexual orientation is involved. Keep in mind that not every lesbian, gay or bisexual has a problem with his or her sexual preference. The challenge is to find a balance between ignoring it when it is a problem and stressing it too much when it isn't one. This can be particularly complicated when dealing with a young target group of people who are actively questioning their sexuality in general.

Representations about homosexuality

Aim: to help the client recognise the external influences on how she/ he perceives her- or himself as homosexual.

Method: Ask the client the following questions

- What were the social values concerning homosexuality where you were being raised?
- 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? As a positive or negative figure or role model?

Please note: this proposal can be useful for those clients who show a high level of interiorised homophobia and who stick to stereotyped representations about homosexuality.

Counselling and Health Care Tools

Specific aspects in counselling gays and lesbians and how to address them:

Search for the “Why-Question” (Sexual Identity)

Aim: to help the client, in his/her search for self-definition, distinguish between sexual orientation and identity, do not take the sexual identity of your client as granted.

Method: What does your client call him/herself and which meaning does he/she give to these “labels”? Discuss what experiences your client has had regarding same-sex behaviour. Distinguish between their sexual orientation and expectations in the past, present and future. Discuss role models and identity with the client. Deal with prejudices; they are an indication of internalised homophobia.

Please note: Focus also on the question of how the client thinks others perceive him/her. This serves to bring up key issues such as the importance of external perception and the fear of rejection.

Gay-Bashing

Aim: To counsel victims of gay-bashing, homophobic violence and discrimination.

Method: Has the client ever experienced physical, psychological or verbal attacks; if so were these direct or indirect? Did the attacks involve sexual violence? When did the attack happen and who was the attacker? How does this experience affect being gay or lesbian or being “out”? Discuss the pros and cons of reporting the incident to the police with the client.

Please note: It helps to be familiar with specific counselling skills relating to trauma and violence beforehand. It is usually in gay cruising areas that gay men encounter violence. Therefore, before advising the client to take their case to the authorities, be absolutely sure of the way your local police deals with anti-homosexual violence. Are there specific consultation partners in the police force who understand this form of violence? Are they male or female? A lesbian victim is unlikely to consult a male police officer.

Counselling and Health Care

Tools

My Body

Aim: An essential part of a man or woman's identity is the image he or she has of his or her own body and the perception and satisfaction of one's own physical needs. The body is the basis of an individual's feelings, thoughts and actions. During puberty, sexual aspects need to be integrated into one's identity. The exercise helps young people become more sensitive to their own feelings and self-image.

Method: Questions for self-reflection

- What role does clothing play for me? What about undressing or being naked?
- How do I react to images of men/ women, gays/ lesbians that I see in 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 do I explain this to myself? How do I handle my feelings?
- What did I learn from my mother and father about how to consider my body? What did I learn from them about nakedness and sexuality?
- How did my mother and father react to my outer appearance? What helped me when I was growing up? What hindered my development?
- Which parts of my body do I connect to lust/ 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 either the client or by the counsellor as a tool for self-reflection. It is helpful to use this method between two sessions as a kind of homework assignment. As the reflection process continues, it is likely that the client will begin to see how the attitudes they learned from their family conflict with their own individual values. For gays and lesbians, this crisis is difficult for two reasons: first, because they lack positive role models and second, because it becomes necessary for them to keep at a distance from the dominant heterosexual norm in order to build up their own identity which, in the beginning, is a negative or anti-identification (non-heterosexual).

Sexuality Yesterday-Today-Tomorrow

Aim: To help the clients reflect on their past, to help them become aware of their current personal assessment and to express their wishes for the future.

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

The client divides the poster paper into three equal parts by using vertical lines. The first step is to reflect on the following questions: How did I see my sexuality during puberty? How do I see it today? How would I like to see it in the future? One section of the poster is reserved for each question. Let the client write down the answers in their own words. Next, have the client cut off the part of the poster which deals with their wishes for the future. The A4 sheet is then glued between this cut piece and the leftover part of the poster paper (making a link between the present and the future). The answers to the following questions are written on the poster:

- If I think about the future of my sexuality and the form I want it to take, what prevents me from realising this vision?
- What or who could help me to overcome these obstacles?
- Which one of my wishes for the future form of my sexuality has already come true?
- Who could support me in further realising my future vision?

Please note: This method helps the counsellor to get information about the client's view on his or her sexuality. It also clarifies the client's vision of their future and helps them identify the resources available to them to achieve this vision. Based on this information, some aims for future counselling sessions can be defined. In addition, the counsellor can estimate how much they can and want to continue working on the issue of the client's sexuality.

Three-Chairs-Exercise

Aim: To help the client reflect on their sexuality; to find out how the client judges his or her own current approach to living with their sexuality.

Method: In addition to the client's and the counsellor's chairs, three other chairs are needed. As a first step the client is asked to choose three important persons in their life, one in their family, one among their friends with whom they have not had a sexual relationship and one among their partners with whom they have had a sexual relationship. The names of these partners are written on a sheet and placed one on each of the three chairs. In the second step, the client is asked to stand behind each chair for five minutes and to answer the following question: "If I asked this person to say what they thought about how you live with your sexuality and how satisfied you are with your approach, what would they say?"

Please note: For the exercise to work, the client must be willing to get intensely involved with their own sexuality. By changing perspectives, reflecting on one's own sexuality becomes easier. Wanted and unwanted behaviour, attitudes and judgements are more easily identified. Once the exercise is completed, the client should have a better idea of how to improve the way he or she lives with his or her sexuality. He or she should also begin to identify steps to realise these changes.

Counselling and Health Care

Tools

Think about the following questions:

- What can you offer if your client feels isolated?
- What can you offer if your client is interested in the gay/lesbian community but feels afraid of it?
- In which other parts of life do communities exist?
- Do the activities/services offered in the community of your city meet the cultural and individual background of your client?
- To which specific groups does your client belong besides the group of homosexuals (e.g. religious, ethnic, gender groups, etc.)?
- Are there groups in your area which match the specific background of your client (e.g. a group for Turkish gay people?)

Gay/Lesbian Social Network

Aim: to help the client reflect on his or her position within the gay/lesbian social network.

Method: Try and find out what images your client has of the community, i.e. gay/lesbian venues, bars and clubs. Do they perceive themselves as being part of the community? Why or why not? Do they associate the scene with negative imagery? Does your client meet socially with other gays and lesbians outside the community?

Please note: Bear in mind that gay men and lesbian women from ethnic minorities do not often frequent 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.

Counselling and Health Care Tools

Individual Counselling

Identifying Historical and Cultural Messages about Homosexuality

Aim: to explore historical and cultural messages about homosexuality which are relevant to the client's personal situation.

Method: Give the client something to read about views on homosexuality in history and culture. Ask your client what messages about sexuality and homosexuality he/she has learned when growing up. Explain how their own history or culture influences the way they perceive themselves as being gay or lesbian. Compare this with another story that shows a different view on homosexuality (it is particularly useful if you can find a story from the client's own culture).

Please note: Whichever readings you choose, they should somehow be linked to the client's current situation. It could give examples of role models, it could help to soften rigid opinions or it could give a concrete context to heterosexual norms that limit the client's frame of thinking or behaviour.

An Extended Family Tree

Aim: to explore historical and cultural messages about homosexuality that are relevant to the client's situation.

Method: Let your client draw an 'extended family' tree (with all people who are socially relevant for the client) with these questions:

1. Where does everybody fit in?
2. Where do they come from, where were they born?
3. Which of these people had an important role in teaching you about your history and sexuality?
4. Which of these people gave you messages about homosexuality? What kind of messages?
5. Which members are important to keep in the extended family tree – which of them will support you and your feelings?
6. How can you deal with the people who might not be very supportive or who might be negative?
7. How can you add more people who will support you to your extended family tree?

Please note: This exercise may take several sessions or may be an aspect that returns to sessions several times. Don't push clients to answer the last questions when they are not psychologically ready for it. Some clients with homosexual feelings will feel such a loyalty to their current social network, that it may be difficult for them to imagine alternative choices. Furthermore, in some extreme situations, giving homosexual feelings a place in their life may create a rift with the traditional family.

Advice for intercultural communication

- You can win your client's trust by asking questions about their family. Many non-Western cultures are less Me-oriented.
- Be honest to your client concerning your lack of knowledge about cultural customs.
- Be aware that in some hierarchical cultures counsellors have much more prestige and are seen as more of an authority.

Counselling and Health Care Tools

The Spiritual Guide

Aim: To provide a starting point for exploring religion in the client's life and to identify the problems she/ he is facing. The exercise could provide some possible solutions.

Method: Ask the client to imagine a situation in which, together with a friend, they meet a priest, rabbi, imam or a spiritual guide. Give clients some time to imagine the situation on their own and afterwards ask them to talk about it. What happens during the meeting?

If the client is not able to imagine how the spiritual leader may try to guide them, have them imagine instead that their close friends are asking them critical questions about their life and their needs.

Please note: This exercise can be used in a group as well as in individual counselling. Be aware that for some, the image of a priest, rabbi or imam may evoke negative rather than positive feelings. Let the client choose a character which they consider to be a real spiritual guide.

Balancing Sex and Religion

Aim: To explore the role religion plays in an adolescent's life. The exercise tries to help the client establish a personal balance between the expression of their sexuality and the profession of their religion and values.

Method: Ask the client to talk about the place of religion in their life. Next, investigate the attitude held by relevant religious figures towards homosexuality. Discuss the historical and cultural relativism of religion as a mix of spiritual and social aspects as well as a means of providing social control.

Explore if religion is an important aspect of a person's identity. When religion is a strong and undeniable part of the client's personal identity, suggest they make contact with homosexual religious groups (if possible). This may help the client find a support network and social identification.

Please note: This exercise can be used in group as well as in individual counselling. In a group session, religion can be a central theme and be dealt with by having a discussion with only one client or by discussing the theme among the whole group. Involving the whole group can be useful when religion is a main issue for all the clients.

In this discussion, it is vital to distinguish between religious norms and spirituality. Norms usually address the relationships between humankind, spirituality and its relationship with the divinity. In cases where religious norms are very uncompromising, emphasis should be put on a personal relationship with the divine, without crushing hope or trying to alter norms.

Role Playing in Group Counselling

Aim: to explore possible ways of solving personal dilemmas relating to religion and homosexuality.

Method: Have one client play the role of a lesbian girl and another play the role of priest. The girl wants to talk about the conflicts she is facing and goes to ask for spiritual guidance. (Naturally, a boy can also play this part, or you can vary the exercise by using a bisexual role.) After a few minutes, change roles. The rest of the group observes. Have as many clients as are willing play one of the roles. When the discussion between the girl and the priest seems to offer no new viewpoints, ask the group what they noted and felt as players and as observers.

Please note: If the clients are hesitant to play a lesbian woman or a gay man, take the role of the homosexual yourself first. It will help if you play the role somewhat 'inadequately'; this may encourage others to improve on your performance.

Impressum

Mit Vielfalt umgehen.
Sexuelle Orientierung und
Diversity in Erziehung und
Beratung

Herausgeber

Ministerium für Gesundheit,
Soziales, Frauen und Familie des
Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen,
D-40190 Düsseldorf
www.mgsff.nrw.de

Online-Version

www.diversity-in-europe.org

Autorinnen und Autoren

Pascal Belling, Flora Bolter,
Peter Dankmeijer, Martin Enders,
Margherita Graglia, Karen Kraan,
Stefan Timmermanns,
Wolfgang Wilhelm

Geschichten

Adriana Stern

Evaluation

Rutgers Nisso Groep, Floor Bakker,
Ine Vanwesenbeeck

Die Urheberrechte liegen beim
Herausgeber. Vervielfältigung oder
Nachdruck, auch auszugsweise,
ist nur unter Angabe der Quelle
gestattet.

Erstellt mit freundlicher Unter-
stützung des Aktionsprogramms
der Europäischen Gemeinschaft
zur Bekämpfung von Diskrimi-
nierungen.

Düsseldorf, August 2004

