Gender and Sexual Orientation: Understanding the Difference

A Lesson Plan from Rights, Respect, Responsibility: A K-12 Curriculum

Fostering responsibility by respecting young people's rights to honest sexuality education.

NSES ALIGNMENT:

By the end of 12th grade, students will be able to:

ID.12.CC.1 – Differentiate between biological sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity and expression.

ID.12.INF.1 – Analyze the influence of friends, family, media, society and culture on the expression of gender, sexual orientation and identity.

TARGET GRADE: Grade 11 Lesson 5

TIME: 50 Minutes

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- White board and markers (have several different colors)
- Flipchart sheets prepared as described
- Flipchart markers (at least 6 of different colors)
- Masking tape
- Two greeting cards for parents of a new baby as described in "advance preparation"

ADVANCE PREPARATION FOR LESSON:

- Purchase two greeting cards that would be given to someone who just had a baby, one that would stereotypically be given to a parent of a baby boy, and one that would stereotypically be given to a parent of a baby girl. If you can find the same or a similar version of the cards for the genders, that's ideal; otherwise, two that are clearly gendered as "male" and "female" will work.
- Prepare six flipchart sheets with one gender and sexual orientation listed at the top (Heterosexual Woman, Heterosexual Man, Lesbian, Gay Man, Bisexual Woman, and Bisexual Man). These headers should each be underlined, with another line drawn down the middle. In the top left half of the sheet should be a plus sign, and in the top right, a minus sign. A sample would be this:

Heterosexual woman

+	-

- Before students arrive, post these sheets around the room, with the bottom halves folded up to the top and taped to hide the headers on each.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

1. Define sexual orientation, biological sex, gender and gender identity. [Knowledge]
2. Name at least two positive and two negative things about being a particular gender and sexual orientation. [Knowledge]
3. Describe at least three sources of messages about gender and sexual orientation. [Knowledge]

A NOTE ABOUT LANGUAGE:

Language is really important and we've intentionally been very careful about our language throughout this curriculum. You may notice language throughout the curriculum that seems less familiar - using the pronoun "they" instead of "her" or "him", using gender neutral names in scenarios and role-plays and referring to "someone with a vulva" vs. a girl or woman.

This is intended to make the curriculum inclusive of all genders and gender identities. You will need to determine for yourself how much and how often you can do this in your own school and classroom, and should make adjustments accordingly.

PROCEDURE:

STEP 1: Greet the class by saying, "I wonder whether you all could help me. A friend of mine just had a baby, and I went to the store to get a congratulations card and narrowed it down to two, but I can't decide on which to send. What do you think?"

Hold up the two greeting cards to the class. Someone will ask right off that bat, "Is it a boy or a girl?"

Say, "Good question! That's the same question that's asked when a baby is born so they can announce the baby's biological sex. Now, where do we look to answer that question, at the baby's nose?" The class will likely laugh and say that we look between the baby's legs. On the board write a vertical line. Write the word penis at the top left. As you write, say, "In most cases, we will see a penis or we will see a vulva." Write "vulva" on the right side of the vertical line next to "penis."

Say, "But this isn't what makes us who we are. There are also our chromosomes. If we have a penis, chances are our chromosomes will be 'XY'." Write "XY" beneath "penis." Say, "If we have a vulva, chances are our chromosomes are 'XX.'" Write "XX" beneath "vulva."

Say, "But this isn't all, either. There's also how we play our part in reproduction – if we have a penis and XY chromosomes, we usually have 'testes.'" (Write "testes" beneath "penis" and "XY"). "If we have a vulva and XX chromosomes, we usually have 'ovaries.'" (Write "ovaries" beneath vulva and XX). "Testes is where sperm and testosterone are made, and ovaries are where eggs and estrogen are made."

Note to the Teacher: *The lists should look like this when done:*

Penis	*Vulva*
XY	*XX*
testes	*ovaries*

Say, "If we have all three in this left column, the announcement is usually 'it's a boy!' and if we have all three in the right-hand column, we'll hear, 'it's a girl!'

Explain to the class that in some cases, something happens to make one of these categories different – someone might have XYY chromosomes, or they might have a vulva on the outside but no uterus on the inside. Explain that there are many different variations – and that when they occur, the baby is known to have a "Difference of Sex Development." A really old term for this that's not used anymore is "hermaphrodite;" you might also hear "intersex."

Ask students which card they would give to the new baby if the announcement were "it's a boy" vs. "it's a girl " and why. After a few answers, say, "Everything I just shared with you up here has to do with our biology – our biological sex." (Write "biological sex" on the

board). "How we respond to that biology – like what kinds of cards we send, or what kinds of clothes we wear or toys we have children play with – all has to do with gender." (Write "gender" on the board.)

Say, "In most cases, babies are born with one of the two scenarios I just described, and are called either 'boys' or 'girls.' In most cases, as a child starts to grow up, this biology matches how they feel on the inside. A person will look in the mirror and see a penis and testicles or breasts and a vulva and feel on the inside, 'I'm male' or 'I'm female.' When what someone is called at birth matches how they feel on the inside, that person is called 'cisgender.'

Sometimes, however, what a person sees in the mirror doesn't match how they feel on the inside. They might see a penis and testicles and think, 'but I'm not a boy.' That person may call themselves 'transgender,' or simpy, "female' if that is how they feel.

However we feel on the inside – whether it matches our bodies or not – is our gender identity. [Write "gender identity" on the board.] And as you're going to see in a minute, our identity is more powerful than our physical bodies or what we do with those bodies."

Some of these terms are connected to – although different from – sexual orientation. [Write "sexual orientation" on the board].

Note to the Teacher: *When you are done, here are the terms that should be listed on the board – biological sex, gender, gender identity and sexual orientation.*

Say, "Sexual orientation has to do with the gender or genders of the people to whom we are attracted, both physically and romantically. This is different from our sense of what our gender is. We all have both a gender identity and a sexual orientation.

For example, a person whose biology at birth was characterized as "female" and who also feels female on the inside [write a woman symbol on the board] who is attracted only to people whose biology at birth was characterized as "male" and who also feel male on the inside [write a man symbol on the board, followed by an equal sign] will likely identify as heterosexual. If she does, the fact that she identifies as a woman [circle the woman symbol] and that the partners she's attracted to identify as men [circle the man symbol] – these are their gender identities. The fact that they're attracted to each other [circle heterosexual in a different color] is their sexual orientation." (10 minutes)

Note to the Teacher: *This is what the board should like for this section –written near the list of terms from the previous section.*

STEP 2: Say, "There's a lot of factual information about people of all different genders and sexual orientations – and there's also a lot of misinformation. Let's do an activity now to look at what we know and where this information has come from."

Indicate the sheets around the room. Say, "Each of these sheets has the name of a gender and sexual orientation. This is not a complete list, but they are some of the most

common categories we hear about." Take down one of the folded halves of a flipchart sheet to reveal what is listed there.

Say, "Beneath each name will be a plus side and a negative side. I am going to ask you to think about what you perceive to be the positives relating to being this person, and what you perceive to be the negatives or challenges.

Please keep in mind that only one of these sheets may apply to you – so you're going to have to rely on your perceptions and beliefs. You're going to work in small groups, and you're going to get to visit each of the sheets. Please don't worry with agreeing about what someone in your group says – and you may also hear or generate some stereotypes; for the purposes of this activity, that's fine! Put it all up on the flipchart sheet. Please just remember that others will need to write after you, so be sure to write small enough for others to add their thoughts, too."

Answer any questions about the activity. Divide the class into six groups, handing each group a different color marker. Assign each group to stand by one of the flipchart sheets. Tell them they will have about 2 minutes at each sheet, but to please not move until you have called time and instructed them to move. Instruct them to read what has been written before they arrived at each sheet to avoid duplication. Tell them they can get started and call time every two minutes having groups rotate to the next newsprint. (16 minutes)

STEP 3: Once all of the groups have visited all the sheets, ask a member of each group to bring the sheets to the front of the room and tape them to the front board. Ask everyone to return to their seats. Once the sheets have all been posted, ask students to comment on what they notice about what's on the sheets.

Note to the Teacher: *What appears is different each time you conduct this activity. Comment on whether there is anything clearly noticeable – such as each sheet has what looks like an equal number of positives as negatives; sheets on which there are very few or no positives or negatives, and so on.*

Go through the sheets, asking for volunteers to help you read through them. Because this is a brainstorming activity and you told the students it would be okay to share stereotypical information, make sure all are read – but be sure to correct any misinformation. (For example, it is common for a negative on the lesbian sheet to be "can't have children." Were that to come up, ask, "Is this true?" Have the class help you clear up these myths with you). (18 minutes)

Note: although each class will generate different responses, here is an example of what the sheets might look like:

Gay Man

+	–
Has nice clothes	Being harassed/hurt
Is always happy	Harder to find a partner
Gets double the wardrobe	HIV
No pregnancy risk with partner	Can't adopt children
	Can't donate blood

If this were the sample, you'd go through each of the responses and whether they are true or false, as well as how the students have learned what they did. For example, "Do all gay men have nice clothes? Where do we get that impression from? What makes someone think that gay men are always happy?" Similarly, "Where does the impression come from that it is harder for a gay man to find a partner?" and "Is HIV only an issue for gay men?"

STEP 4: Ask the class, "So, how did you know all of this? How did you come to the conclusion that [give an example from one of the sheets]? Where did you see or hear that [give another example from a different sheet]?" As students respond, write a word or phrase on the white board representing their answers. Probe for:

- That's how they're always portrayed on television
- That's what I know from being _____ myself
- My [friend/family member] is [gender/orientation]
- My parent(s)/caregiver(s) told me
- My friends always said this
- I looked it up online
- My faith community teaches this

Ask, "Looking at the lists, how much of what we hear about someone who isn't us do you think is true, and how much is what people would like to be true?"

After a few students have answered, ask, "When you glance at them, do you see more similarities or more differences between each of the lists?"

After a few responses say, "Probably the most important thing we can all keep in mind is that no matter who we are – no matter our gender identity or sexual orientation – there are positive aspects and negative aspects. That alone is something we all have in common." (6 minutes)

RECOMMENDED ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING OBJECTIVES AT CONCLUSION OF LESSON:

The mini-lecturette at the beginning of the lesson will fulfill the first learning objective. The gallery walk brainstorming activity and discussion that follows will achieve the second and third learning objectives.

HOMEWORK:

None.