

### Overview

The diversity of human sexual behaviour has been researched and documented over many years. A range of theories offer explanations about 'heterosexuality' being viewed as the 'norm' and how other types of sexuality can often be interpreted by some as not 'normal'. However homosexual, bisexual, asexual and transgender people exist across all cultures, social groups, occupations and educational backgrounds. The fact that people with a variety of sexual orientations are in all communities demonstrates that the presence of sexual diversity is in fact 'normal'. The Kinsey Scale and Sexual Trichotomy described below, provide a useful reference in understanding sexual orientation, identity and behaviour.



### Understanding sexual orientation

#### *Kinsey Scale*

The Kinsey Scale is a useful starting point in understanding the nature of the continuum of sexual orientation. The scale shows that people do not necessarily fit into exclusive heterosexual or homosexual categories. Although it does not deal with sexual identity, it can be a useful reference in understanding the nature of homosexuality.

Rating	Description
0	Exclusively heterosexual
1	Predominantly heterosexual, only incidentally homosexual
2	Predominantly heterosexual, but more than incidentally homosexual
3	Equally heterosexual and homosexual
4	Predominantly homosexual, but more than incidentally heterosexual
5	Predominantly homosexual, only incidentally heterosexual
6	Exclusively homosexual
x	No socio-sexual contacts or reactions

### The sexual trichotomy

Rather than viewing people's heterosexuality or homosexuality as a single and different dimension, it's more useful to think of sexuality being related to three separate but interconnected dimensions:

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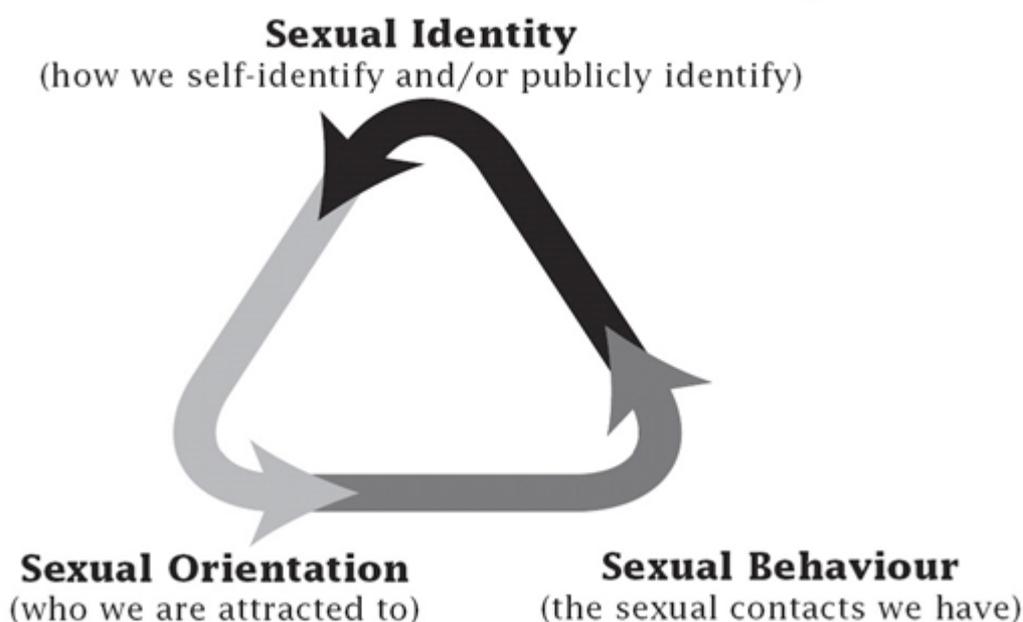
**Orientation** - sexual feelings and fantasies

**Behaviour** - with whom a person engages in sexual activity

**Identity** - the label (or group) with which the person identifies

This model allows students to begin to understand how sexuality is defined by three distinct but inter-related elements.

## The sexual trichotomy



Department of Education, Employment and Training. *Catching On: Teaching and Learning Activities*. Victoria, 2001.

### Sexual orientation and identity

The term or acronym LGBTIQ is sometimes used to reflect the commonality of various kinds of sexual diversity within society. Each letter stands for:

**L - Lesbian** refers to a female person whose primary sexual attraction is toward females.

**G - Gay** refers to a male person whose primary sexual attraction is toward males.

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**B - Bisexual** refers to a male or female person who is sexually attracted to both males and females.

**T - Transgender and/or Transsexual** refers to a person whose gender identity is neither exclusively female nor male. Transsexual refers to a person whose gender identity is the opposite of their biological sex.

**I - Intersex** is a term that relates to a range of congenital physical traits or variations that lie between ideals of male and female. Intersex people are born with physical, hormonal or genetic features that are neither wholly female nor wholly male; or a combination of female and male; or neither female nor male. Many forms of intersex exist; it is a spectrum or umbrella term, rather than a single category. Intersex differences may be apparent at birth.

**Q - Queer or Questioning.** Some non-heterosexual people refer to themselves as Queer because they are uncomfortable labelling themselves according to the more traditional categories of gay, lesbian or bisexual. A person who is Questioning is in the process of arriving at a clearer sense of what their sexual orientation is.

Understanding why a person's sexual orientation or 'nature' is towards the same or opposite sex is a much-contested area of research and not easily explained in a non-academic form.

### *Homosexuality*

A homosexual person is one whose sexual orientation (or nature) and attraction is towards people of the same sex. Another way of describing homosexuality is the state of being 'same sex attracted'. A homosexual male is sometimes referred to as 'gay' while a homosexual female may be described as 'lesbian'.

There is no definitive answer as to why a person becomes, or is, homosexual. A range of opinions exist, and debate about biological and environmental influences continues.

The use of labels to describe people can be problematic especially in using them to describe a sexual identity. An individual may adopt a label to describe their own identity or choose not to use any labels to identify themselves as homosexual, gay, lesbian or otherwise.

### *Homophobia*

Some people may regard homosexual men and women, and sexually diverse people, with suspicion, or even to the extent of personal disgust. This condition is termed 'homophobia' and such attitudes and fears toward those who are lesbian or gay are termed 'homophobic'.

People may justify these kinds of opinions on the basis of strict religious precepts, or by repeating other erroneous prejudices and beliefs about homosexuality. Another ungrounded fear sometimes articulated by people with these beliefs is that only homosexuals spread HIV. Such beliefs can be

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most harmful especially if they lead to discrimination, encourage harassment or even physical assault. Dispelling misinformation and stereotypes help to dissipate these types of fears and their potentially destructive consequences.

Dr Dorothy Riddle, an American psychologist, developed an 8-point scale of attitudes towards lesbian, gay and bisexual people from the least to most supportive. The first four attitudes are said to be Homophobic Attitudes (repulsion; pity; tolerance; acceptance). The next four are referred to as Improved Attitudes (support; admiration; appreciation; celebration). Dr Riddle's scale helps to gain a perspective on where society sits in regards to attitudes towards lesbian, gay and bisexual people.

### *Discrimination*

Teachers may experience difficulties dealing with the homophobic attitudes of some students. It is essential teachers address inappropriate comments that may arise when discussing values or ethical issues. Successful strategies include:

- Being prepared to respond to anti-gay, anti-lesbian or anti-bisexual slurs as would be done for racist or sexist slurs.
- Being as well informed as possible. Respect the person challenging you. Focus on challenging the negative opinions rather than the person.
- Avoiding a debate of religious arguments. Where a person has strongly held views it may be more productive to discuss sexuality issues in terms of how the person is feeling.
- If students use names such as 'homo', 'poof', 'leso' or 'that's so gay' use the following approach:
  - name the use of the terms as a problem
  - refer to classroom rules established earlier, for example, no put-downs
  - give the consequences that should have been established along with the class ground rules.

It is inappropriate to apply labels to young people whose sexual identity may still be emerging. The individual might not visualise themselves within any particular 'pigeonhole'. A young person can find the experience of being defined or labelled by others to be quite damaging. It is best to leave young people to self-identify as they choose over time.

### Teaching tips

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### *In general*

- Be aware and respectful of potential sexual diversity within your students.
- It's important to understand and be aware of where your own values lie to avoid imposing them on students. Give students the opportunity to explore a range of values about sexual diversity that exist in society.
- There may be resistance by parents or the community to raising this topic in a classroom setting. Emphasise that learning activities focus on discrimination, and public and community health, not on moral judgement.
- It is particularly important to use inclusive language in sexual health education in order to avoid unknowingly discounting or discriminating against same-sex attracted people.

### *In the classroom*

- Remind students about the classroom ground rules.
- Be aware and respectful of potential diversity amongst students.
- Define 'sexual identity' with students such that they clearly understand it to include our sex, gender, sexual orientation and sexual expression.
- Explore issues such as conformity, individuality, discrimination and stereotyping.
- Students respond well to guest speakers on this topic.
- Preview all videos prior to presenting them to students.
- Provide resources that students can take if they would like to know more on the subject.

## Relevant resources

### *Guidelines*

[Guidelines for Supporting Sexual and Gender Diversity in Schools](#), Equal Opportunity Commission WA

### *Websites*

[Safe Schools Coalition Australia](#)

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*A national coalition dedicated to helping schools to be safer and more inclusive for same sex attracted, intersex and gender diverse students, school staff and families. The WA team is now delivering the program to schools throughout Western Australia.*

### [Freedom Centre](#)

*For sexually diverse young people under 26 to support each other and their communities to be informed, happy and healthy about their sexuality, sex and gender.*

### [Living Proud](#)

*Living Proud LGBTI Community Services of WA is a non-profit organisation which aims to promote the wellbeing of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex, queer and other sexuality, sex and gender diverse people in Western Australia.*

### [Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays \(PFLAG\) WA](#)

*Parents, families and friends of lesbians and gays who provide a support system in an effort to understand and accept loved ones who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender or intersex.*

### [Other resources](#)

[Sex and gender](#), Get the Facts

[Families like mine](#), Beyondblue

[Sexual orientation](#), Sex and U (Canada)

## Postscript

**This Background Note relates to the following Learning Activities:**

- [Laugh and learn videos - puberty part 2](#)

## Date printed

17 September 2019

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