

# IMAGINE THIS!

Gay  
Lesbian  
Bisexual  
Sexual orientation  
LGBT / LGBTQ  
Coming out  
Homosexuality  
Homophobia  
Heteronormativity  
Sex  
Bias  
Discrimination  
Violence  
Media  
Values

- ✓ 1. To encourage understanding of those who are different.
- ✓ 2. To create awareness among learners about the effects of discrimination and **homophobia**.
- ✓ 3. To promote acceptance and respect for all people irrespective of their **sexual orientation**.

45 minutes

**Imagine This!** Guided Imagery (provided)

## PROCEDURE

- 1 Tell learners that you will talk them through what is known as 'guided imagery' or fantasy. Do not tell them anything more nor reveal the topic of the activity.
- 2 Ask them to get comfortable in their seats and to close their eyes. They can rest their heads on their desk if they want to.
- 3 Tell them that they will be asked to imagine a world quite different from the one they know. Ask them to pay attention to their reactions (thoughts, images, emotions, or physical sensations). Ask them to allow these feelings to pass, without trying to change them or suppress them.
- 4 Begin the Guided Imagery: 'Imagine this!'
- 5 After you have finished, pause for a least 20-30 seconds to allow learners to digest what they have heard. Then ask them to open their eyes.
- 6 Ask them to pair up or form small groups of no more than 3-4 persons and answer this question: 'What are you experiencing?'
- 7 Ask each participant to turn to the person next to her/him and take a few minutes to talk about how they are feeling. Specifically:
  - a. How do they feel after listening to the guided imagery?
  - b. What would it feel like to live in such a world?
  - c. What it would feel like if they had to keep so many secrets about themselves?
  - d. What might those feelings lead them to do if this were a real situation?
- 8 Then ask the class for volunteers who are willing to share their thoughts and feelings. Write their responses on the board. Add checkmarks when other participants offer the same or similar responses.

### Expect to hear answers like:

- Feeling angry, sad, and isolated
- Staying home from school to avoid people/bullying
- Dropping out of school
- Using alcohol and other drugs to feel better
- Breaking the rules because you feel angry/upset
- Feeling depressed.

- 9 If learners do not suggest these responses, then suggest them yourself.

Facilitate a discussion by asking:

- a. On a day-to-day basis, how might people who are gay, lesbian, or bisexual experience society?

If learners are struggling here, explain that while the situation is fictional, it is similar to the real experiences of many **LGBT** people who are isolated and feel rejected by mainstream society, often even the people they are close to. LGBT people, especially youth, are understandably afraid to '**come out**' (reveal their sexual orientation) to others.

Explain that sometimes keeping so many secrets can be very difficult and can affect the rest of people's lives, it can lead to their dropping out of school, staying home from school, using alcohol and other drugs, risky sexual practices, running away, breaking the law etc.

Explain that whilst most LGBT people find ways to come out to those who are important to them, the struggle to decide who is safe to tell continues throughout their lives, because there is so much ignorance and fear about **homosexuality** in our society.

- b. Ask learners if they know what **homophobia** is. What about **heterosexism**?

Provide the following definitions from the **Glossary**:

**HETEROSEXISM** is an attitude which assumes that **heterosexuality** is the norm, and believes that heterosexuality is superior to other **sexual orientations**. Heterosexism causes people who do not identify as heterosexual to be marginalised and 'othered'.

**HOMOPHOBIA** is an irrational dislike and fear of sexual minorities (**LGBTQ** people). Homophobia can be institutionalised in anti-gay laws, policies, and the formal opinions of church and state. Homophobia results in people being excluded from social spaces. Homophobia is used as an excuse for perpetuating verbal abuse, physical violence and even murder.

- c. What do you remember about first learning of **homosexuality**? Do you remember learning anything from your family? Friends? Community of faith? Was what you learned positive or negative?

- d. What movie or television character have you watched who you recently learned is **homosexual**? How has that affected your thinking?

- e. How many of you have been in relationships (heterosexual or homosexual) with someone whom your family or friends do not approve? What was that like?

- f. If **homophobia** were eliminated, how might this benefit heterosexuals?

Learners may struggle to articulate benefits of ending **homophobia**.

**You could suggest some examples such as:**

- Allowing more emotionally intimate relationships with members of one's own sex, without fear of people thinking that you're gay (because being gay won't have negative associations anyway).
- Freedom to learn about life and experience new perspectives by sharing experiences with sexual / gender minorities.
- Freedom from rigid gender roles and stereotypes.
- Increasing self-awareness and self-understanding.

**g.** How has this exercise helped you to understand the daily experience of **lesbians, gay** men, and **bisexual** women and men?

**h.** What do you think lesbians, gay men, and bisexual people might need from you?

**i.** How can we challenge **heteronormativity** and **homophobia**?

## TEACHER TIPS



### General

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

Sexual orientation is a controversial topic and some teachers may feel uncomfortable talking about it. As a teacher it is important that you create an environment of respect and understanding for all your learners, and that your personal views or religious beliefs do not prevent you from doing this. Remember that discussions about sexual orientation are not about moral judgement, or religious views, but

about treating people equally and fairly, and respecting other people's right to engage in mutually consensual relationships of their choice, as afforded to them by the law.

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

As you lead this activity, remember that there are probably gay, lesbian, bisexual, and teens questioning their orientation in your group. It does not matter that this exercise is focused at learners who identify as straight. For LGBT learners, the guided imagery may represent their daily lived experiences, and may be affirming.

It is important that you make LGBT learners (whether they have 'come out' or not) feel acknowledged and understood. You will not know the sexual orientation of every participant, so be very sure to use inclusive and affirming language. For example, say 'we,' 'all people,' and 'some people,' not 'they' or 'people like them.'

Never ask learners to disclose their sexual orientation in class.



### Making the Link with Gender and Violence

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



### Assessment Ideas

This is not a good exercise for assessment as it is intended to solicit learners' feelings about difference, stigmatisation and isolation as the basis for further discussion.



# IMAGINE THIS! (GUIDED IMAGERY)

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**Imagine...** a world where everyone dates, has relationships with, and marries people of the same sex. Only 10-12% of the entire population is heterosexual. It is world in which everyone is gay, but you are not. In this world, almost all of the teachers and learners in your school are gay. All of your friends and family members are gay, and so is everyone else you know.

Most of the doctors, judges, politicians and world leaders are gay. All the characters in books and on television and the radio are gay, all movie stars and celebrities are gay, as are all of the religious and traditional leaders. In this world, all of the books are about gay characters.

Every day of your life, you notice the invisibility of heterosexuals, and feel the constant presence of gays and lesbians, they are everywhere. Think about how much value is put on being gay and lesbian in society.

There have been just a handful of openly heterosexual celebrities who have 'come out'. It is only after they have been harassed in the media about their sexual orientation, and after a lot of public speculation that they have chosen to end the controversy.

Heterosexual sex is seen as promiscuous, perverted and filthy. Sexual activity of heterosexuals is seen as irresponsible and risky and could lead to the spread of diseases. Not to mention the immorality of the act. How disgusting. Everyone feels contempt for heterosexuality, and all who engage in this abomination become outcasts. They are called: Breeders! Sickos! Freaks! Even just being called straight is bad enough.

These words are used as insults throughout society, even schoolchildren say 'That's so straight!' or 'You're such a breeder!' to tease their peers. These terms mean you are different, unacceptable, an outcast. In school when you have sex education you learn that it is normal to feel physically and emotionally attracted to people of your own sex. No one talks about being attracted to someone of the opposite sex. You are sure that what you are feeling cannot be normal and that no one can help you.

And so you learn that you must prevent anyone from learning your terrible secret, the most horrible secret of all: you are attracted to a person of the opposite sex. You feel completely alone.

You don't understand why this happened. You did everything right, you learned gay and lesbian social behaviour: who asks who out, taking someone of the same

sex to school dances, putting posters up of celebrities of your gender, participating in conversations about who the hottest person in your sports team is. You desperately wanted to appear normal, so you tried very hard to fit in. You have even kissed someone of the same sex to prove you were 'normal'. But you know you are different. You wish you had a crush on someone of your own sex, but you don't! It's people of the opposite sex that attract you. What can you do?

More than anything in the world, you want your parents to love and accept you. You know they will never understand if you tell them you are straight. Your mothers have been happily married for years. Your sister has a crush on a famous actress. None of them are like you. You want to tell them, but the thought of telling them, or anyone else makes you feel sick with fear and anxiety. You spend hours thinking about how to approach the subject. You remember hearing your mom tell nasty jokes about straights at the dinner table and everyone laughed. Your family is religious and you remember your family's religious leader telling the congregation that being straight is unnatural and immoral and the whole congregation, including your family, nodded in agreement. What if they are disgusted by you? What if they do not love you anymore? Who can you turn to?

Things have been even worse for you lately. You used to believe you were the only heterosexual in the world and it was so lonely. But then you met someone else like you. You got to know each other, you really like them, it may even be love. You want to tell everyone, especially your family, how happy you are. But you can't. Now your secret seems even bigger. This makes you feel even worse- angry and afraid. What if people find out? What if you make a mistake, slip up, walk too close, touch, hold hands on the street? You could be attacked. You have heard on the news of heterosexuals being assaulted.

The saddest thing is that you can never invite your partner home, or introduce them to your family and friends, and share the joy of your relationship with them.

All of this makes you feel really alone and afraid. You are unsure what to do. Where can you turn? Who can you talk to? You feel unsafe; you don't trust your family or friends to support you. Having this secret is all you can think about, and there is no way to let it out. You feel disgusted and disappointed in yourself, you feel isolated from everyone you know. You feel angry at yourself, why can't you just be normal? You start to hate yourself, wish that you had never met your partner, never had feelings for them, never been attracted to anyone of the opposite sex, wish that you didn't exist.