



WORKSHEET

STATEMENTS TO CHALLENGE NORMS ABOUT GENDER, SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND SEX CHARACTERISTICS

Activity 4

1. When a baby is born, how do we know that it is a boy or a girl? Is it possible that this may not be so for all children?
2. Boys usually don't show their emotions as easily as girls do
3. A real man is one who is tough, strong, dynamic and a leader
4. Girls should be as they appear in Instagram posts: thin, sexy, beautiful and seductive. Do you agree or disagree?
5. Not all people identify as boys or girls, men or women. Discuss.
6. Since heterosexuals don't discuss their sexuality, why do gay people or people with different sexual attractions need to discuss theirs so provocatively?
7. In a gay or lesbian relationship, which person plays the male and which person plays the female ?
8. Isn't it confusing to call a person with the pronoun they want for themselves when they 'look' to be a different gender? What pronoun should we use in the end?
9. Is it true that bisexuals are confused and in reality they are gays/lesbians who are still in the closet?
10. People should not disclose their sexual orientation because it is a private matter. Discuss
11. All people need to be open about their sexual orientation and which people they are attracted emotionally and/or sexually.
12. How do you become lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual or asexual?
13. We are having more LGBTIQ+ people nowadays because it has become fashionable to be different. Discuss.
14. Can you tell a person's sexual orientation by looking at them? How?
15. Is it true that if we talk to children about different gender identities, they will want to change gender?
16. Why do LGBTIQ+ persons feel the need to promote their lifestyle so intensely?
17. Why are PRIDE events being organized since LGBTIQ+ rights are already protected by law?
18. Is it healthy for kids to be raised by same sex parents?

Answers to the questions (for the facilitator):

The answers provided here are only indicative and aim to provide some general guidelines on how certain topics can be addressed and approached. Facilitators will develop their own style and language when providing answers to young people's questions. The important thing is to use every opportunity to dispel myths, challenge norms and provide room for thoughts for young people, so they can explore different perspectives towards the acceptance of diversity. Try to provide answers in a short, clear, concise, non-academic but approachable and youth-friendly manner, providing just the right level of information: not too little and not too much because it may be confusing. Just the mere fact that you're providing a genuine answer to sensitive issues and issues that are taboo in most societies, helps cultivate acceptance and openness.

For more detailed explanations of the terms, also please refer to the theoretical part of this module.

1. *When a baby is born, how do we know that it is a boy or a girl? Is it possible that that this may not be so for all children?*

When a baby is born, doctors decide if the baby is a boy or a girl based on whether it has a penis or a vagina. This however is not true for all individuals. Some people are born with genitalia which are not clearly male or clearly female. Also some people experience different combinations of sex characteristics that lie outside the traditional gender binary. These people are called intersex.

2. *Boys usually don't show their emotions as easily as girls do and*
3. *A real man is one who is tough, strong, dynamic and a leader*

These statements reflect stereotypical perceptions of boys, who are expected by society to

be tough, strong and show emotional self-restraint. However, gendered perceptions and gender roles are but social constructs and because of this, they can change. Truly, young people have 'incentives' to conform or adhere to these social roles (they will be more likeable, accepted and sexually appealing). But what is the price to pay for conforming to social expectations? It is important to recognize that societal expectations are limiting and diminish the wealth of a person's identity and personality into only a few 'expected traits'. What's more, people who do not exhibit these expected traits experience gender-based abuse by being criticized, ostracized or harassed. We've all heard of boys being called a 'sissy' or a 'faggot' for not being tough 'enough' or girls being called a 'bitch' because they are dynamic, tough, strong and leaders. The fear of criticism, isolation and abuse holds young people back from expressing their true self and their true personality, significantly limiting their options or scope of activity and are held back from reaching their full potential. Sensitivity, strength, dynamism, leadership are not masculine nor feminine traits. They are human traits and every person is entitled to exhibit them without being criticized or abused, no matter what their gender identity is.

4. *Girls should be as they appear in Instagram posts: thin, sexy, beautiful and seductive. Do you agree or disagree?*

This perception only reinforces gender stereotypes which force girls to conform to what society wants them to look like and behave. Gender stereotypes have a catastrophic effect because they do not describe the majority of people but instead they 'lock' people in predefined 'moulds' which limit the sense, experience and expression of a person's identity. They also limit the people's range of options, potential and possibilities. Also, the sexualization of girls as presented in social media, gives the wrong messages about how girls should



be treated and cultivate very wrong perceptions and attitudes about sexual violence.

5. *Not all people identify as boys or girls, men or women. Discuss.*

Many people identify themselves outside the gender binary (distinct categorization into males and females) and may not conform to traditional gender roles, acting and expressing themselves in a non-stereotypical manner and/or a gender-neutral way across a spectrum of gender identities. These people identify as nonbinary, queer, gender neutral, gender queer, gender fluid, gender non-conforming, agender, bigender. They may also opt to use the pronouns they/them (instead of she/he, her/his) for themselves or ze, sie, hir or may use no pronoun at all.

6. *Since heterosexuals don't discuss their sexuality, why do gay people or people with different sexual attractions need to discuss theirs so provocatively?*

Heterosexuals express their sexual orientation when they mention (or introduce) their boyfriend, girlfriend, husband or wife to another person; when they kiss their partner goodbye in a public place; when they place a family picture on their desk at work; when they hold hands on the street. They have no need to let people know in a specific way what their sexual orientation is, because their actions and words over time let everyone know they're heterosexual. Homosexual and bisexual people who do precisely the same things, however, are often accused of "flaunting their sexuality" or of "throwing their private lives in other people's faces." They may be scorned, harassed or attacked. Keeping one's sexual orientation secret can be difficult, limiting and exhausting and is also unfair for people who want to express their sexual orientation freely to be on constant guard, monitoring every word they say.

7. *In a gay or lesbian relationship, which person plays the male and which person plays the female ?*

If we assume that gay or lesbian relationship is a relationship where people are of the same gender, how can one of them be the man and the other the woman? In addition, how about relationships where the people involved define themselves as neither male nor female? How can we expect one to be the male and the other to be the female? If we explore this question more closely, we'll see that it reflects very heteronormative perceptions about gender, the gender binary and gender roles. In real life, every relationship, the people involved will decide for themselves how to divide roles. Is it mandatory for instance that women are the ones who are more nurturing, clean, cook and take care of others, while men are the ones to always pay for stuff, repair things, take out the garbage and carry heavy objects? Aren't these just stereotypical perceptions of how women and men should behave? And aren't these perceptions limiting how each person can express themselves? These task divisions are rapidly changing in many countries. In modern societies a traditional task division may create more problems than it solves. From another point of view, this question may refer to sex and what roles people assume during the sexual act, for instance stereotypical perceptions of who is seductive and passive (i.e. women, 'effeminate' men) or in control and 'on top' (men, 'butch' women). These images and ideas are not only far from reality but they are extremely offensive. In a healthy and equal relationship a person can choose what they want to do according to what they like, enjoy and feels good for them.

8. *Isn't it confusing to call a person with the pronoun they want for themselves when they 'look' to be a different gender? What pronoun should I use in the end?*

What a person 'looks like' is irrelevant with how that person feels and expresses their gender identity. Gender identity is a deep, personal sense of one's self that each person defines for themselves. Because of this we cannot really make 'assumptions' about a person's gender, no matter what they look like. Individuals who identify themselves as nonbinary may opt to use the pronouns they/them (instead of she/he, her/his) for themselves or ze, sie, hir or may use no pronoun at all. To respect each person's identity (and to make each person feel included and accepted), it is important that we use the pronouns they want to use for themselves. Continuing to call a nonbinary person or a trans person a 'he' or a 'she' because we feel that this is the right thing to do, is only disrespectful it is also hurtful because we show that we cannot accept the other person's identity.

If you're unsure which pronoun a person uses, listen first to the pronoun other people use when referring to them. Someone who knows the person well will probably use the correct pronoun. If you must ask which pronoun the person uses, start with your own. For example, "Hi, I'm Alex and I use the pronouns he and him. What about you?" Then use that person's pronoun and encourage others to do so. If you accidentally use the wrong pronoun, apologize quickly and sincerely, then move on. The bigger deal you make out of the situation, the more uncomfortable it is for everyone. Lastly, refrain from asking a trans or nonbinary person what their "real name" is. For some people, being associated with their birth name is a tremendous source of anxiety, or it is simply a part of their life they wish to leave behind. It is also important to respect the name a trans/nonbinary person is currently using.

9. *Is it true that bisexuals are confused and in reality they are gays/lesbians who are still in the closet?*

This is only a myth about bisexual persons, and arises from prejudice towards diverse sexual orientations that don't fall in the binary of

heterosexuality or homosexuality. Perceptions that people who are not straight or gay are "confused", "can't make up their minds", "want it all" or that still "haven't accepted their true nature" (which should be either gay or straight) arise from lack of understanding of sexual diversity and what sexual orientation is and are driven by prejudice, homonormativity and intolerance. Bisexuality (as also pansexuality, asexuality etc.) are real sexual orientations, just as heterosexuality or homosexuality are.

10. *People should not disclose their sexual orientation at school because it is a private matter. Discuss.*

Sexual orientation is indeed a personal matter and each person has the right to disclose it or not to others according to what feels right and safe for them. Because heterosexuality is considered the 'norm', people who are heterosexual do not really have to disclose their sexual orientation because it is implied by their actions (when for instance they describe which celebrity they think is hot, when they kiss/hold hands in public, when they openly talk about their boyfriend or girlfriend). However, how about people who are not heterosexual? Do they feel safe to express their sexual orientation openly, so it is implied and they don't have to disclose it? The truth is that most of the time that can't do so and therefore they feel the need to disclose it, so that they can feel free and have nothing to hide. Expecting that people will not disclose their sexual orientation (if they feel willing, ready and safe to do so of course) is limiting and disrespectful ; not providing a safe space where all people can express their sexual identity is also a violation of human rights as it violates the right to identity, freedom of expression, the right to equality and non-discrimination and the right to participation in public life.



11. *Why are some people not open about their sexual orientation? Why don't they just come out?*

Coming out is a very personal decision and it connotes that the person feels safe and ready to do so. Coming out is not an easy or straightforward decision, especially considering that most people are raised in environments where homophobic/transphobic/interphobic remarks are common, acceptable or go unchallenged. It may take many, many years for them to accept and love themselves and to be willing to reveal their identity to even the most trusted people in their lives. Coming out first requires coming out to oneself – a process which may take many years. Some people come out when they can no longer bear the isolation and limitations that come with being the closet; some people just slowly develop a need to be themselves, no matter what; some people decide to come out when they fall in love; some choose to confide in a few trusted people because they need someone to know who they are and how they feel. People normally come out because they do not want to hide who they are or whom they are in a relationship with. They want to be honest with other people, particularly with those they care about and trust. Being able to disclose one's sexual orientation to others increases the availability of social support, which is crucial to a person's wellbeing. No matter what, a person should never be pressured, forced or coerced to come out (nor by friends, family, peers, their partner); coming out is their own personal decision and we should respect each person's decision to do so (or not).

12. *How do you become lesbian, gay, bisexual or asexual?*

Although there is a lot of research on the subject, scientists either disagree or find it hard to identify the exact cause of sexual orientation. Our current understanding is that who we are attracted to is not determined by any one factor alone

but by a combination of genetic, hormonal, and environmental influences. Recent theories tend to favour biological factors, suggesting a complex interplay of genetic factors and how hormones work while they are an embryo in the uterus. Quite importantly, substantive evidence suggests that style of parenting, early childhood experiences or traumatic events do not play a role in forming a person's sexual orientation. This dispels myths about people 'becoming' gay/lesbian/bisexual because the mothers were too authoritative, the fathers were weak or because they were abused when they were children.

13. *We are having more LGBTIQ+ people nowadays because it has become fashionable to be different. Discuss.*

The truth is that LGBTIQ+ persons have existed for many centuries but because of lack of protection of their human rights, fear of persecution and even death, a high share of LGBTIQ+ people kept their identities a secret. Nowadays while still gender and sexuality remain taboo, international laws and European conventions create a framework where these issues can be more openly discussed and people with gender and sexual diversity can be protected (by law at least). In lieu of this, more and more LGBTIQ+ persons are open about their identities. Being an LGBTIQ+ person has to do with your identity and not with what is 'hip', 'cool' or 'fashionable'. You don't become an LGBTIQ+ person because your friends are, or because it is 'contagious' or because of what you see on TV or social media.

14. *Can you tell a person's sexual orientation by looking at them? How?*

No, it is impossible to tell someone's sexual orientation based on how they look. People who identify as heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual, asexual, pansexual etc. are not recognizable due to specific features, the way they dress, talk, move or

due to specific physical characteristics. This notion is based on stereotypes and generalizations about LGBTIQ+ people which were formed by prejudice, as for instance the fact that gay men are 'effeminate' and lesbians are 'butch'. Such stereotypes are not only not true, but they are also hurtful and offensive.

15. *Is it true that if we talk to children about the different gender identities that exist, they will want to change gender?*

When we talk about different gender identities we help children to recognize and value diversity. Children already have a sense of their true identity as it is innate. They won't change it because of a discussion in class. However, having these discussions is particularly important for children who are not cisgender, because it helps them feel welcomed and accepted. This is particularly crucial, having in mind that more than 40% of trans children are at risk of suicidal attempts.

16. *Why do LGBTIQ+ persons feel the need to promote their lifestyle so intensely?*

Because gender and sexual diversity are still not accepted, 'normalized' and 'mainstreamed', the way LGBTIQ+ people express their identities and lifestyle is considered 'strange', 'out of the norm' or 'provocative'. An LGBTIQ+ person for instance may be living their life and act as a cis-gender and/or straight person may be acting, but because of prejudice they are considered 'flamboyant', 'flashy' or 'loud'.

17. *Why are PRIDE events being organized since LGBTIQ+ rights are already protected by law?*

LGBTIQ+ pride is the positive stance against discrimination and violence toward lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans people to promote their self-affirmation, dignity, equality rights, increase their

visibility as a social group, build community, and celebrate sexual diversity and gender variance. In some countries Pride comes as a celebration, in some – as a political act – pointing out that not all citizens are treated right, that there are groups of people whose rights are still not secured (despite any provisions in the law) and who still experience discrimination, marginalization and violence.

18. *Is it healthy for kids to be raised by same sex parents?*

All the research conducted in families with same-sex parents shows that the children who grow up in same-sex parented families show no differences compared to children who grow up in traditional families (with a dad and a mum or in single parent homes) on a range of parameters, including general health, emotional health, coping behaviour and learning behaviour. It is not parent's sexual orientation that causes the wellbeing of the child; it is a safe and nurturing environment that fosters love, care, trust, and respect that promotes healthy development. Children can experience all these regardless of their family 'shape'. The only harmful thing about same sex parents is the negative attitudes and the prevailing stigma they experience. Moreover, it is a myth that children who grow up in rainbow families (with parents of diverse sexual orientations or gender identities) may grow up to be non-heterosexual or trans. Gender identity and sexual orientation are not shaped by the experiences of childhood or parental care. They constitute an inner sense of identity, as defined by the individual themselves.