



LGBTQ+ Issues in Social Work Practice Education, Placements and the ASYE

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What is this resource? This [introductory video](#) answers this question. The resource provides support for practice educators and ASYE assessors to support thinking about how LGBTQ+ issues might arise and be worked with on student placements or during the ASYE, including how these issues might come up in supervision. Practice educator assessors may also find the resource helpful as a support for those they support. The resource is not intended as “the answer” but includes discussions on scenarios that might arise as a way of opening up discussion and reflection. The resource is aimed at social work practice educators and ASYE assessors but is also relevant to social work and social care managers. The six videos can be used for self-guided reflection or support by those supporting students or newly qualified social workers in practice. They can be used on PEPS courses or in local authority groups for practice educators or ASYE assessors.

Getting started:

- **Terminology and language** – To support students and ASYE social workers with this work, it is important to understand key terms and use affirmative, anti-discriminatory and respectful language. Stonewall have produced a [comprehensive list of terms](#) for cross-reference. We use the term LGBTQ+ as an umbrella term to represent diverse sexual and gender identities but it is important to remember that there are many perspectives, contestations and inequalities within the LGBTQ+ umbrella – for example two people who appear to hold similar sexual or gender identities may describe or understand LGBTQ+ issues in very different ways. Social workers who do not identify as LGBTQ+ can show solidarity and respect through developing allyship, supporting those who do identify as LGBTQ+ and helping to challenge exclusionary and discriminatory trends.
- **LGBTQ+ history** – understanding that LGBTQ+ identities have been marginalised and criminalised across history is important. King's College London have produced a [short overview of LGBTQ+ history](#). Several countries across the world continue to criminalise LGBTQ+ identities or relationships and many of these laws were introduced through British colonialism. This may be relevant when working with LGBTQ+ people who have migrated to Britain - [ILGA regularly update their map resource](#). History is cyclical and current progress is at risk of being undermined due to re-emergence of anti-LGBTQ+ discourses - see [Stonewall's short video](#). See also [Field \(2018\)](#) on LGBTQ+ history and the implications for critical social work practice.

- **Theory and practice re: LGBTQ+ teaching approaches**
 - **Anti-oppressive practice / Anti-Discriminatory practice** – AOP/ADP recognises the existence of discrimination and therefore relevant to work with LGBTQ+ people. It provides an analysis of power which social work students should be encouraged to think about in terms of work with people who are LGBTQ+. There are risks that AOP/ADP can silence exploration of how people grow up around values about sexuality and gender identity, particularly religious values. This may mean that students and social workers may feel unable to explore any dissonance between personal and professional values arises, which can leak out unhelpfully in practice. [Schaub et al \(2017\)](#) discuss some limitations of AOP/ADP conceptualisation for LGBTQ+ identities in more detail.
 - **Queer Consciousness** - [Martinez et al \(2011\)](#) propose that a queer consciousness approach could be helpful. This provides space for professionals to consider their values around sexuality and gender identity, where these came from and what they now mean for professional practice. To achieve this, interactive and discussion-based supervision, rather than simply sharing/stating AOP/ADP values, are more likely to give students space to explore these issues and values and provide a more transformative learning experience.
 - **Intersectionality** - Sexuality and gender identity are aspects of identity which can be marginalised, but when thinking about working with a particular person or family, do consider aspects of [intersectionality](#), for example the impacts of racism, religious discrimination, ageism and disability discrimination. Thinking about multiple aspects of identity, including LGBTQ+ identities is therefore important.
 - **Rights-Based practice and Advocacy** - Keeping a focus on what people who are LGBTQ+ will value from social work services, what barriers they may additionally face and supporting students to adopt and develop their knowledge of power and discrimination, skills around advocacy and values that are respectful and rights-based will help to shape the discussion. Within all of this, ground rules around respect and the spirit of learning are important to ensure everyone feels safe.
 - **Policy-Awareness** – This rights-based work should be rooted in an awareness of how policies can have disproportionate impacts on LGBTQ+ people. [Gregory and Matthews \(2022\)](#) have commented on the silence in social policy scholarship about impacts on LGBTQ+ people and this could also be argued re: social work practices. [Beckett \(2015\)](#) has also provided evidence of specific impacts of austerity on LGBTQ+ people.
- **LGBTQ+ Professionals** - Be aware that workplaces can be discriminatory or may provide micro-aggressions for LGBTQ+ professionals, as illustrated in [this first-person account](#) published by The Guardian. This might mean that professionals may guard their identity from colleagues, managers or people who use services. It is worth reviewing how inclusive your workplace feels and how heterosexuality and cisgender identity is woven into the fabric of the workplace (agency literature, posters in waiting areas, LGBTQ+ staff network or senior representation, etc?)
- **Working in Organisations** - Many organisations have their own Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) policies. Students and ASYE social workers should be encouraged to research and read these local policies as this may help to promote more joined up EDI work as well as intra-allyship across different communities within the workplace and with those who use services. Within this work there may be potential for inclusive workplace practices, but there are also risks of LGBTQ+ and other colleagues to feel commodified for their difference and expected to take up advocacy roles. EDI work remains everybody's business. As LGBTQ+ work is rolled out, organisations and

teams may find defensive or hostile responses arising, so strategic oversight of local implementation is important.

Supporting students who identify as LGBTQ+

- LGBTQ+ students and newly qualified colleagues face all the usual power dynamics of being assessed but may face additional challenges. This may occur due to norms that exclude or silence their identities by treating heterosexuality or cisgender identity as the assumed 'normality'. This is referred to as heteronormativity. It can play out through assumptions, language, apparently innocuous personal questions or practices that include gendered language. In some instances, however, LGBTQ+ social work workplaces can be directly homophobic, biphobic or transphobic and people can experience micro-aggressions. Practice Educators should be prepared to work affirmatively with all students including those who are LGBTQ+.
- In [Video 1](#) we discuss supporting a social work student / ASYE social worker who is uncertain about coming out in the workplace.
- In [Video 2](#) we discuss supporting a social work student / ASYE social worker who encounters discriminatory language in the workplace.
- In [Video 3](#) we discuss supporting a social work student / ASYE social worker who identifies as trans and is about to join the team. [Inch \(2017\)](#) argues that social work students are less likely to feel confident about practice with trans people, so this is a particularly important area for practice educators to familiarise themselves.
- When watching the videos, think about what your initial response to the scenario would be and whether we captured all of this in our discussion. If using it with a student, you could also think about how the video

LGBTQ+ Issues and Religion on Placement

- In [Video 4](#) we discuss issues relating to students or ASYE social workers who have religious beliefs and how this might interact with LGBTQ+ issues, using a LGBTQ+ practice educator as part of the scenario.
- [Schaub et al \(2017\)](#) discuss the ways in which social workers can struggle with aspects of sexuality (including on the basis of religion) and this can lead to compartmentalising personal and professional values. Stonewall have produced a [short video resource about religion and sexuality](#) from the perspective of LGBTQ+ people of colour.
- You may also find it helpful to refer to the court Judgment in [R\(Ngole\) v University of Sheffield \[2019\], EWCA Civ 1127](#) which links with this topic and fitness to practice processes. [Mason et al \(2022\)](#) provide a critical commentary on the implications of this case for practice.

Supporting practice with LGBTQ+ people who use services

- In [Video 5](#) we discuss how practice educators might support students to work with people who are LGBTQ+ when undertaking a carers assessment with a gay couple.
- In [Video 6](#) we discuss how practice educators or ASYE assessors might support a student or newly qualified social worker to work with an adult with learning disabilities who identifies as LGBTQ+ and has been called names in the community.
- Be familiar with issues that people who are LGBTQ+ may face when accessing social work or social care. This is important in terms of preparedness for student or ASYE questions and being clear about the importance of readiness for this work. Community Care have produced [a blog on this](#). The House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee have also produced [a report on this topic](#).

- SCIE produced a [range of videos](#) that could be used as supervision aids to prepare students and ASYE social workers for working with different LGBTQ+ service use experiences. Research in Practice have produced [this guidance on LGBTQ+ issues in Children's Services](#) and Skills for Care have produced [this framework for LGBTQ+ issues in later life](#).

Additional Suggestions for Supervision

- At the beginning of any supervisory relationship, it is important to acknowledge differences and similarities. When doing this, discuss how would your identities have an impact on how you might appreciate the lives of people who have different characteristics, including LGBTQ+ people. This conversation will change based on who is in the relationship, but this can open up conversation about experience, understanding, privilege and where we get our understandings from, for example friends or family members who are LGBTQ+. This might help with getting to know one another, as well as to highlight our starting points for this work.
- Acknowledge and discuss values we bring to work with LGBTQ+ people. A provocative question is suggested by [Martinez et al \(2011\)](#), namely "Do you worry about the privileges you are afforded on the basis of your sexuality?". Whilst this question relates to heterosexual privilege and should be extended to include gender identity and cisgender privilege, it might be a useful exercise to consider the heteronormative nature of society and the ways in which there is often a poor 'fit' for LGBTQ+ people based on the norms of society.
- Think about assessment practices – is heterosexuality and cisgender identity assumed or are there ways in which LGBTQ+ people's different ways of organising their lives are accommodated? In what way might sexuality or gender identity structure a person's experience of participating in their community? Could sexuality or gender identity structure, as examples (that you can adapt) an adult's experience of care needs or a young person's experience of education? Are there examples of this that you can share from your own experience?

References and Further academic reading (may be paywalled but available by students and PEPS students via their university libraries):

Beckett, C. (2015) Assessing the Cost of Cuts in Welfare Spending for Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People, *Social Policy and Society*, 14(1), 29-41, doi:10.1017/S1474746414000062

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Schaub, J., Willis, P. and Dunk-West (2017) Accounting for Self, Sex and Sexuality in UK Social Workers' Knowledge Base: Findings from an Exploratory Study, *British Journal of Social Work*, 47(2), 427-446, doi:10.1093/bjsw/bcw015

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