Celebrating gender and sexuality diversity at school: Inclusive practices for strong school cultures

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Part 1: Some key terminology: Understanding "gender" and "sexuality"

Some starting concepts and terminology

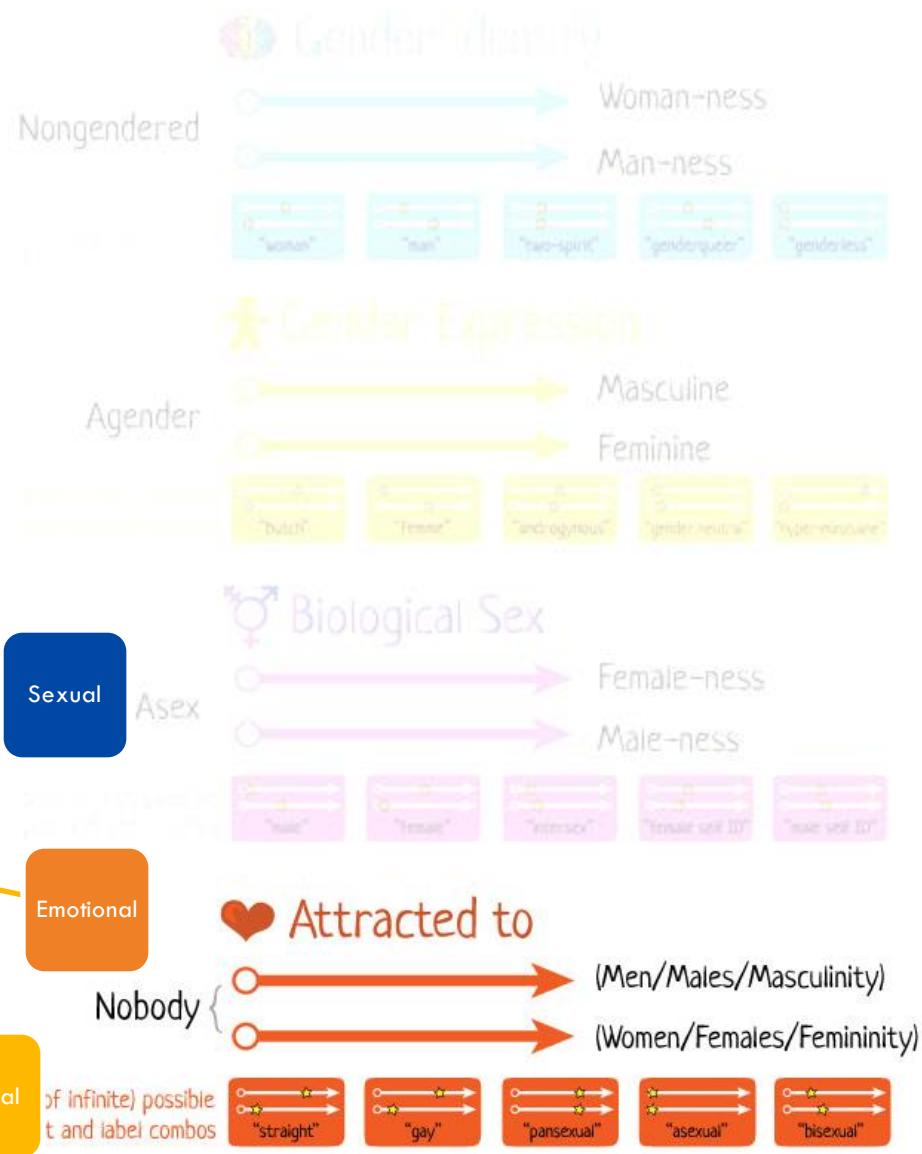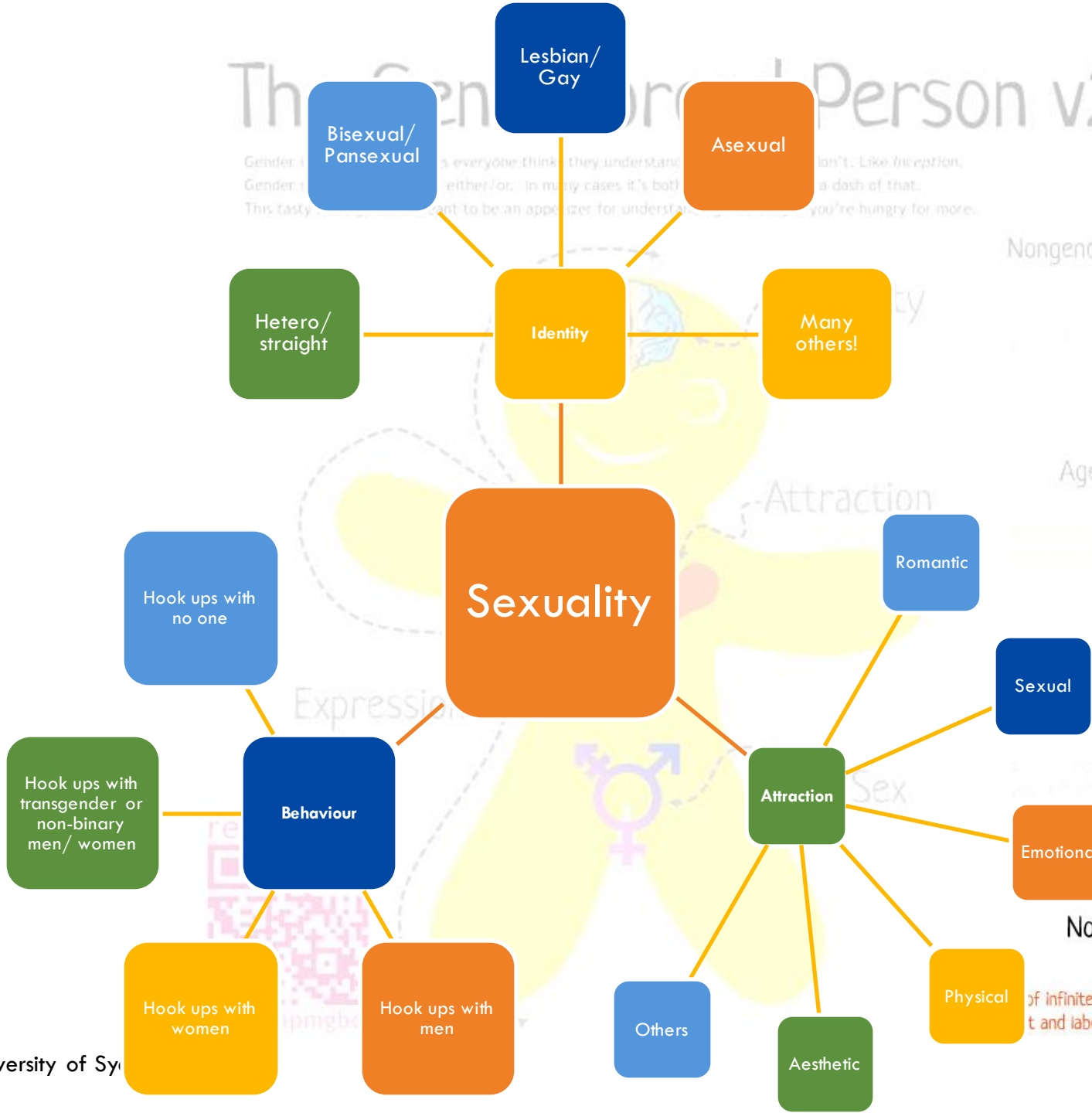# LGBTIQA+

Lesbian   Gay

Bisexual   Transgender   Intersex
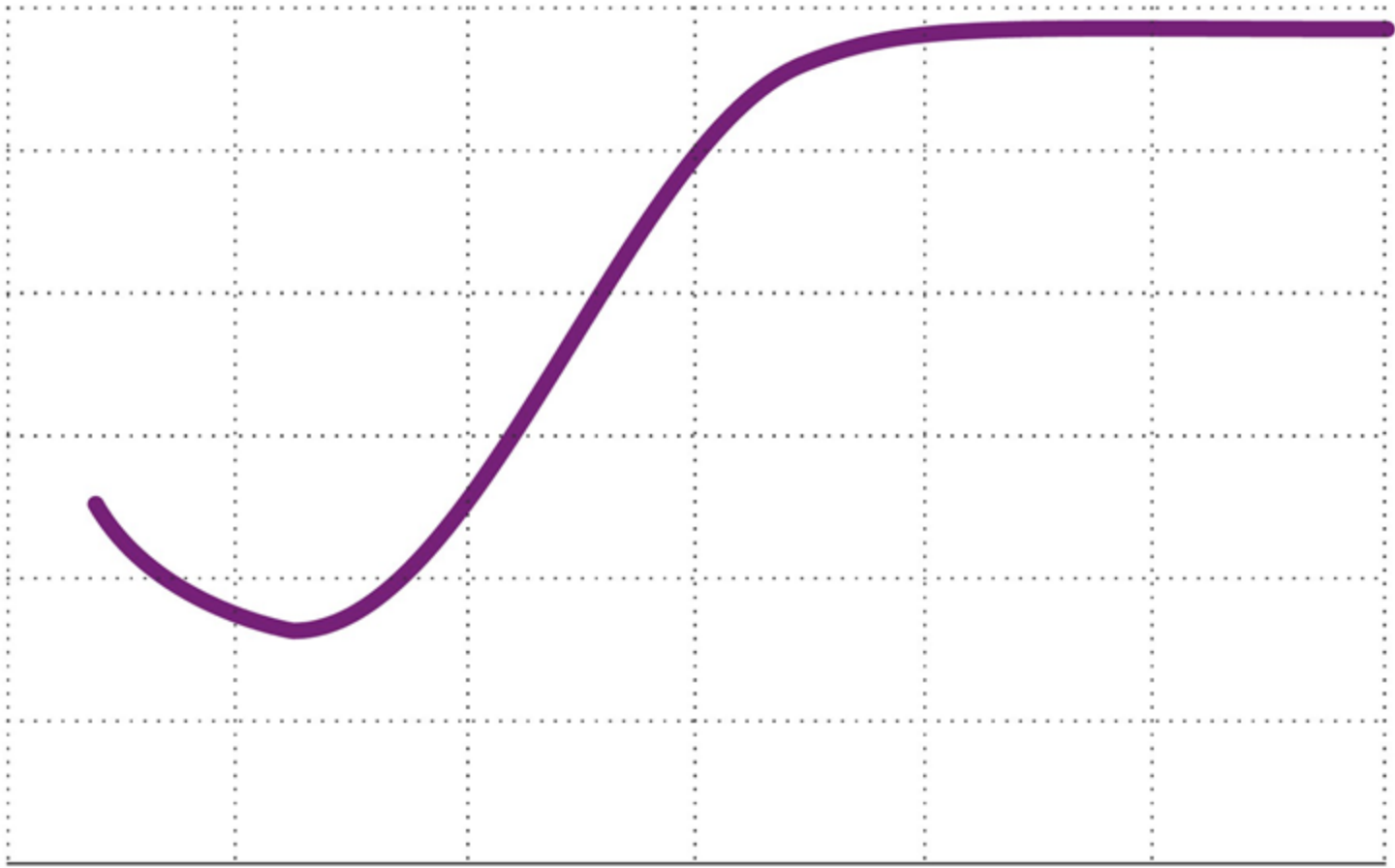
Queer (or Questioning)   Asexual   ...and others

QUILTBAG

The Gendered Person v2.0

it's pronounced METROsexual

Gender: everyone thinks they understand it but it doesn't. Like Inception.
Gender: it's not either/or: in many cases it's both, and a dash of that.
This tasty ... want to be an appetizer for understanding ... you're hungry for more.

Sexuality

Identity
- Lesbian/Gay
- Bisexual/Pansexual
- Asexual
- Hetero/straight
- Many others!

Behaviour
- Hook ups with no one
- Hook ups with transgender or non-binary men/women
- Hook ups with women
- Hook ups with men

Attraction
- Romantic
- Sexual
- Emotional
- Physical
- Aesthetic
- Others

Gender Identity
Nongendered — Woman-ness / Man-ness

Gender Expression
Agender — Masculine / Feminine

Biological Sex
Asex — Female-ness / Male-ness

Attracted to
Nobody { (Men/Males/Masculinity) / (Women/Females/Femininity)

"straight" "gay" "pansexual" "asexual" "bisexual"
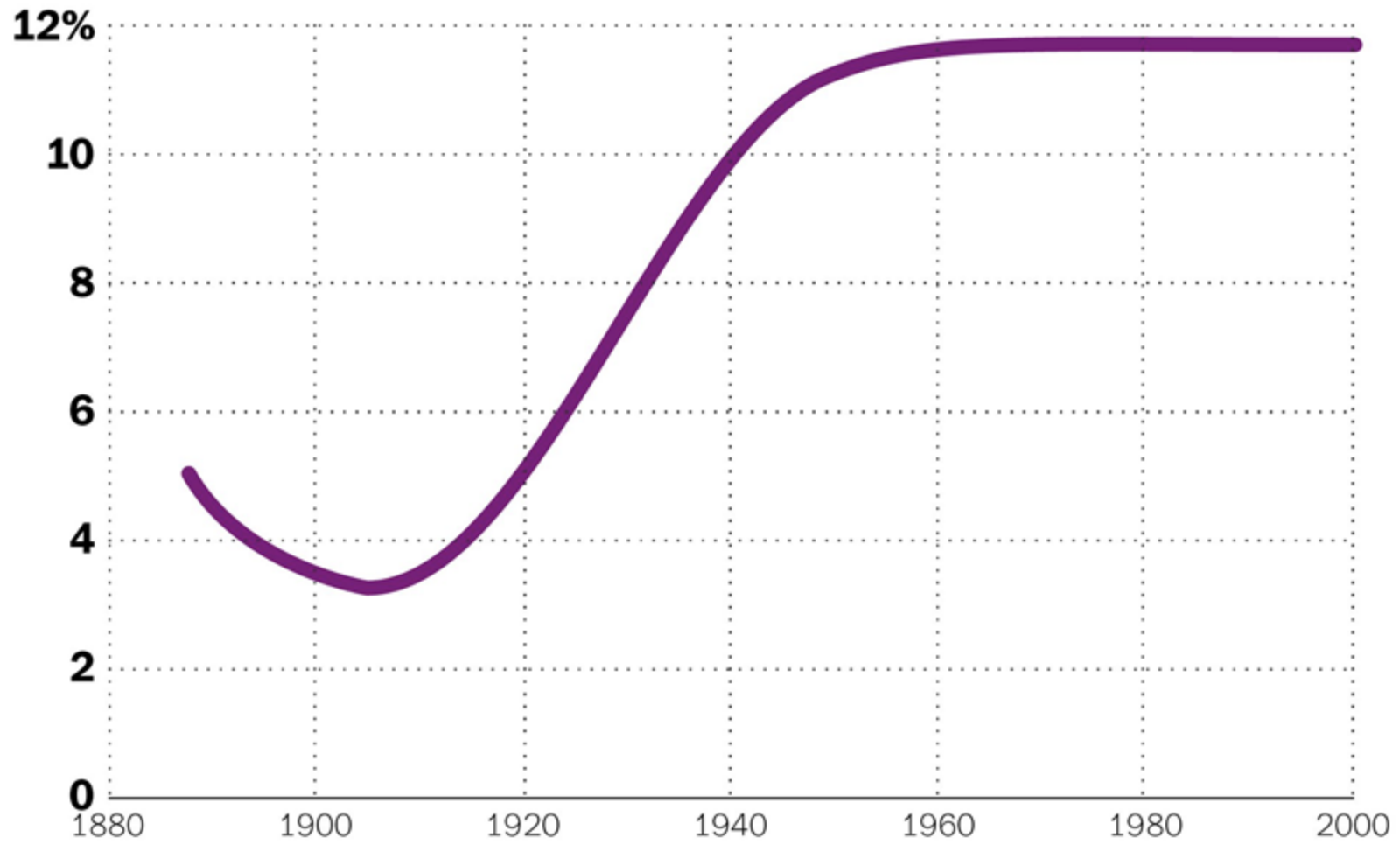
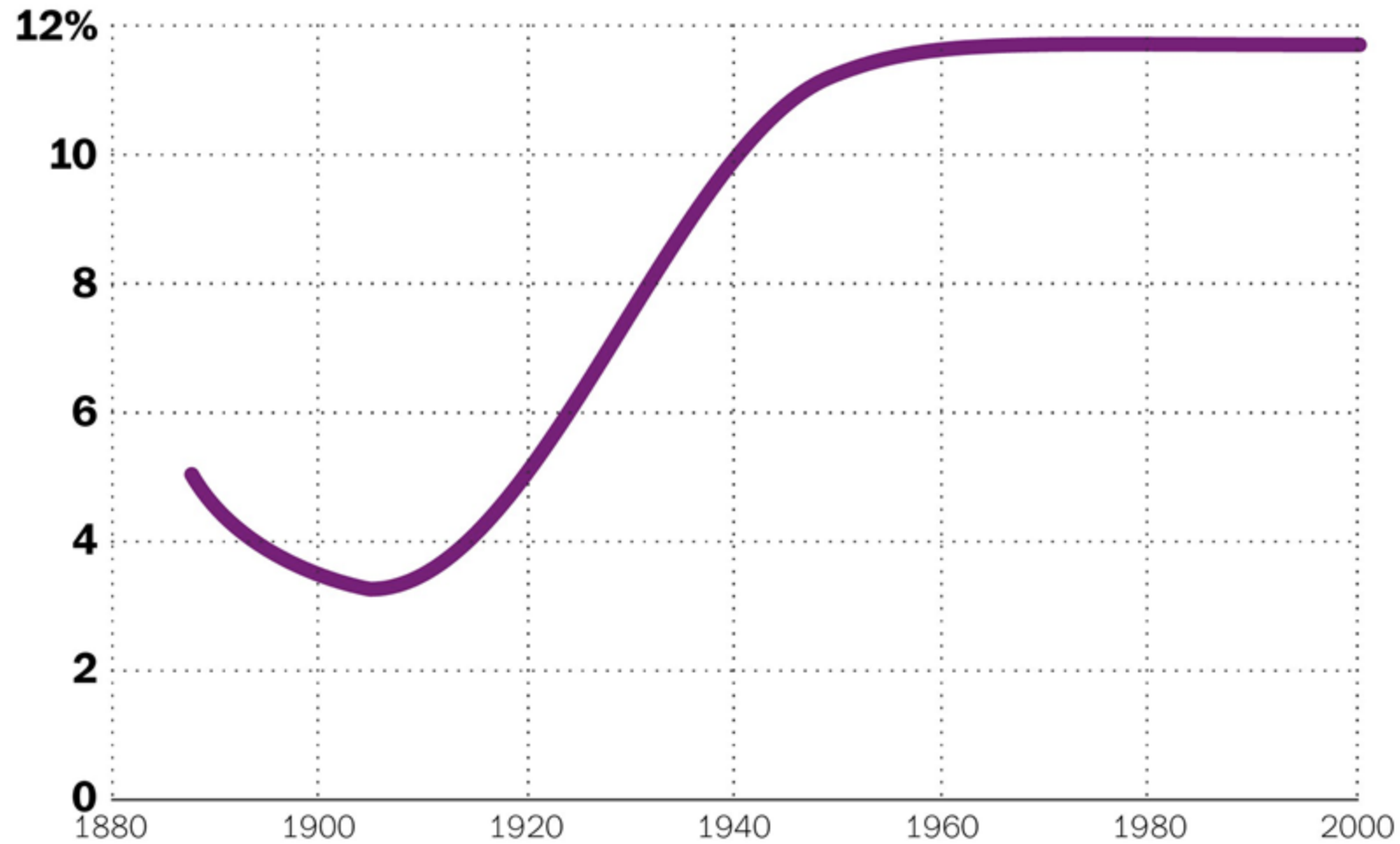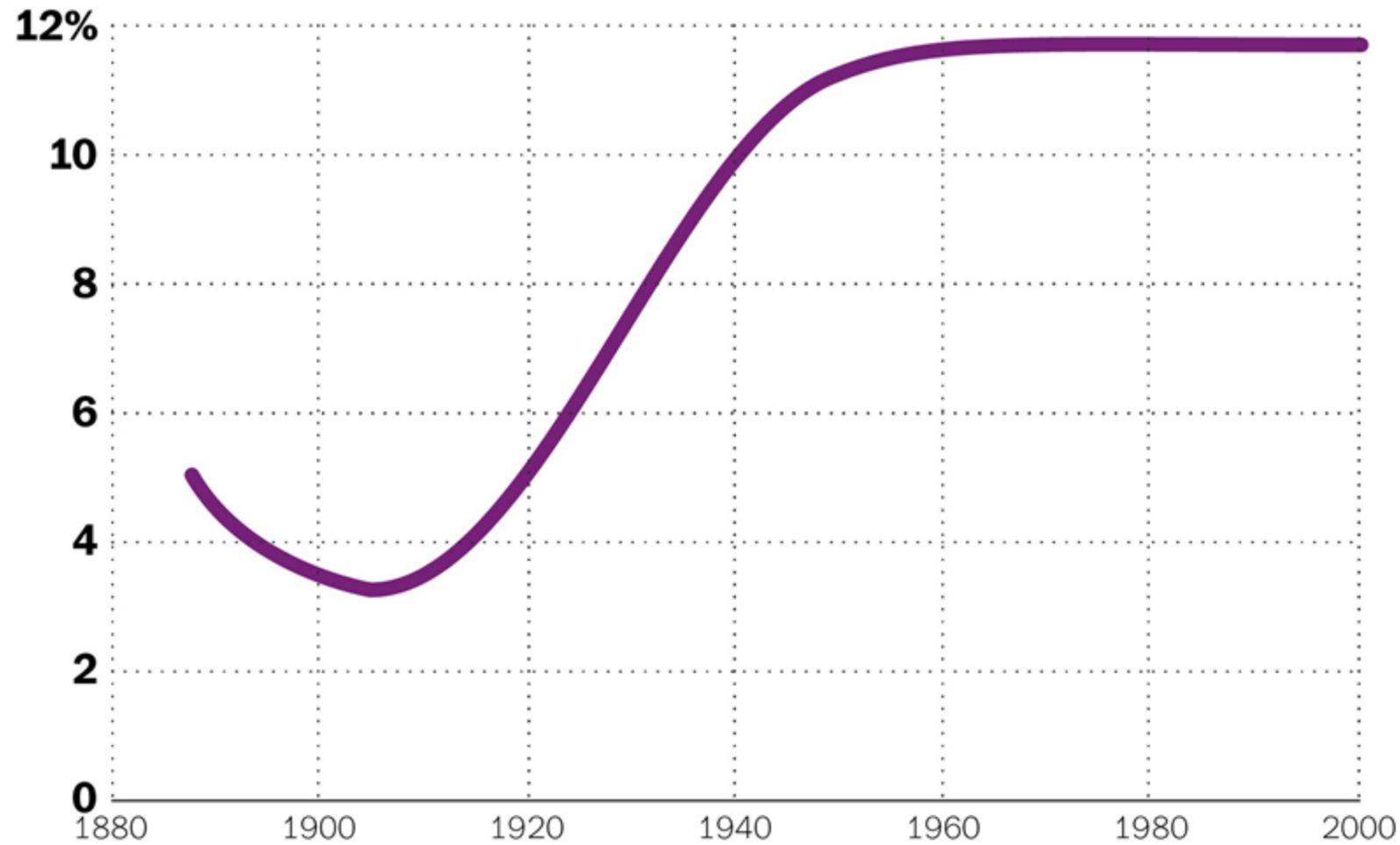# Part 2: Gender, sexuality, society and culture
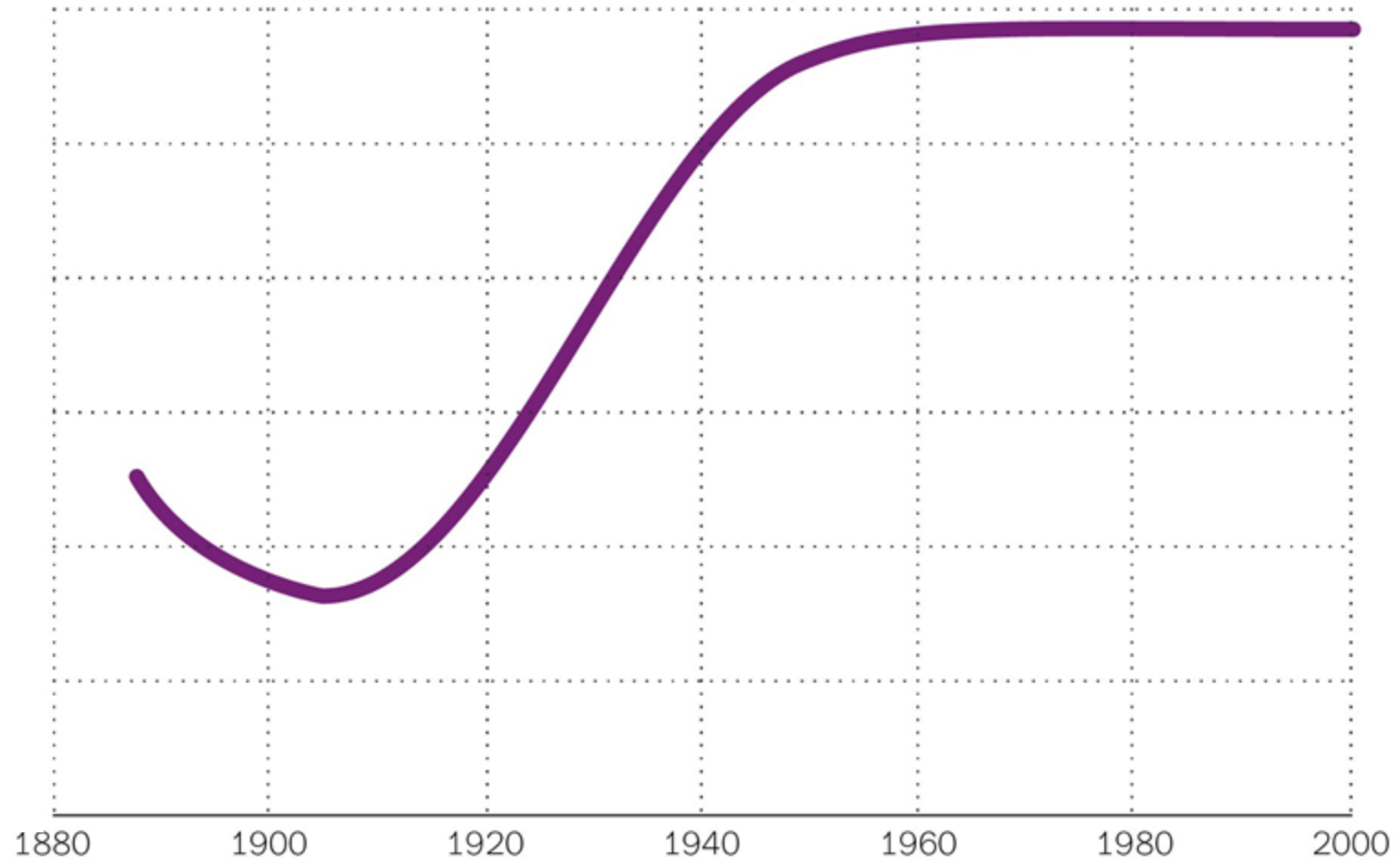
The history of left-handedness

Rate of left-handedness among Americans, by year of birth

The history of left-handedness
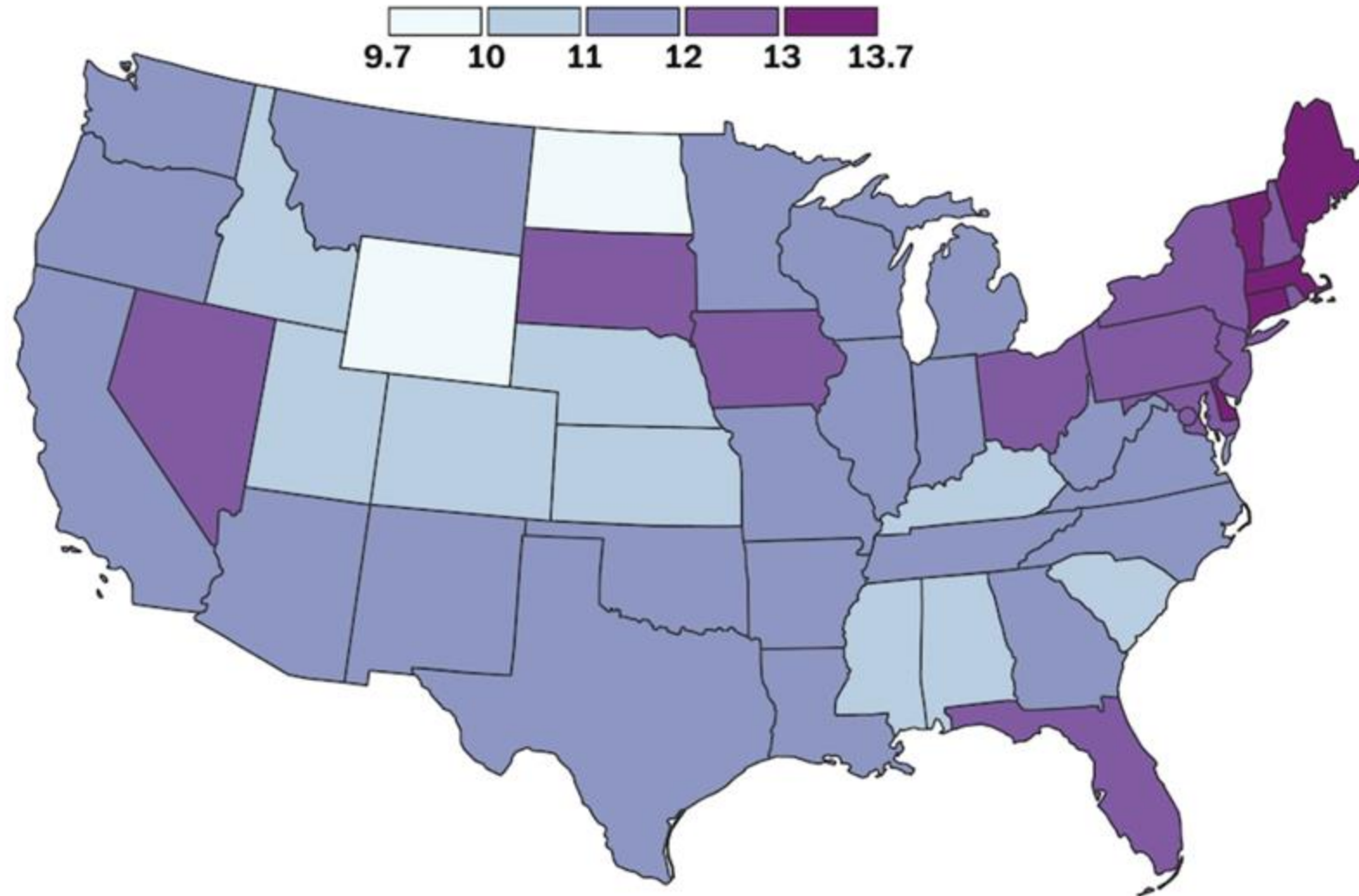
Rate of left-handedness among Americans, by year of birth

Source: Survey data reported in "The History and Geography of Human Handedness" (2009)
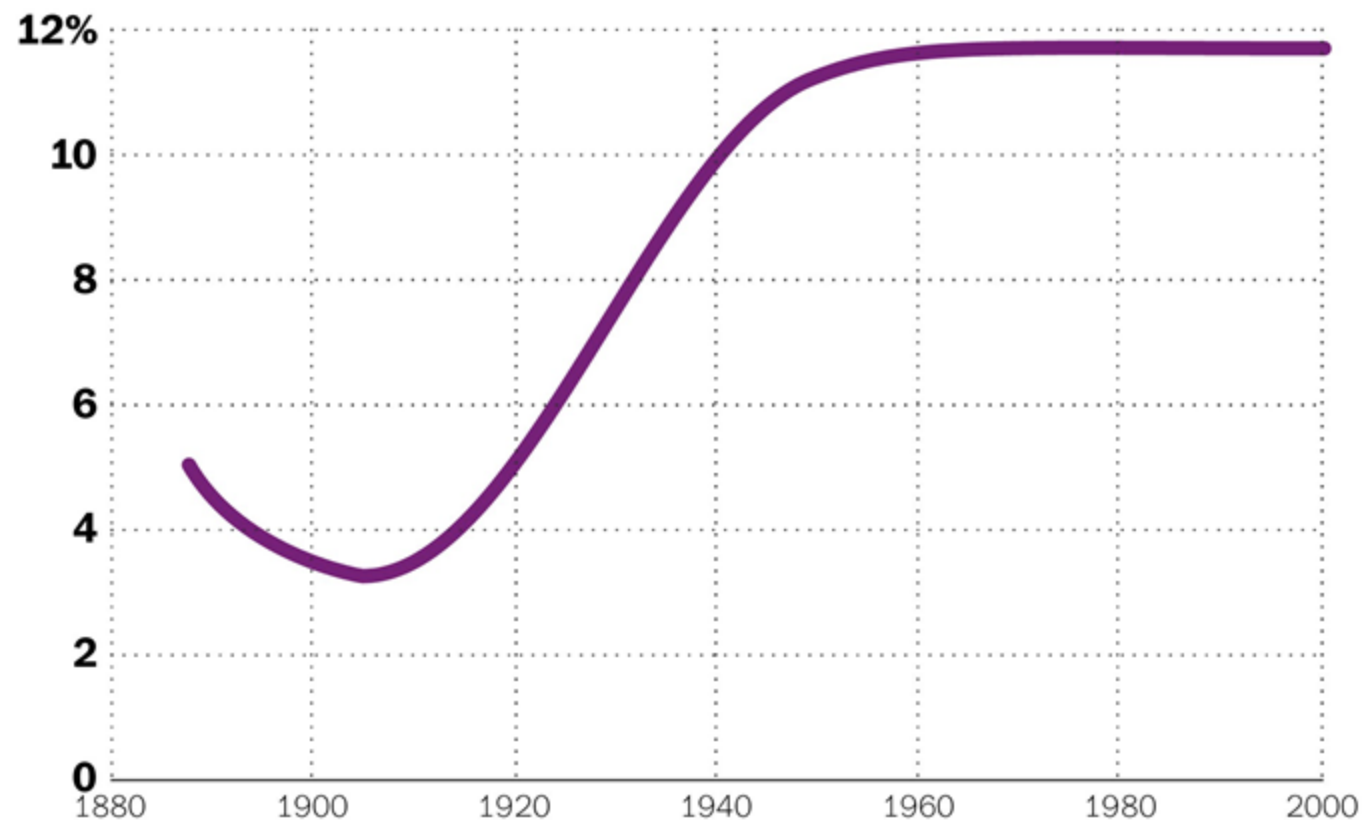
The geography of left-handedness

Percent of white residents born after 1950 who are left-handed

The history of left-handedness
Rate of left-handedness among Americans, by year of birth

WAPO.ST/WONKBLOG
Source: Survey data reported in "The History and Geography of Human Handedness" (2009)

5.6 Percent of U.S. Adults Identify as LGBT
Share of American adults who identify as LGBT, by birth year

Gen Z (1997-2002)   Millennials (1981-1996)   Generation X (1965-1980)
Baby boomers (1946-1964)   Traditionalists (before 1946)

LGBT share of U.S population in 2020
5.6%

2014   2017   2020

15.9
9.1
3.8
2.0 1.3
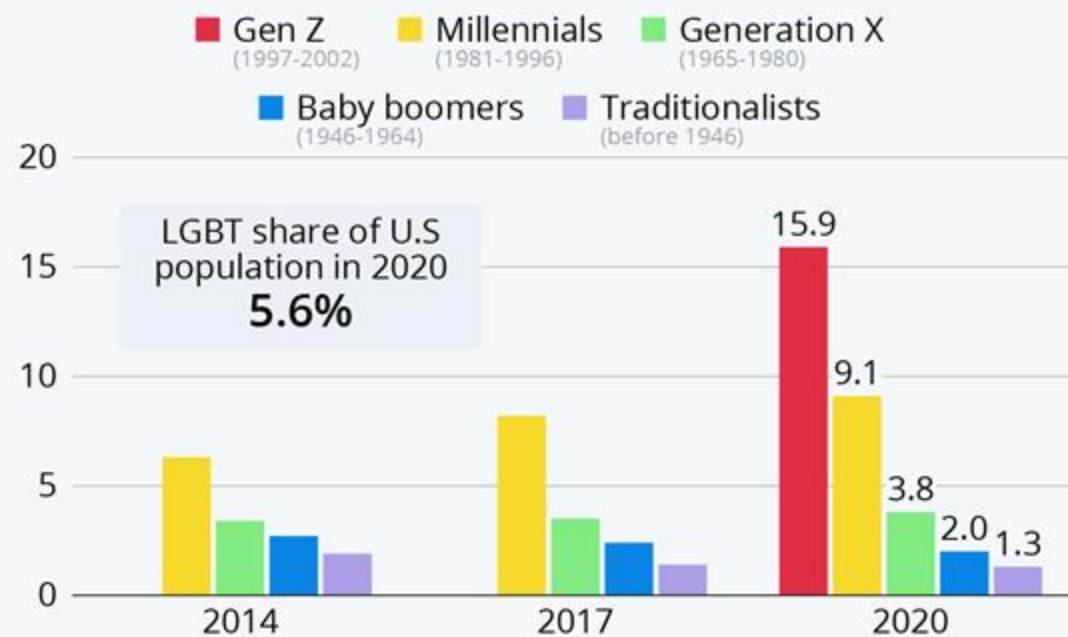
Source: Gallup

statista

So, what mediates gender and sexuality diversity?

- "Like gender, sexuality is political. It is organised into systems of power, which **reward and encourage some individuals and activities, while punishing and suppressing others**" (Rubin, 1984, p. 309)

- Homophobia is gender and/ or sexuality policing (normalising judgement) in action- and works hand in hand with heteronormativity

- 'The term **heteronormativity** refers to the **dominant social practices associated with heterosexuality**'. It '...describes a system in which only two sexes are recognised, usually as opposites, and these sexes are mapped into gender roles'. (Finkelstein and Goodwin, 2005, p.111-12)

- "… the institutions, structures of understanding and practical orientations that make **heterosexuality seem not only coherent—that is, organized as a sexuality—but also privileged.**" (Berlant & Warner 2000, p. 312):

heteronormativity

Homophobia
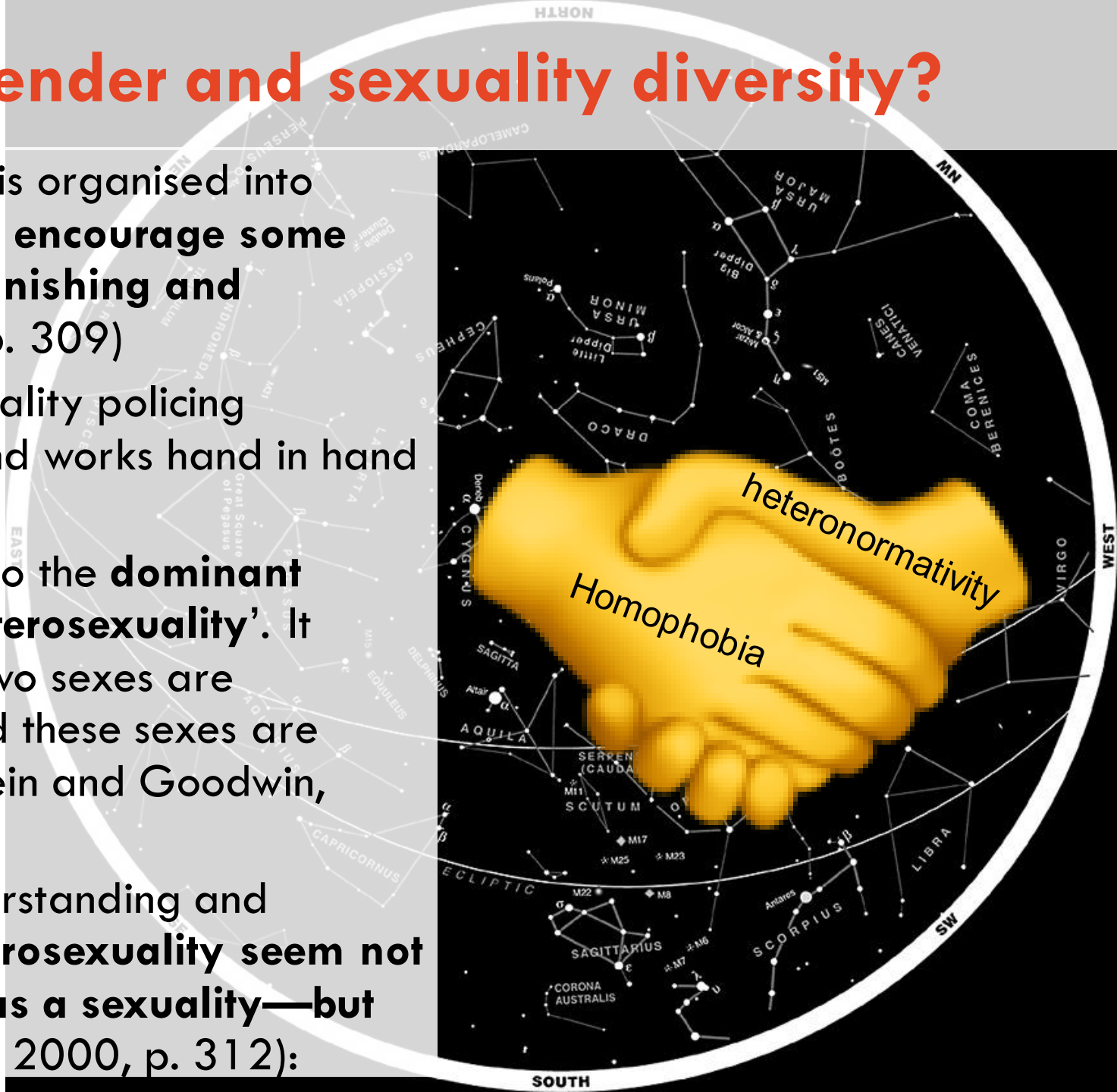
- Learned norms, informed by institutions, mean that we are often conscious of 'performing' (Butler, 1990) our sex, gender and sexuality to ensure that we remain within them.

- Those that fall outside can face intense scrutiny from social, educational, religious and political institutions.

- Foucault refers to these processes as '**discipline**' (for not meeting the standard) and '**panopticism**' (self-regulating to always perform how we 'should' be, as we feel like we're being 'surveilled')
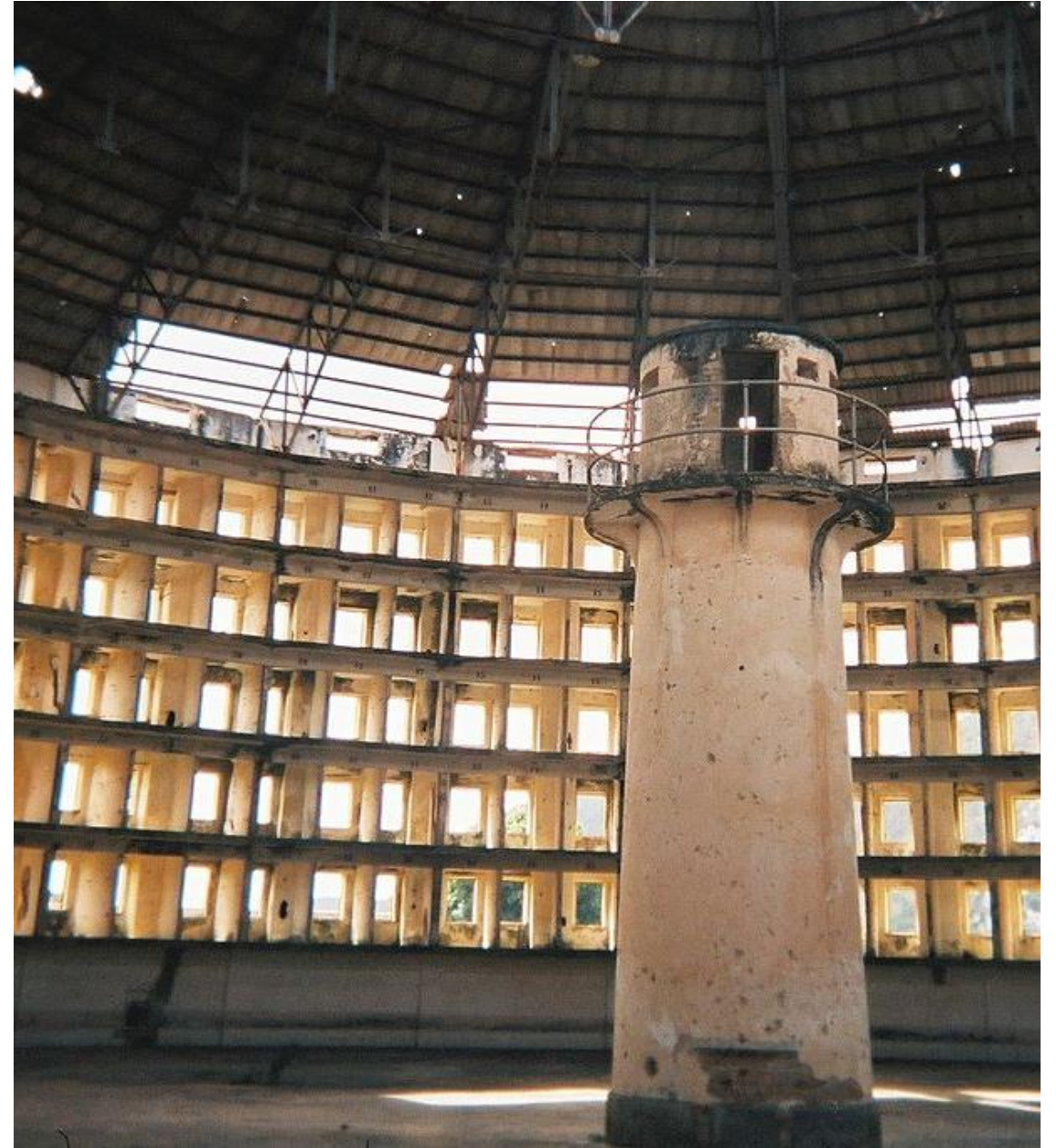
"I think everyone who does gay and lesbian studies is haunted by the suicides of adolescents. To us, the hard statistics come easily… [that queer young people are between five and eleven times] more likely to attempt suicide, and accomplish it; that [16% of LGBTI young people have attempted suicide; that 35% of transgender people have attempted suicide]; that minority queer adolescents are even more at risk.

This knowledge is indelible, but not astonishing, to anyone with a reason to be attuned to the profligate way **this culture has of denying and despoiling queer energies and lives."**

(Sedgwick, 1993, p.1 & [recent statistics from] National LGBTI Health Alliance, 2019)

What is hurting sexuality and gender diverse children and young people?

– Experiencing homophobia, biphobia and/ or transphobia,

– Feeling unable to talk about their emotions

– Feeling negative about their queer identity

– Feeling distress about keeping a queer identity hidden

Many of these emerge from **sexual and gender norms that make young people feel that something is wrong with them**, without being told or abused directly. Not all of these happen at school- they can happen at home, in their friendship groups, at sport/ clubs, in public and/ or online.

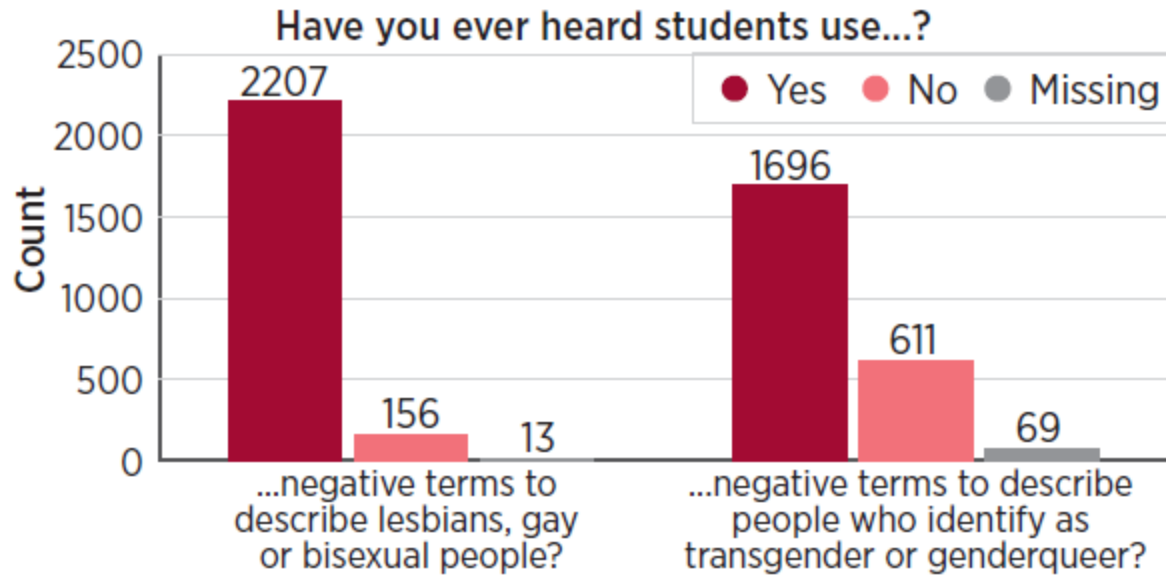**Figure 19:** Homophobic/Transphobic Language Use at School (*N* = 2,376)

Have you ever heard students use...?

Legend: ● Yes ● No ● Missing

- 2207 / 156 / 13 — ...negative terms to describe lesbians, gay or bisexual people?
- 1696 / 611 / 69 — ...negative terms to describe people who identify as transgender or genderqueer?

Figure 20: Frequency of Reported Homophobic Language at School (*n* = 2,207)

"Within the last month, how many times have you heard students use this kind of language at school?"

- Almost every day: 36.7%
- Several times per week: 19.9%
- Once or twice per week: 20.8%
- Once or twice: 19.8%
- Never: 2.4%
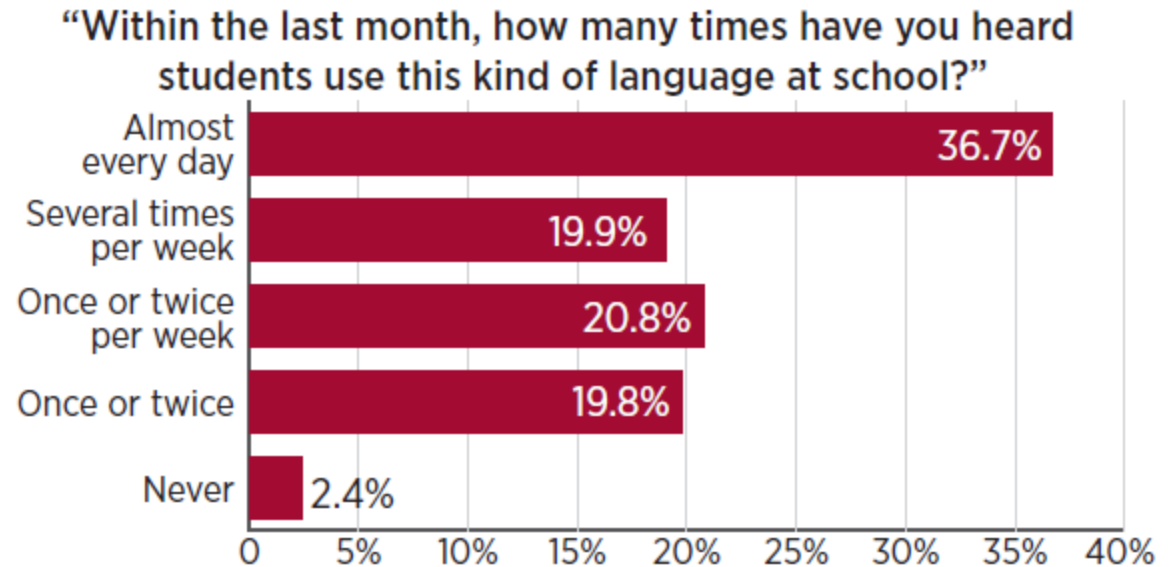
Note: Missing data (0.4%) were excluded from this graph.

Ullman, J. (2021), *Free to Be…Yet?: The second national study of Australian high school students who identify as gender and sexuality diverse.* Centre for Educational Research, School of Education, Western Sydney University, Penrith.
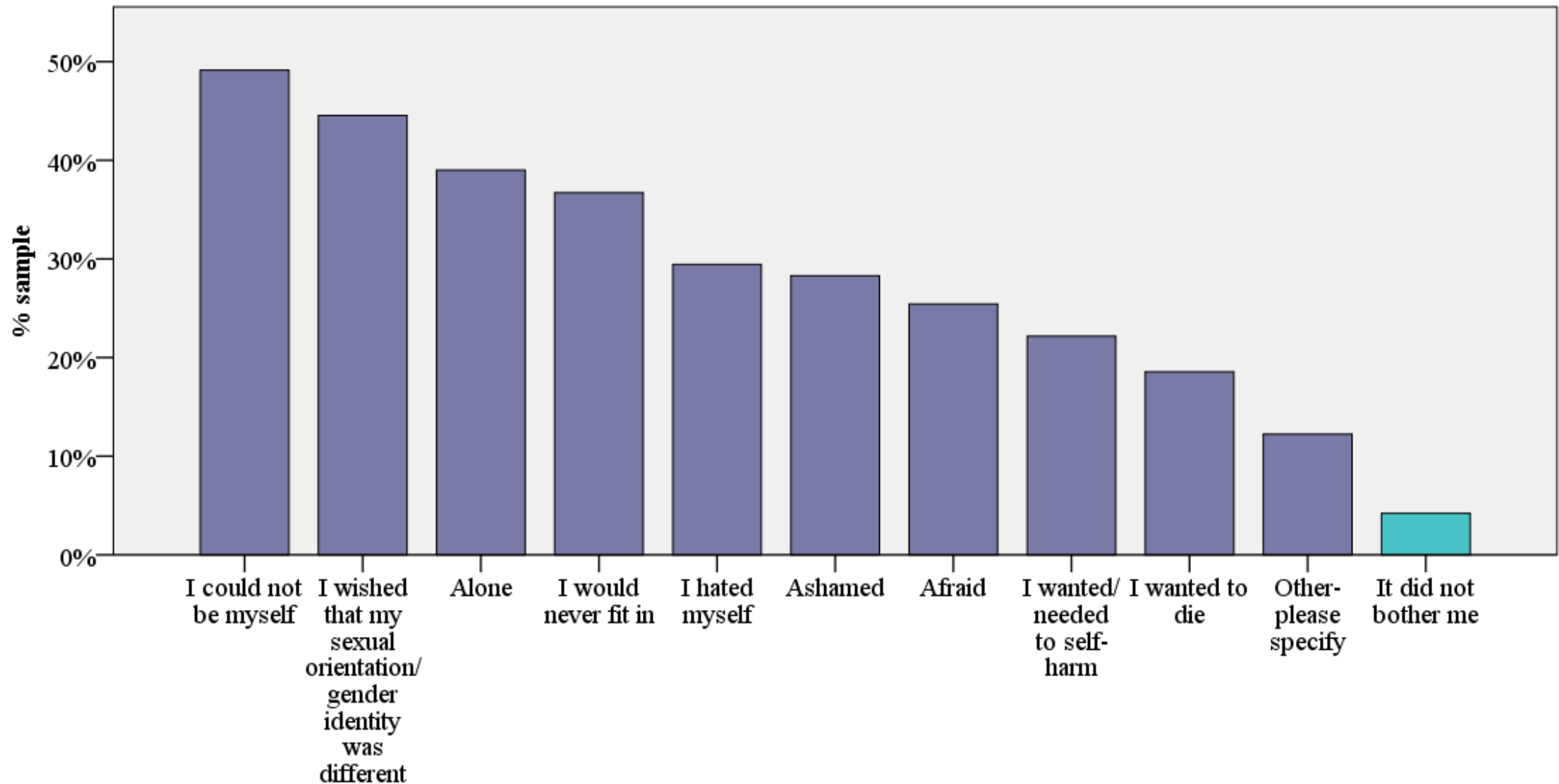
(see Mcdermott, Hughes & Rawlings, 2016)

Why look at schools?

"schools serve as sexualising and normalising institutions. Classrooms, hallways, libraries, parking lots, gym locker rooms, playgrounds and cafeterias have long been noted as central *places* in the data on queer young people's school experiences. Less attention has been paid to those places as not only sites but also particular kinds of *spaces* that enable some types of interactions, preclude others, and are made and undone by the interactions unfolding inside them" (Fields & Payne, 2016, p.1)

Part 3: Gender and sexuality norms at school

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Problematic behaviours towards others including sexual harassment and assault (Plummer, 2020; Sundaram, 2014)

Decreased sense of school connectedness for all students (Snapp et al, 2015)

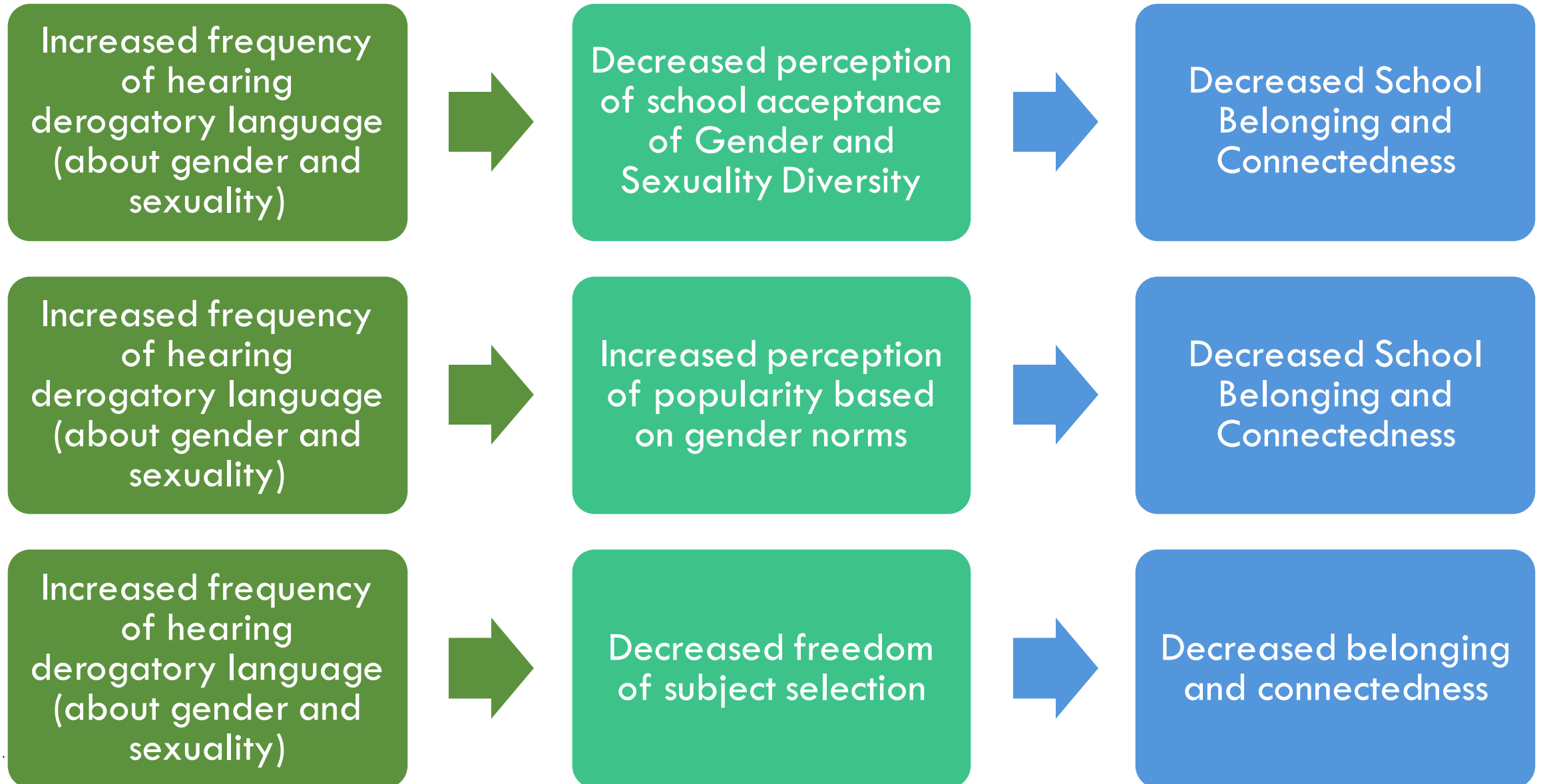**Decreased sense of wellbeing and mental health for LGBTIQ+ students** (Ullman, 2021)

Outcomes of reductive school cultures of gender and sexuality

Poorer academic performance (Snapp et al, 2015, Ullman, 2021)

Under-reporting of violence at and around school (Rawlings, 2017, 2019)

Homophobic bullying/ teasing (regardless of sexuality) (Pascoe, 2007; Rawlings, 2020; Odenbring & Johnson, 2021)

corridor cultures

Emerging findings: Derogatory language

Increased frequency of hearing derogatory language (about gender and sexuality)	→ Decreased perception of school acceptance of Gender and Sexuality Diversity	→ Decreased School Belonging and Connectedness
Increased frequency of hearing derogatory language (about gender and sexuality)	→ Increased perception of popularity based on gender norms	→ Decreased School Belonging and Connectedness
Increased frequency of hearing derogatory language (about gender and sexuality)	→ Decreased freedom of subject selection	→ Decreased belonging and connectedness

Part 4: Institutional Practices

Think about your own school. Choose just one of these elements, and think about how this might have some intended or unintended messages about gender or sexuality for students.

Co-curricular activities

Material spaces and objects

School History

Language and interactions

Rules or policies

Curriculum

Rituals, ceremonies or routines

Symbols

Part 5: Apprehensions

Silences

- Schools don't often talk about gender and sexuality explicitly- however they do give a lot of meanings (as do other institutions) about the 'normal' configuration of them

- Students hear messages about what is normal/ 'right' through the hidden curriculum: text/ problem choices, school ceremonies, events, spaces, materials, identities and policies, and consequently the opposite as well.

- In most societies and schools, heterosexuality and being cisgender are socially rendered as preferred, leading to those who don't identify as such often feeling ashamed, alone and afraid.

Fear and care

Palmer (2007, p.62) suggests that we are **distanced** from our colleagues, students and subjects by fear.

*We collaborate with the structures of separation because they promise to protect us against one of the deepest fears at the heart of being human—the fear of having a **live encounter** with alien "otherness," whether the other is a student, a colleague, a subject, or a self-dissenting voice within.*

Finding our fears: Activity

— Discomfort, uncertainty, worry and other feelings can lead to self-censoring or institutional avoidance about gender and sexuality in programming, lesson planning and material selection.

— This results in silence on diverse genders and sexualities.

— In this activity, we will focus on apprehensions, fears and worries when talking about sexuality or gender identity in the classroom.

— Write down your 'fear' on a piece of paper.

— Please don't name names or include identifying information.

The difference one person can make

- Transgender and gender diverse students who do not feel supported by teachers within their school "are over four times more likely to leave school if they experience discrimination than those [students] with teacher support" (Smith, et al, 2014, p. 12)

Marcus: [My school counsellor] kind of knew exactly what to do, and how to deal with it and that sort of stuff. She helped me sort of, like make my first appointment [with a psychologist] and deal with all the stuff around that. It was cool. … Apparently they did that for a few other kids that went to [the psychology service] too. Like if you gave them consent, they'd talk. And they'd make sure that everything was going okay, and they'd see how they could help you at school and all that sort of stuff. Like **it was amazing.**

- (Evans and Rawlings, 2021)