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A content analysis of LGBTQ+ representation in Irish SPHE (Social, Personal and Health Education) textbooks

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Positionality Statement

I am an Irish, non-binary lesbian who grew up in a rural area. I felt unsafe being out during my teenage years due to an unsupportive school environment. I completed my undergraduate degree in Psychology at the University of Galway. I moved to the Netherlands to pursue my master's degree in Children's Studies and Education (Research) at Leiden University, where I focused on educational sciences. My experiences from my high school years motivate my research questions, as I felt that in school, LGBTQ+ issues were either ignored entirely or, when they were discussed, they were misinformed or reflected the teacher's prejudice. I acknowledge that this is a personal bias I have with the topic. However, I think my identity as a lesbian, as well as someone who does not fit in the traditional gender binary, may give me additional insight into how LGBTQ+ content is portrayed, as I can connect it to my personal experience. My goal with this research is to examine the LGBTQ+ content in the current Irish SPHE curriculum, with the aim of offering recommendations for future improvements if necessary. Additionally, I aim to determine whether the Irish SPHE curriculum can serve as an example or guide for other curricula seeking to include more LGBTQ+ representation or content.

Declaration on use of GenAI

I declare that while writing my thesis I have only used GenAI in accordance with the rules in the Masterproject Prospectus

Abstract

The current study examines LGBTQ+ representation in Irish SPHE textbooks in comparison to heterosexual representation, analysing the proportion of LGBTQ+ content to heterosexual content and exploring the themes present in both types of content. This will be achieved by coding 10 Irish SPHE textbooks that incorporate the new 2023 curriculum and dividing the content on sexuality and relationships into 'hits'. The hits were then coded by the sexuality and themes they represent. The results indicated that there was an overrepresentation of queer-only hits across the textbooks. However, this changed to an overrepresentation of heterosexual-only hits when chapters on sexuality were removed. In addition how sexualities were represented thematically were in line with heteronormative hidden theory, where heterosexual content was overrepresented in sexual education, dating and relationships and family themes. In contrast, LGBTQ+ was overrepresented in discrimination, mental health, and sexuality themes. Overall, the new SPHE textbooks set a positive example for LGBTQ+ representation at the secondary level by incorporating a substantial amount of LGBTQ+ content and showcasing a diverse range of LGBTQ+ identities and experiences. The textbooks employ a third-person open approach to teaching

sexuality, enabling readers to incorporate their own experiences into the text, thereby potentially fostering a more inclusive learning experience. However, the findings indicate a need for continuous representation of LGBTQ+ content throughout SPHE textbooks in everyday contexts, alongside the specified content on explicit LGBTQ+ issues. Additionally, there is a need for greater intersex representation and more comprehensive LGBTQ+ sexual education.

Introduction

Over the past decade, there have been positive advancements in LGBTQ+ rights internationally. Ireland, in particular, has made progress with LGBTQ+ rights by introducing legislation that protects LGBTQ+ people, such as marriage rights and gender recognition acts (Youth Work Ireland Tipperary, 2022). However, homophobia in Ireland persists, with a recent national study showing that in 2024, LGBTQ+ people do not feel safe, and there is still more progress to be made on legislation (Higgins et al., 2024). Heterosexuality is still the norm, and LGBTQ+ people do not see themselves represented. This also occurs in schools where textbooks offer students an opportunity to see themselves represented and can be used as a tool to normalize the presence of LGBTQ+ people in daily life and also act as a support for LGBTQ+ students who may be feeling isolated (Naseem et al., 2016). In 2023, a new SPHE curriculum was introduced to be more inclusive and informative of the LGBTQ+ community. This study will conduct a content analysis of the new Irish SPHE textbooks (post-2022) to examine the representation of LGBTQ+ content and compare it with the heterosexual content.

Terminology

In order to ensure clarity in this content analysis, it is important to first define key terms related to sexual and gender identities. LGBTQ+ is an acronym for Lesbian (*women who experience same gender attraction*), Gay (*Men who experience same gender attraction*), Bisexual (*people who are attracted to more than one gender*), Transgender (*People who do not identify with the gender they were assigned at birth*), Queer (*an umbrella term used for anyone who does identify as non-heterosexual and non-cisgender*) and the '+' refers to other non-heterosexual or non-cisgender identities such as asexual (*someone who does not experience sexual attraction*), intersex (*someone whose biology does not fit into the male/female binary*), or non-binary (*someone who does not identify as either male or female*), and genderfluid (*someone who does not have a single unchanging gender identity*) (Stonewall, 2024). Cisgender refers to someone who identifies as the gender they were assigned at birth, and heterosexuality refers to when a man is attracted to a woman and a woman is attracted to a man (Stonewall, 2024).

International advancements

In the 21st century, the perspective on LGBTQ+ people has shifted in a positive direction, with 38 countries now legalizing same-sex marriage (HRC Foundation, 2024). There has been more global support for LGBTQ+ people with the United Nations launching UN Free & Equal, a global UN campaign that aims to promote equal rights and fair treatment of LGBTQ+ people (United Nations, 2014). However, the fight for LGBTQ+ rights does not end with marriage equality; there is still much work to be done regarding the decriminalization of same-sex sexual conduct, anti-discrimination laws based on sexual identity, and a ban on conversion therapy (Gerber et al., 2021)

Irish legislation

Ireland's progress on LGBTQ+ rights reflects the broader global advancement. However, examining how this is reflected in national legislation is important. In 2015, the Marriage Equality Referendum and the gender recognition act were passed; this legalized same-sex marriage and allowed trans people to be legally recognized as their preferred gender (Youth Work Ireland Tipperary, 2022). The Children and Family Relationships Act was enacted in 2021, allowing same-sex parents to have both names on their child's birth certificate (Youth Work Ireland Tipperary, 2022). Last Year the Criminal Justice (Hate Offences) Act 2024 commenced, this act set out new offences where the person committing the crime is motivated by hatred due to a person's characteristics (including sexual orientation and sex characteristics). This bill is enacted to prevent hate crimes towards minority groups (Citizensinformation.ie, 2025). Although these are positive steps, there is still some more work to be done, such as the inclusion of non-binary and inter-sex people in the gender recognition act, as well as the ban of conversion therapy. A bill was introduced in 2018 to enact the ban on conversion therapy, but as of 2025, there has still been no progress on this bill, and the practice remains legal to this day (Oireachtas, 2018)

Homophobia in Ireland

The national study on the mental health and well-being of the LGBTQ+ communities in Ireland is an extensive study that interviewed 2800 LGBTQI+ people in Ireland. They also conducted telephone (n= 1000) and online questionnaires (n= 1024) with the general public. In total, 2024 responses from the general public regarding attitudes toward the LGBTQ+ community were recorded. They found that there is still a high level of animosity towards LGBTQ+ people in Ireland with 10% and 22% of the general public cohort agreeing that being LGB (Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual) is a phase/choice or not 'normal' and that people can be convinced to 'turn' LGB. This group also agreed that it is difficult for them to accept transgender people as 'normal' (Higgins et al., 2024). There was also a decrease from a 2014 study (62%

to 53%) in the belief that being transgender is something you are born with. There is a large portion of Irish people (36%) who believe that equality has already been achieved for LGB people. This is notable in light of the equality issues, such as the ban on conversion therapy, which has not been passed yet, and the lack of hate crime legislation (Higgins et al., 2024). People who believe that LGB people have already achieved equal rights suggest that the general population is not aware of what rights LGB people still need to achieve and that education on LGBTQ+ issues is necessary. A large number of LGBTQ+ people still do not feel safe in Ireland. Approximately half of LGBTQ+ people reported that they would feel unsafe showing affection with a same sex partner in public and felt unsafe holding hands with a same sex partner in public (Higgins et al., 2024). Similarly, transgender and non-binary people feel unsafe expressing their gender identity in public (Higgins et al., 2024). A large number of LGBTQ+ people in Ireland have been victims of harassment, the majority having experienced verbal harassment (72%) and a smaller but significant number have experienced non-consensual touching (30%), physical attack (24%), and sexual assault (16.5%) (Higgins et al., 2024). LGBTQ+ people also feel unsafe accessing LGBTQ+ resources by themselves, such as going to an LGBTQ+ venue or researching on a public computer.

Homophobia in Irish schools

This homophobia is also present in Irish schools, where LGBTQ+ children experience bullying due to their identities and feel unsafe within the school environment. Of the LGBTQ+ cohort of the national study, 40% were either currently enrolled in school in the Republic of Ireland or had attended within the last 5 years. 31% reported feeling that they did not belong at school (Higgins et al., 2024). Half the participants reported experiencing homophobic, biphobic, or transphobic bullying in school, and a quarter reported they missed or skipped school to avoid said bullying. Compared to 2016, significantly more participants thought of leaving school or did leave school compared to 2016 (41% vs 28%) (Higgins et al., 2024). This environment is also unsafe for transgender and non-binary students, where approximately half are not free to wear the uniform that aligns with their gender identity and are not being addressed by their correct name or pronouns (Higgins et al., 2024). This may be due to few schools having supportive spaces for LGBTQ+ people and queer students avoiding certain areas in school due to feeling unsafe. There also may be a lack of teachers informed on LGBTQ+ issues such as policies and resources for queer students (McShane & Farren, 2023). Students suggested that to improve the school environment for LGBTQ+ students, there is a need to pay attention to the safety and support of LGBTQ+ students, as well as the education of staff and students on LGBTQ+ identities and issues (Higgins et al., 2024). Negative attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ community can occur for many reasons such as lack of information about the community, certain beliefs about the community, and heteronormativity (Higgins et al., 2024).

Heteronormativity in school textbooks

Heteronormativity is the concept that heterosexuality is the preferred or normal mode of sexual orientation. It assumes the gender binary and that sexual and marital relations are most fitting between people of the opposite sex (Harris & White, 2018). Heteronormativity means that often LGBTQ+ people are forgotten about, or when discussed, are brought up in harmful and ill-informed ways (Brett, 2024). Heteronormativity can appear in all aspects of life, such as social norms, government policies, and education. Heteronormativity can also appear within school textbooks.

Textbooks play an important role in shaping students' learning outcomes. Textbooks are used to teach and appeal to children by being relatable, showing colorful diagrams, and having comprehensible text. Textbooks reflect society by portraying diverse types of people, jobs, and situations, thereby normalizing various concepts to students reading the books (Naseem et al., 2016). However, textbooks can also contain a hidden curriculum. These are the *unwritten, unofficial, and often unintended lessons, values, and perspectives* students learn in school (Wilmot & Naidoo, 2014). There is a hidden curriculum in all media forms. It can be intended or unintended. The hidden curriculum usually refers to more socially dominant ideologies (Van de Rozenberg et al., 2023). This includes heteronormativity, meaning that there may be an overrepresentation of heterosexuality and a lack of information and representation of LGBTQ+ topics and people within textbooks. Given the influential role of textbooks in shaping social attitudes, their representation of marginalized groups such as the LGBTQ+ community becomes significant in promoting inclusivity and reducing prejudice among students.

Contact theory, developed by Allport (1954), suggests that prejudice toward an outgroup, in this case, the LGBTQ+ community, can be reduced when members from an ingroup come into contact with a member of the outgroup. This was first developed to mean face-to-face contact, but it has recently been found that, although less effective, indirect contact with the outgroup can reduce prejudice; this can be done by seeing LGBTQ+ people in a TV show or a textbook (Brown & Paterson, 2016). A study showed that students were less likely to discriminate against the made-up outgroup person they were playing with if that person had been personalized rather than kept anonymous (Junger et al., 2008). This study provides evidence for the indirect contact theory. Another study found that boys who had watched videos of people coming out were more likely to intend to challenge homophobic microaggressions and less likely to support these microaggressions (McGuire et al., 2023). This study demonstrates how media-based content can encourage adolescents to challenge homophobic behaviour, and that adolescents seeing representations of LGBTQ+ people and experiences may reduce prejudice towards the LGBTQ+ community.

Indirect contact through media, such as videos and books, can also be helpful for young LGBTQ+ people. When children see themselves positively represented in the media, it may increase their self-esteem; conversely, the opposite may occur if they do not see themselves represented (Martins & Harrison, 2011). Children who do not see themselves represented may begin to feel invisible or less important than their peers (Levinson, 2020). A 2023 study identified that having an inclusive policy and curriculum in schools is a protective factor for LGBTQ+ youth. Having access to positive representation in media contributes to positive experiences (Fernandes et al., 2023). In addition, a study examining the factors associated with LGBTQ+ well-being suggests that schools should routinely make information regarding sexual identity available to all students and parents (Higa et al., 2012).

Previous Textbook Representation Studies

The representation of LGBTQ+ topics in textbooks can differ between countries due to cultural differences and depend on the country's laws regarding different sexualities and gender identities. Generally, textbooks globally appear to ignore LGBTQ+ issues, and for books that do address LGBTQ+ issues, they are often portrayed in a negative context, such as HIV/AIDS and discrimination (Schmidt, 2016; Temple, 2005; Wylie, 2012).

Norway - similar to Ireland - has made progress in LGBTQ+ rights, but there is still a prevalence of homophobia within schools (Smestad, 2018). A 2018 study conducted a content analysis of English, Norwegian, RLE (religion, philosophies of life, and ethics), social science, and natural science textbooks, as the LGBTQ+ curriculum is divided into these five subjects (Smestad, 2018). They found that throughout the textbooks heteronormativity is still a problem and that bisexual and transgender people were far less visible than lesbians and gay men (Smestad, 2018). It was also found that although Norwegian and English had the least curriculum demand, they had the largest number of pages related to LGBTQ+ issues. LGBTQ+ issues were not presented in a negative context, but appeared on fewer than two pages per textbook. These representations were portrayed primarily in fictional texts, which allows the reader to see LGBTQ+ issues from a different perspective (Smestad, 2018).

In South Africa, where LGBTQ+ people are provided constitutional protection, they are still oftentimes victims of discrimination and violence, and schools often reinforce this prejudice (Wilmot & Naidoo, 2014). An Analysis of Life Orientation textbooks found that topics of family, dating, safe sex, and marriage all assumed heterosexuality as the norm (Wilmot & Naidoo, 2014). Lesbians were only mentioned in the context of gender-based violence and in the section on sexual assault. Another example given of same sex attraction is two boys who an older man has sexually assaulted. These examples show

that same sex attraction was only located in the context of violence and sexual assault. There is an omission of any mention of LGBTQ+ in the sections on human rights and any informative text about LGBTQ+ people (Wilmot & Naidoo, 2014). These negative representations and the lack of positive representation of LGBTQ+ people normalize the unsatisfactory attitudes towards LGBTQ+ people in South Africa, where it could be used as an opportunity to debunk these views.

A content analysis conducted in the United States in 2010 examined a range of 12 textbooks believed to represent the most widely used multicultural texts, a subject the authors considered an appropriate topic to address negative attitudes toward LGBTQ+ people (Jennings & Macgillivray, 2011). The analysis found that LGBTQ+ representation varied between the 12 textbooks. Three books were exemplary in their representation of LGBTQ+ identities, dedicating chapters to each. However, the author mentions how this division of identities failed to account for intersectionality. Intersectionality is a paradigm that addresses the multiple dimensions of identity and social systems as they intersect with one another and relate to inequality (APA, 2019). The textbook treats identities as homogeneous and does not highlight how people typically have multiple identities that interact and shape them differently (Jennings & Macgillivray, 2011). This also shows that it is not enough to have only one chapter for marginalized identities, but to have a diverse range of people represented constantly throughout the textbook so that LGBTQ+ issues and other marginalized people are not overlooked or forgotten. Some textbooks from this study failed to include LGBTQ+ people and identities or minimized LGBTQ+ topics. This varied representation exemplifies how politics and culture can be represented in educational textbooks. In a politically polarized country such as the USA, schools have the option to choose a textbook that aligns with their attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ community, and this means that schools may have the power to reinforce negative stereotypes about the LGBTQ+ community or not address it entirely.

Social, Personal & Health Education (SPHE)

In Ireland, SPHE (Social, Personal, and Health Education) is a mandatory course taken by all students in the junior cycle of secondary education (years 1-3). In this course, students are taught about relationships, bullying/discrimination, sexual education, and identities; many of these topics are topics that come up when discussing LGBTQ+ people and issues. It would appear the most appropriate subject for students to learn about is LGBTQ+ identities and issues. In the past year, it has been reported by LGBTQ+ people that gender and sexuality diversity was not addressed in SPHE and that there were no positive statements and representations of LGBTQ+ people in the curriculum (Higgins et al, 2024). However, in 2023, a new curriculum was proposed for the SPHE cycle to include LGBTQ+ identities and issues.

The current SPHE curriculum (revised in 2022) states in the learning outcomes that students will learn about inclusivity and self-identity and should be able to appreciate how sexual orientation and gender identity are experienced and expressed in diverse ways (Department of Education, 2023). This followed after The Program for Government (2020) states that “this Government will develop inclusive and age-appropriate curricula for Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) and Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) across primary and post-primary schools, including an inclusive programme on LGBTI+ relationships”, The Report on the Citizens Assembly on Gender Equality (2021) which recommended “Curriculum review and development should promote gender equality and diversity”, and, Zero Tolerance, the Third National Strategy for Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (DSGBV) which regarding the updating the SHPE curriculum advised to address LGBTQ+ matters (NCCA, 2022). The government has also reviewed the 2013 action plan on bullying, focusing on areas including gender identity bullying. This action plan also advised curriculum developers to consider and implement the findings and recommendations of the action plan when developing new curricula (Department of Education, 2013). With this new policy action, new SPHE textbooks are expected to include more informative material on LGBTQ+ issues and inclusion.

The current study

The current study will conduct a content analysis of the new Irish SPHE textbooks (post-2022) to examine the representation of LGBTQ+ content and compare it with heterosexual content. This will be done by comparing the numerical amount of LGBTQ+ and heterosexual content, examining the themes of the content, and analyzing how the content is represented.

The research questions are as follows:

1. Is there a numeric difference between LGBTQ+ and heterosexual representation?
H1: There is a higher number of heterosexual hits compared to LGBTQ+ hits.
2. Is there a difference in the themes of heterosexual representation compared to LGBTQ+ representation?
H2: Heterosexual hits will have more relationship/sexual education themes, and LGBTQ+ hits will have more discrimination/mental health themes.
3. Does the representation of different sexualities in the textbooks confirm or deny the gender binary more, depending on which of the hit groups they belong to?

H3: Hits that are queer-only will deny the gender binary more than heterosexual-only hits and hits that are both heterosexual and queer.

4. Is the LGBTQ+ representation specified and does it describe queer experiences?

H4: Hits that are queer-only will be specified more often than hits that are both heterosexual and queer.

5. Is there any difference in the number of individual LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, or Transgender) hits.

H5: There is a difference in the number of hits among individual LGBTQ+ identities.

6. Is there a numeric difference in LGBTQ+ representation between individual publishers?

H6: There will be a numeric difference in hits between publishers.

Methods

Textbooks

Ten textbooks were chosen from the publishers Folens, EDCO, Gill Education, and Mentor Books. These are Ireland's most commonly used textbook publishers for the junior certificate SPHE program. Each SPHE textbook from these publishers was examined to give a representative view of LGBTQ+ content in SPHE textbooks in Ireland. Three books from each publisher were coded, one for each year of the junior certificate cycle. However, the 3rd-year books for Gill education and Mentor books with the new curriculum are scheduled to be published later in 2025. Due to this, these textbooks could not be included in the analysis, so only the first and second-year textbooks were analyzed for these two publishers.

Coding

A codebook was developed to perform the content analysis. The study used Jehle et al.'s (2024) codebook as a reference and used a similar template to develop the codebook. The codebook describes how sexuality and gender identity references are identified as 'hits'. Each hit was then coded by whether it was queer, heterosexual, or both. If a queer hit, it was further coded to determine if it specified LGBTQ+ experiences, whether it confirmed or denied a gender binary, and finally, what themes the hit explored.

Hits

A hit is a word, sentence, paragraph, or page(s) that relates to sexual and gender identities and topics, more specifically heterosexual and queer identities and topics.

The following types of text were not included as a hit;

- Gender stereotyping, for example, ‘boys are taught to be strong while girls are taught to be caring’ and ‘boys can wear feminine clothes’. As this is not related to sexuality or gender identity. Gender stereotyping can happen to anyone regardless of sexual or gender identity.
- Topics of relationships and dating that are not related to sexual orientation or gender identity, for example, ‘when you enter secondary school, your friend might start to get into relationships, but there should not be any pressure until you feel ready’.
- Biological puberty changes; however, it should be considered a hit if the text refers to intersex or transgender biology, as these are considered LGBTQ+ identities.
- The use of pronouns in the books, such as ‘he/she’ vs. ‘they’, is only relevant to a person's romantic or sexual partner or interest. In addition, for the terms ‘boyfriend/girlfriend’ vs ‘(romantic) partner’ when used in a sentence only the term itself is considered a hit and the rest of the sentence is ignored unless otherwise relevant to a queer or heterosexual reference. Both these terms can be considered a queer and heterosexual reference as it is dependent on the preference of the reader except girlfriend/boyfriend confirms the gender binary while partner challenges it.

The length of the hit is how many words are given to the specific reference; for example, if the reference is about the variety of sexualities, the length of the hit is determined by how long it discusses the variety of sexualities. If a paragraph discusses stereotyping and uses an example of how queer people are stereotyped, only the example is considered a hit, and the rest of the paragraph can be ignored.

Heterosexual

A hit was marked as heterosexual if the hit references a heterosexual topic or describes cisgender heterosexual people. A heterosexual topic is a topic that relates to the heterosexual orientation; this topic may be referenced when discussing content such as sexual education, puberty, and relationships.

Example: ‘During sexual intercourse between a man and a woman.’ A cisgender heterosexual person is someone who experiences opposite sex attraction and also identifies as the gender they were assigned at birth. Example: Picture of a straight couple together and ‘She told him that she did not want a boyfriend and he said that was okay with him - he was happy to stay friends.’

Queer

A hit was marked as queer if the hit references a queer topic or describes an LGBTQ+ person. A queer topic is any topic that relates to any sexual orientation and gender identity that exist outside of heterosexual and cisgender identities. These topics may be referenced when discussing content such as puberty, sex education, and discrimination. Example: 'Stereotypes can also be positive, such as 'Gay men have great fashion sense' and 'the highest rates of discrimination were reported by people who identify as LGBTQI+'. A queer person is someone who identifies outside of heterosexual and cisgender identities. These people may identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or non-binary. Examples: 'Picture of a gay couple touching foreheads' and 'Peter is always getting spiteful messages online about being gay'.

It is important to note that sometimes a hit can be both heterosexual and queer as the hit may be describing sexuality and gender identity more broadly for example, or use terms such as girlfriend/boyfriend or romantic partner to leave the interpretation open to the reader for example: 'As adolescents experience emotional and social changes during puberty, they may question their gender and sexual orientation' and 'Some people may start having girlfriends and boyfriends in teenage years and some do not'. Such hits were coded under a third group as both heterosexual and queer.

LGBTQ+ identities

For hits that were coded as 'queer' it was indicated which queer identity is referred to (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, non-binary or the '+'). Transgender and non-binary will be coded as separate identities, although both may fit under the 'T' in LGBTQ+. The hit can also reference LGBTQ+ as a whole, for example, 'every child should have equal access to education regardless of the child's gender or sexual orientation'. For hits that were coded as '+', it was also specified which identity the hit was referring to, such as asexual, intersex, and genderfluid.

Hits that are both heterosexual and queer that did not reference a specific LGBTQ+ identity, for example, 'Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of having a long term boyfriend or girlfriend as a teenager' are not coded for a LGBTQ+ identity. For hits that are both heterosexual and queer but did reference a queer identity, the identity that was referenced was selected. For example: 'Gender identity describes how you feel inside - it refers to whether someone feels male or female or something else.' For this hit it would be both queer and heterosexual (cisgender) and the queer identities it refers to are LGBTQ+ and non-binary. Multiple identities can be referenced in a hit.

The gender binary

The hits that referred to gender identity were coded as assuming the gender binary or denying the gender binary. To assume the gender binary means to assume that gender is a binary between male and female. It fails to acknowledge other gender identities outside of these. For example, ‘you may be interested in having a boyfriend/girlfriend’ and ‘talk to your mom/dad about this’. To deny the gender binary means that the hit does not assume that gender is binary and allows for the inclusion of gender identities outside of the binary. For example, ‘Gender identity refers to whether someone feels male or female or something else’ and ‘ you may be interested in a romantic partner’. Any inclusion of transgender and non-binary people and identities challenges the gender binary.

Queer Specification

For hits coded as queer, it was also noted whether the hit specified a queer identity or experience (‘male, female, and non-binary’) or if the hit referenced a topic or person that could be outside of heterosexual or cisgender identities but does not specify a queer identity or experience (‘male, female, or other’)

Themes

For each hit, the themes of the content were coded from the following themes.

- Sexual practice
- Puberty
- Dating/relationships
- Marriage
- Family
- Pathology
- Mental health
- Discrimination
- Human rights
- Gender
- Sexuality

Multiple themes could be chosen for a single hit.

Procedure

To test the reliability of the codebook, two different coders coded the same book and compared their results. No significant differences were found, and the codebook was then adjusted for minor differences, such as the length of the hit and picture specification.

Each of the 10 textbooks was read thoroughly, and the LGBTQ+ and heterosexual content was divided into hits: words, sentences, paragraphs, or pages that reference LGBTQ+ or heterosexual content. The study author did this. The hit was then coded according to the codebook (see appendix). When the 10 books were coded, the analysis was conducted using SPSS to answer the research questions.

Data analysis

To test the hypotheses of this study regarding the number of hits, chi-square goodness-of-fit tests were performed to analyze how the number of hits differed across different variables. Standardized residuals were calculated to examine the direction of the results.. For some of the hypotheses, word count was also examined, and this was done by performing One-way or Two-way ANOVAs (depending on the number of factors) to examine the differences in means across the word count of different hits. With the ANOVAs, Tukey's post hoc test was used to examine the direction of results. Frequencies were also collected to examine the association between variables. All statistical tests were performed on IBM SPSS Statistics 27. A Bonferroni correction will not be used in the statistical analyses, despite the repetition of statistical tests being carried out on the same sample. This decision was made due to the exploratory nature of the study, as the Bonferroni correction is quite conservative and increases Type II errors (Haynes, 2013).

Results

1. Is there a numeric difference between LGBTQ+ and heterosexual representation?

H1: There is a higher number of heterosexual hits compared to LGBTQ+ hits

The sample consisted of 10 textbooks with 573 'hits' of representation of sexuality. Out of the 573 hits 160 (27.9%) were classified as heterosexual-only, 217 (37.9%) were classified as queer-only, and there were 196 (34.2%) hits that were classified as both heterosexual and queer. A chi-square goodness-of-fit test was performed to examine the numeric difference between queer-only, heterosexual-only, and both queer and heterosexual hits and if these differed from an equal distribution (33.3%). The result indicated a significant difference between the observed value and expected value $\chi^2(2, 573) = 8.70, p = .01$.

Examination of the standardized residuals revealed that there was no significant over/under representation, and no standardized residuals exceeded 2 (Heterosexual-only: $z = -0.76$; Queer-only: $z =$

0.64; Both: $z = 0.12$), suggesting that although the overall deviation was significant, no single category deviated strongly from expectation. Heterosexual-only hits were moderately underrepresented, and queer-only hits were moderately overrepresented.

Next the difference in word count between queer and heterosexual hits was examined. Heterosexual-only hits had a total word count of 9528 (35.5%), while queer-only hits had a total of 10739 (40%). Hits that were both queer and heterosexual had a total word count of 6569 (24.5%). A one-way ANOVA revealed a significant association between word count and hit group $F(2,570) = 3.90, p = 0.021$. Post hoc comparisons using Tukey's Honest Significant Differences (HSD) test revealed that heterosexual-only hits ($M = 59.55, SD = 119.21$) produced significantly higher word counts than hits that were both heterosexual and queer ($M = 33.52, SD = 68.65$), $p = .018$, with a mean difference of 26.04, 95% CI [3.68, 48.39]. However, there was no significant difference between heterosexual-only hits and queer-only hits ($M = 49.49, SD = 70.50$) ($p = .53$) or between queer-only hits and hits that were both heterosexual and queer ($p = .17$). On average, heterosexual-only hits contained the most words; however, this was not significantly different from the average word count in queer-only hits. Therefore, by examining both the number of hits and word count, the hypothesis (H1) that 'there will be a larger amount of heterosexual content than queer content' is rejected.

Sexuality chapter removed

Does this change when the chapters on sexuality are removed from the analysis? This was done to examine how LGBTQ+ representation is portrayed in the textbooks when there is no chapter specifically about sexuality. It was done to obtain a more accurate representation of the average LGBTQ+ representation in the textbooks and to determine whether the majority of the representation is confined to one chapter on sexuality or spread throughout the textbook. When chapters on sexuality are removed, the total number of hits is 420. The number of heterosexual-only hits is now 153 (36.4%), there are 115 (27.4%) queer-only hits and there are 152 (36.2%) hits that are both heterosexual and queer. A chi-square goodness-of-fit test was performed to examine if these values differed from an equal distribution, and the result indicated a significant difference between observed and expected values $\chi^2(2, 420) = 6.70, p = .04$. Examining the standardized residuals reveals that none of the sexualities were significantly over- or underrepresented. However contrary to the initial analyses, now queer hits were moderately underrepresented ($z = -0.81$) and heterosexual hits were slightly over represented ($z = 0.42$).

A one-way ANOVA was performed to examine if there is an association between word count and hit group. Heterosexual-only hits had a total word count of 9205 (55.8%), queer-only had 4374 (26.5%) and both heterosexual and queer had 2909 words (17.6%).

The results of the one-way ANOVA indicated that hit group had a significant effect on word count, $F(2, 417) = 9.12, p < .001$.

Post hoc comparisons using Tukey's HSD test revealed that the mean of heterosexual-only wordcount ($M = 60.16, SD = 120.99$) was significantly higher than the mean of wordcount of hits that were both heterosexual and queer ($M = 19.14, SD = 48.34$) ($p < .001$) with a mean difference of 41.03 95% CI [18.41, 63.64]. The queer-only mean word count ($M = 38.03, SD = 56.32$) did not significantly differ from either group (Heterosexual; $p = 0.08$ & Both; $p = 0.16$). This is similar to the initial analysis.

The removal of the sexuality chapter reveals that there are now more heterosexual-only hits than queer-only hits. However, the lack of significance means we cannot accept the hypothesis (H1).

2. Is there a difference in the themes of heterosexual representation compared to LGBTQ+ representation?

H2: Heterosexual hits will have more relationship/sexual education themes, and queer hits will have more discrimination/mental health themes.

The themes of the hits were examined using a multiple-response set, as multiple themes could be selected for a single hit. It was found that for heterosexual-only hits, the majority of hits were about Dating and Relationships (41.9%), Sexual practice (40%), and Family (12.5%). Each of the remaining themes accounted for less than 5% of the heterosexual-only hits (see Table 2.1). For queer-only hits, the majority were about Mental health (33.6%), Sexuality (29%), Discrimination (24.4%), and Gender (17.5%). Each of the remaining themes accounted for less than 8% of the queer-only hits. For hits that were both heterosexual and queer, the majority of hits were about Dating and Relationships (43.9%), Sexuality (26%), Sexual practice (23%), and Gender (15.3%). Each of the remaining themes accounted for less than 2% of the hits that were both heterosexual and queer.

Table 2.1

Frequency and percentages of themes across different hit groups

	Heterosexual (only)		Queer (only)		Both	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Sexual	64	40%	15	6.9%	45	23.0%

Practice						
Puberty	1	0.6%	4	1.8%	8	4.1%
Dating/relationships	67	41.9%	16	7.4%	86	43.9%
Marriage	4	2.5%	0	0%	1	0.5%
Family	20	12.5%	7	3.2%	1	0.5%
Mental Health	2	1.3%	73	33.6%	2	1.0%
Discrimination	1	0.6%	53	24.4%	4	2.0%
Human Rights	2	1.3%	17	7.8%	2	1.0%
Gender	6	3.8%	38	17.5%	30	15.3%
Sexuality	8	5.0%	63	29.0%	51	26%

Sexual Practice

A chi-square goodness-of-fit test was performed to examine the difference in hit type (Heterosexual, Queer, and Both) across the sexual practice theme. The results indicated a significant difference $\chi^2 (2, 573) = 59.76, p < 0.001$. Examination of the standardized residuals revealed a significant overrepresentation of heterosexual-only hits ($z=5.0$) and a significant underrepresentation of queer-only hits ($z=-4.7$).

Puberty

A chi-square goodness-of-fit test was performed to examine the difference in hit type (Heterosexual, Queer, and Both) across the puberty theme. The results did not indicate a significant difference $\chi^2 (2, 573) = 5.03, p = 0.081$.

Dating and Relationships

A chi-square goodness-of-fit test was performed to examine the difference in hit type (Heterosexual, Queer, and Both) across the dating and relationships theme. The results indicated a significant difference $\chi^2 (2, 573) = 82.36, p < 0.001$. Examination of the standardized residuals revealed a significant overrepresentation of hits that were both heterosexual and queer ($z=3.7$) and heterosexual-only hits ($z=2.9$) and also a significant underrepresentation of queer-only hits ($z=-6.0$).

Marriage

A chi-square goodness-of-fit test was performed to examine the difference in hit type (Heterosexual, Queer, and Both) across the marriage theme. The results indicated a significant difference $\chi^2 (2, 573) = 7.12, p = 0.03$. Examination of the standardized residuals revealed a significant overrepresentation of heterosexual-only hits ($z=2.2$).

Family

A chi-square goodness-of-fit test was performed to examine the difference in hit type (Heterosexual, Queer, and Both) across the family theme. The results indicated a significant difference $\chi^2 (2, 573) = 29.32, p < 0.001$. Examination of the standardized residuals revealed a significant overrepresentation of heterosexual-only hits ($z=4.4$) and significant underrepresentation of hits that were both heterosexual and queer ($z=-2.8$).

Mental Health

A chi-square goodness-of-fit test was performed to examine the difference in hit type (Heterosexual, Queer, and Both) across the mental health theme. The results indicated a significant difference $\chi^2 (2, 573) = 122.55, p < 0.001$. Examination of the standardized residuals revealed a significant overrepresentation of queer-only hits ($z=8.1$) and significant underrepresentation of heterosexual-only hits ($z=-4.2$) hits that were both heterosexual and queer ($z=-4.7$).

Discrimination

A chi-square goodness-of-fit test was performed to examine the difference in hit type (Heterosexual, Queer, and Both) across the discrimination theme. The results indicated a significant difference $\chi^2 (2, 573) = 78.72, p < 0.001$. Examination of the standardized residuals revealed a significant overrepresentation of queer-only hits ($z=6.6$) and significant underrepresentation of heterosexual-only hits ($z=-3.8$) hits that were both heterosexual and queer ($z=-3.6$).

Human Rights

A chi-square goodness-of-fit test was performed to examine the difference in hit type (Heterosexual, Queer, and Both) across the human rights theme. The results indicated a significant difference $\chi^2 (2, 573) = 17.21, p < 0.001$. Examination of the standardized residuals revealed a significant overrepresentation of queer-only hits ($z=3.2$).

Gender

A chi-square goodness-of-fit test was performed to examine the difference in hit type (Heterosexual, Queer, and Both) across the gender theme. The results indicated a significant difference $\chi^2 (2, 573) = 17.02, p < 0.001$. Examination of the standardized residuals revealed a significant underrepresentation of heterosexual-only hits ($z = -3.2$).

Sexuality

A chi-square goodness-of-fit test was performed to examine the difference in hit type (Heterosexual, Queer, and Both) across the sexuality theme. The results indicated a significant difference $\chi^2 (2, 573) = 35.72, p < 0.001$. Examination of the standardized residuals revealed a significant overrepresentation of queer-only hits ($z = 2.5$) and a significant underrepresentation of heterosexual-only hits ($z = -4.5$).

Examining the results of the chi-square tests, a large divide is apparent between the hit groups with themes. Aligning with the hypothesis, heterosexual-only hits were overrepresented in the sexual practice, dating and relationships, and family themes. In contrast, queer-only hits were overrepresented in the mental health, discrimination, and sexuality themes. The hypothesis (H2) is accepted.

3. Does the representation of different sexualities in the textbooks confirm or deny the gender binary more, depending on which of the hit groups they belong to?

H3: Hits that are queer-only will deny the gender binary more than heterosexual only and hits that are both heterosexual and queer.

A cross tabulation was performed to examine whether queer and heterosexual hits confirmed or denied the gender binary more often. The frequencies are shown in Table 3.1. There were no heterosexual hits that confirmed or denied the gender binary. The cross tabulation was redone, now excluding heterosexual-only hits and a significant difference was found between queer-only hits and hits that were both queer and heterosexual $\chi^2 (1, 297) = 40.27, p = <.001$. Examination of the standardized residuals found that were significantly fewer hits that were queer-only that confirmed the gender binary ($z = -4.3$) and significantly more hits that were both queer and heterosexual that confirmed the gender binary ($z = 3.8$). This means that queer-only hits were less likely to confirm the gender binary than the hits that were both heterosexual and queer.

Table 3.1

Frequency of hit groups that confirm or deny the gender binary

	Heterosexual-only	Queer-only	Both
Confirms	0	3	52
Denies	0	127	115

A two-way ANOVA was then conducted to examine whether the effect of confirming or denying the binary on wordcount was affected by whether the words belong to queer-only group or both heterosexual and queer. The heterosexual-only hits were removed from this analysis, as there were no heterosexual-only hits present in either the denying or confirming category. The hit group variable had a significant main effect on word count $F(1, 293) = 12.14, p < 0.001$. This implies that queer-only hits ($M=49.49, SD=79.50$) had a significantly higher mean word count than hits that were both queer and heterosexual ($M=33.52, SD= 68.65$). The confirming/denying variable did not have a significant main effect on word count $F(1, 293) = 3.16, p = 0.08$. This implies no significant difference in word count between hits that confirmed the binary and hits that denied the binary. However, the interaction effect was significant $F(1, 293) = 6.59, p = 0.01$. This implies that the difference between confirming and denying the gender binary is more pronounced in the Queer-only group (Confirm; $M=162.67, SD=230.74$ & Deny; $M=58.52, SD=83.99$) than in the Both group (Confirm; $M=17.60, SD=69.64$ & Deny; $M=36.53, SD=71.45$).

. Table 3.2

Means and standard deviations of hit groups and the gender binary variable

	Queer-only		Both	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Confirms	162.67	230.74	17.60	69.64
Denies	58.52	83.99	36.53	71.45

Hits that were queer-only were significantly more likely to deny the gender binary than hits that were both heterosexual and queer. So, we accept the hypothesis (H3) that hits that are queer-only will deny the gender binary more than hits that are heterosexual-only and hits that belong to the Both group. However, although there were only three hits that belonged to the Queer-only group that confirmed the gender binary, these three hits had a higher word count compared to the Both group. However, due to the small sample size, this does not affect the result of the hypothesis (H3).

4. Is the LGBTQ+ representation specified and does it describe queer experiences?

H4: Hits that are queer-only will be specified more often than hits that are both heterosexual and queer.

Of the 413 hits that could be specified, 48.7% were not specified, and 51.3% were specified. A cross tabulation was performed to examine if there was a difference in hits that were specified or not among different hit groups (Queer-only and Both), see Table 4.1. This difference was significant $\chi^2(1, 413) = 216.37, p = <.001$. The standardized residuals reveal that significantly more queer-only hits were specified ($z=7.1$). Moreover, that there were significantly less hits belonging to the Both group that were specified ($z=-7.4$). This was the opposite for hits that were unspecified, having significantly less queer-only hits ($z= -7.3$) and significantly more hits that were both heterosexual and queer ($z=7.6$). It is evident that queer-only hits were usually specified while hits that were both heterosexual and queer were usually unspecified.

Table 4.1

Frequencies of hit groups and specified variable.

	Queer-only	Both
Unspecified	31	170
specified	186	26

A two-way ANOVA was conducted to examine if hits being specified affected the word count and if this relationship was influenced by whether the hit was queer-only or both heterosexual and queer. It was revealed that the main effect between hit group (Queer-only ($M=44.40, SD= 7.1$) & Both ($M=54.90, SD=7.7$) and word count was not significant $F(1, 409) = 1.00, p = 0.32$). However the main effect between specified and wordcount was significant $F(1, 409) = 11.938, p < 0.001$, meaning that words that hits that were specified ($M=67.7, SD=7.68$) had a higher word count on average than hits that were unspecified ($M=31.48, SD = 7.17$) The interaction effect was significant $F(1, 409) = 4.35, p < 0.05$. This means that there was a significantly greater difference between specified and unspecified with hits that belonged to the Both group (Unspecified; $M=25.79, SD=58.26$ & Specified; $M=84.00, SD=103.69$) than the Queer-only group (Unspecified; $M=37.16, SD= 44.25$ & Specified; $M=51.54, SD=83.85$), see Table 4.2.

Table 4.2

Means and standard deviations of hit groups and specified variable

	Queer-only		Both	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Unspecified	37.16	44.25	25.79	58.26
Specified	51.54	83.85	84.00	103.69

The hypothesis (H4) is accepted, as queer-only hits were significantly overrepresented in the specified group, while hits belonging to the Both group were significantly overrepresented in the underspecified group.

5. Is there any difference in the number of individual LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, or Transgender) hits?

H5: There is a difference in the number of hits among individual LGBTQ+ identities.

A multiple-response set was created for the individual LGBTQ+ identities. The variable plus consists of all the identities encompassed in the '+' of LGBTQ+, such as asexual, intersex, and genderfluid. Non-binary was given its own variable as it was expected to occur more frequently than other identities. To account for multiple responses, the percentages are considered every time a sexuality is selected. So, a hit that was marked as gay and lesbian will count as two hits, one for each sexuality. This is the same for word count. Table 5.1 outlines the frequency of hits under each LGBTQ+ identity. The multiple response means that the assumption of independence is no longer valid, and thus, a chi-square cannot be performed; therefore, only the frequencies will be examined for this analysis.

Table 5.1

Frequencies of hits and LGBTQ+ identities.

	<i>n</i>	%
LGBTQ+	187	51.1%
Gay	50	13.7%
Lesbian	43	11.7%

Bisexual	19	5.2%
Transgender	37	10.1%
Non-Binary	18	4.9%
+	27	3.3%
Total	366	100%

The highest number of queer hits was LGBTQ+ (51.1%), followed by Gay (13.7%), Lesbian (11.7%), and Transgender (10.1%). The remaining identities account for 5% or less. We see this same order repeated for word count; see Table 5.2. However, when examining the means, it can be seen that the ‘+’ identity has the highest mean ($M=127.67$, $SD = 102.88$), meaning it had the most words per hit compared to other individual identities. In contrast with the number of hits and word count sum, LGBTQ+ had the lowest mean ($M=61.26$, $SD=82.0$), meaning it had the lowest word count per hit.

Table 5.2

Descriptives of word count of LGBTQ+ identity hits

	<i>Sum</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
LGBTQ+	11456	43.8%	61.26	82.0
Gay	4067	15.6%	81.34	119.90
Lesbian	2999	11.5%	69.74	111.80
Bisexual	1694	6.5%	89.16	99.65
Transgender	2982	11.4%	80.59	106.33
Non-Binary	1419	5.4%	78.83	74.88
+	1532	5.9%	127.67	102.88
Total	26149	100%	-	-

We cannot accept the hypothesis (H5) as no statistical test was performed.

6. Is there a difference between individual publishers?

H6: There will be a numeric difference in hits between publishers

A chi-square goodness-of-fit test was performed to examine whether the publisher influenced the association between sexuality and the number of hits. There was a significant difference in the number of hits depending on the publisher, $\chi^2(6, 573) = 34.56, p < 0.001$, see frequencies in Table 6.1 (% within the publisher variable). The standardized residuals reveal that in the Folens textbooks there was a significant overrepresentation of hits that were both heterosexual and queer ($z = 3.8$) and a significant underrepresentation of queer-only hits ($z = -2.3$). It was found in the Gill education books there was a significant underrepresentation of hits that were both heterosexual and queer. Although insignificant, there was a moderate overrepresentation of queer-only hits ($z = 1.7$). There was no significant over- or underrepresentation of either sexuality in the EDCO and Mentor books.

Table 6.1

Frequencies of hit groups and publishers (% within publisher)

	Heterosexual-only		Queer-only		Both		Total	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Folens	35	21.5	44	27	84	51.5	163	100
EDCO	51	28.7	74	41.6	53	29.8	178	100
Gill Education	42	31.8	62	47	28	21.2	132	100
Mentor Books	32	32.0	37	37.0	31	31.0	100	100
Total	160	-	217	-	196	-	573	

A two-way ANOVA examined the effects of hit group and publisher on word count. There was a significant main effect of hit group, $F(2, 435) = 16.06, p < .001$, indicating that word counts differed significantly across different hit groups. A Tukey's HSD test was conducted to examine pairwise differences in word count between the three groups. The results showed that heterosexual-only hits ($M=110, SD = 114.35$) had significantly higher word count than queer-only hits ($M=63.92, SD=85.12$) and hits that were both heterosexual and queer ($M=34.04, SD= 69.05$). It also revealed that queer-only hits had a significantly higher word count than hits that were both heterosexual and queer. The main effect of publisher was not statistically significant, $F(3, 435) = 2.56, p = .054$. This implies no significant difference in word count between publishers. Additionally, the interaction between hit group and publisher was not significant, $F(6, 435) = 1.31, p = .25$, suggesting that the effect of the publisher on word count did not significantly differ across hit groups.

Table 6.2

Means and standard deviations of hit groups and publishers

	Heterosexual-only		Queer-only		Both	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Folens	63.81	74.63	54.14	70.81	24.84	58.98
EDCO	131.0	175.56	63.32	111.74	32.77	67.20
Gill Education	99.97	86.84	68.57	57.21	63.82	92.73
Mentor Books	150.93	220.33	70.82	74.10	33.58	68.154

The hypotheses (H6) is accepted, as the results from the cross-tabulations suggest a significant difference in the number of hits depending on whether they are heterosexual-only, queer-only, or both across the publishers. However, the word count does not differ significantly across publishers.

Discussion

This study aimed to examine the representation of LGBTQ+ content in Irish SPHE textbooks and how it differs numerically and thematically from the heterosexual representation in the books. H1 ‘There is a higher number of heterosexual hits compared to LGBTQ+ hits’ was rejected. It was found that numerically, queer hits and heterosexual hits did differ significantly from one another, with queer hits being moderately overrepresented. These findings contradict previous studies, which have had little to no representation of LGBTQ+ individuals and topics (Wilmot & Naidoo, 2014; Schmidt, 2016; Wylie, 2012). The overrepresentation of queer-only hits indicates that the new 2023 SPHE curriculum did an effective job of including LGBTQ+ topics and identities throughout numerous textbooks.

The analysis was rerun, excluding chapters on sexuality, to examine whether the LGBTQ+ content was restricted to this chapter. When chapters on sexuality were removed, the initial findings were switched, and now queer hits were moderately underrepresented. It is fitting to have LGBTQ+ content in the sexuality chapter, as it is crucial to have a section of the textbook that provides information on LGBTQ+ issues. However, having most of the content restricted to one chapter means that LGBTQ+ issues are relegated to a specialized status rather than being represented as part of everyday life. As a result, simple representations, which are not an explicit topic, of the LGBTQ+ community are still not the norm in these textbooks. LGBTQ+ identities should be consistently represented throughout textbooks, ensuring that everyday representations of LGBTQ+ people are included (Jennings & MacGillivray, 2011). LGBTQ+ content being restricted to a single chapter also means that intersectionality is not accounted for. Queerness often overlaps with other aspects of identity. Discussing LGBTQ+ issues only in terms of sexuality can isolate them from other identities. Some books include a sexuality wheel that highlights how sexuality affects various aspects of identity, such as gender identity, personality, and values (see Figure 1 in the appendix for an example of the sexuality wheel). This wheel provides a good example of the spectrum of sexuality, illustrating its multifaceted nature and not just one component of identity.

Next, H2 ‘Heterosexual hits will have more relationship/sexual education themes, and LGBTQ+ hits will have more discrimination/mental health themes’ is accepted. When examining the themes of the queer and heterosexual hits it was found that there was a significant overrepresentation of heterosexual-only hits in the sexual practice, dating and relationships, marriage, and family themes. In contrast, for queer-only hits there was a significant overrepresentation in the mental health, discrimination, and sexuality themes. So despite there being roughly equal numbers of queer and heterosexual hits the content of those hits differed vastly. This finding is consistent with previous studies, which have shown that LGBTQ+ content and heterosexual content differ thematically (Wilmot & Naidoo, 2014; Schmidt, 2016; Wylie, 2012). This is where the heteronormative hidden curriculum is most evident in this analysis, as the stark difference between the heterosexual-only hits represents a societal norm, where marriage and family life

are expected, and the queer-only hits portray negative themes of poor mental health and discrimination. This aligns with hidden curriculum theory, where the socially dominant heterosexual lifestyle is seen as the norm and the LGBTQ+ lifestyle is 'othered' (Van de Rozenberg et al., 2023; Wilmot & Naidoo, 2014). Discrimination and mental health are important to discuss in textbooks, especially with Irish LGBTQ+ students still reporting feeling unsafe and having experienced homophobic or transphobic bullying (Higgins et al, 2024). However, it should not be the only representation of the LGBTQ+ community, as it may contribute to feelings of isolation when LGBTQ+ students do not see themselves positively represented (Naseem et al.,2016).

Hits that were both queer and heterosexual were significantly overrepresented in the dating and relationships theme. This may be due to many of the books having a third-person approach to discuss dating and relationships, for example, 'you may be interested in having a boyfriend/girlfriend when you start secondary school'; this leaves it up to the reader to interpret it according to their own sexual identity, it is an inclusive approach that puts it in the both queer and heterosexual group.

H3 'Hits that are queer-only will deny the gender binary more than heterosexual-only hits and hits that are both heterosexual and queer' was accepted. The queer-only hits were more likely to deny the gender binary than those who were both. This makes sense, especially when the following hypothesis (H4) 'Hits that are queer-only will be specified more often than hits that are both heterosexual and queer' was also accepted. It found that hits belonging to the 'both' group were more likely to be unspecified. Hits that were queer-only specified LGBTQ+ experiences and identities. Many LGBTQ+ identities inherently deny the gender binary (Levitt et al., 2024), for example, non-binary, where a person does not fit on either end of the gender binary. So it is reasonable that specifying LGBTQ+ identities and experiences could also mean denying the gender binary.

Hits belonging to the 'both' group are just as frequent as hits belonging to the heterosexual-only and queer-only groups. Therefore, a large portion of the sexuality representation in the textbooks falls into the 'both' group. The hits from the 'both' group represent sexuality in a gender-neutral way, which allows the reader to insert themselves into the text (example: you may have a boyfriend/girlfriend).

However, examining the results of H3, where hits from the 'both' group are more likely to accept the gender binary, a potential suggestion is that if future editions continue to adopt a more open, third-person approach, they should ensure the rejection of the gender binary. An example of this could be using the phrase "romantic partner" instead of "boyfriend/girlfriend." Additionally, it is important that explicit LGBTQ+ content about LGBTQ+ issues and identities are still included, as many Irish students remain misinformed or uneducated about LGBTQ+ identities and issues (Higgins et al, 2024).

The hypothesis H5, 'There is a difference in the number of hits among individual LGBTQ+ identities,' is not accepted due to no statistical test being performed. Of the queer hits, over half related to the LGBTQ+ identity. This is logical, as this identity encompasses the entire LGBTQ+ community. Examining the frequencies of individual LGBTQ+ identities shows no notable differences in their occurrences compared to other identities. Gay and lesbian identities rank next highest (after LGBTQ+); this is not surprising since these identities are more widely shown. However, there are still many mentions of lesser shown identities, such as transgender, bisexual, and non-binary identities. This contrasts with the LGBTQ+ content in Norwegian textbooks, where, although the overall representation was adequate, there was a lack of representation of transgender and bisexual people compared to lesbians and gay men (Smedstad, 2018). The new Irish curriculum offers information on various LGBTQ+ identities, allowing students with lesser-represented LGBTQ+ identities to see themselves reflected, helping them avoid feeling less valued than their peers (Levinson, 2020). Access to positive representation is also suggested as a means to increase positive experiences, such as social support, since this representation can act as a role model for younger LGBTQ+ students (Fernandes et al., 2023). As this curriculum is designed for students in their 1st to 3rd year of secondary school, aged 12 to 15, they may be easily influenced by the people and role models that they interact with (Foulkes et al., 2018). Access to media role models for LGBTQ+ youth has been found to serve as a source of pride, inspiration, and comfort (Gomillion & Giuliano, 2011). Meaning even indirect role models, such as representation in textbooks, can impact of LGBTQ+ wellbeing. The representation of trans and non-binary individuals in education is now especially relevant, in light of the ongoing culture war. In Ireland's neighbor, the UK, there have been recent consultations threatening to remove transgender, non-binary, and gender-diverse individuals from state school curricula (Department of Education, 2024). The lack of supportive policies and the hostile political and media landscape leave discussions about the education of gender identity controversial. A consequence of this is that school leaders and teachers may become reluctant to engage with these gender identity topics, in fear of resistance and backlash. (Payne & Smith, 2022; Ullman, 2022). Despite the potential influence from a neighboring country, the new Irish curriculum sets an example by providing a more inclusive curriculum and having an adequate amount of transgender and non-binary representation. The visibility of more LGBTQ+ identities is beneficial as students learn about these identities and indirectly engage with LGBTQ+ characters and issues. Although indirect, this interaction can still effectively decrease prejudice against LGBTQ+ individuals among students (Brown & Paterson, 2016; Allport, 1954). Additionally, there is a lack of intersex representation in the textbooks. The UN has estimated that up to 1.7% of the global population is born with intersex traits (UNFE, 2016). This represents a significant portion of the population, yet in the textbooks, there is little mention of intersex people. Textbooks that include explanations of intersex people may allow children born with intersex traits to see themselves represented

and can also illustrate the restrictiveness of the gender binary, highlighting that some individuals possess both male and female sex characteristics (Monro,2021).

The hypothesis H6: ‘There will be a numeric difference in hits between publishers’ is accepted.

When examining the individual publishers, it was found that Folens had a significant underrepresentation of queer-only hits. At the same time, there was an overrepresentation of hits that included both queer and heterosexual elements. In contrast, Gill Education showed an underrepresentation of hits that were both queer and heterosexual. These differing approaches from the publishers highlight the subjects from H3 and H4, raising the question of whether sexuality should be discussed with an open approach, allowing the reader to incorporate their own experiences into the topic, or if sexuality education should be divided by sexualities. Similar to previous papers, a difference exists in the amount of queer representation among publishers (Jenings & MacGillivray, 2011). This is a concern, as it allows schools to choose textbooks with less LGBTQ+ representation and content, particularly since teachers with negative attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ community are less likely to implement an LGBTQ+ curriculum (Page, 2017). It is important that students are able to access LGBTQ+ information, and it should be included in textbooks. In the event that the school does not teach about LGBTQ+ issues, the information should still be available for students in the textbooks. Given the transformative role of education in fostering equality and inclusion, the integration of LGBTQ+ representation in textbooks becomes not just necessary but a reflection of education’s broader purpose. A primary aim of education is to promote individual and societal improvement, and education policies should play a pivotal role in this social and individual progress (Türkkahraman, 2012). Education is essential to ensure that no one is left behind amid changing social and economic conditions and also to help communities adapt and thrive in these conditions (Türkkahraman, 2012). This is evident in the international effort to provide access to education for all girls, to achieve gender equality (Chisamya et al., 2012). Additionally, educational innovations have been used to reduce racial biases and discrimination (Vera et al., 2016). In that case, no LGBTQ+ student should be left behind in the educational system, and non-LGBTQ+ students should be educated on LGBTQ+ topics, as this can help to promote community growth regarding LGBTQ+ attitudes.

Limitations and future research

Some limitations should be acknowledged in this study. Firstly, since this is a recently developed curriculum, many publishers have not yet completed their entire programs. Mentor Books and Gill Education have not, as of the writing of this paper, released their third-year textbooks. Including these books in future research would provide a more comprehensive representation of LGBTQ+ content in SPHE textbooks. Additionally, since the study did not include papers from before 2023, which used the

old curriculum, we cannot determine the effectiveness of the curriculum in increasing LGBTQ+ representation. Future research could compare the new textbooks (post-2023) with the old textbooks (pre-2023) to achieve a more accurate view.

Another limitation to acknowledge is the lack of a Bonferroni correction used in the statistical analyses. This means there is an increased chance of a Type I error (false positives) due to multiple instances of the same statistical test being performed on the same sample (Haynes, 2013).

The coding of the textbooks could also be improved regarding individual LGBTQ+ identities, where the multiple responses made it challenging to conduct statistical tests for analysis. Creating a separate dataset to categorize the hits could be helpful in future research. The hits would have only one LGBTQ+ identity, making it more efficient to examine whether there are any significant differences between LGBTQ+ identities. Additionally, research must be conducted on how positive representation in textbooks can impact attitudes toward the LGBTQ+ community and the well-being of LGBTQ+ students. While important textbooks are only one part of the education process, teachers' education, gay-straight alliances, and antibullying policies will also influence attitudes toward the LGBTQ+ community in schools (Swanson & Gettinger, 2016).

Practice implications

Compared to previous studies on LGBTQ+ representation in textbooks (Wilmot & Naidoo, 2014; Schmidt, 2016; Wylie, 2012), the Irish SPHE textbooks contain more LGBTQ+ representation than heterosexual representation. However, although there is ample queer representation, the themes still reflect heteronormative standards. Future policy should focus on including LGBTQ+ individuals in content related to family dynamics and marriage. LGBTQ+ students seeing themselves represented in positive, everyday contexts can help increase their self-esteem (Martins & Harrison, 2011).

It is also evident that there is a continued need for more LGBTQ+ sexual education in SPHE textbooks, as the lack of LGBTQ+ inclusive sexual education content creates barriers for LGBTQ+ students when accessing sexual health information and may lead to a higher likelihood of engaging in risky sexual behavior (Garg & Volerman, 2020).

The results also imply that there is a need for more information on intersex people in future textbooks. Information on puberty is heavily divided by gender, and it may be informative to have a section that defines intersex and discusses the various ways that intersex traits present.

How the textbooks handle sexuality, dating, and relationships is a step in the right direction.

As aforementioned, the textbooks employ a third-person approach, allowing the reader to insert themselves. This approach, alongside sections about LGBTQ+ explicit issues, ensures that everyone is included, while still leaving space to discuss LGBTQ+ specific content and issues. While it is essential to

discuss the challenges that LGBTQ+ students face, the textbooks must also discuss the positives of being LGBTQ+, such as living authentically, forging community, and freedom from traditional gender roles (Riggle et al., 2008). Discussing these positives alongside the difficulties of being LGBTQ+ can help LGBTQ+ students in the classroom feel less isolated and ensure that non-LGBTQ+ students receive a balanced and informed perspective on the LGBTQ+ community (Naseem et al., 2016).

Conclusion

In conclusion, Irish SPHE textbooks have set a commendable example in terms of LGBTQ+ representation, featuring substantial discussions on LGBTQ+ topics and showcasing a diverse array of LGBTQ+ identities, particularly when compared to previous studies (Wilmot & Naidoo, 2014; Schmidt, 2016; Wylie, 2012). However, in line with the theory of hidden curriculum, the portrayal of heterosexual and LGBTQ+ strongly differs, with LGBTQ+ representation primarily referencing discrimination and mental health. In contrast, heterosexual representation depicts heteronormative standards of family dynamics and sexual education. Future policy and curriculum developers should prioritize including LGBTQ+ individuals consistently throughout the textbooks in more everyday contexts. There should also be an increase in intersex representation and LGBTQ+ sex education to ensure that LGBTQ+ students have access to all the necessary information. Additionally, the open, third-person approach the books have to dating and relationships means the students can insert themselves into the textbook regardless of their sexuality. By implementing these suggestions into future textbooks, it may help to ensure that LGBTQ+ students are not forgotten about in the classroom and aid in educating non-LGBTQ+ students on LGBTQ+ issues and identities.

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Appendix

Figures

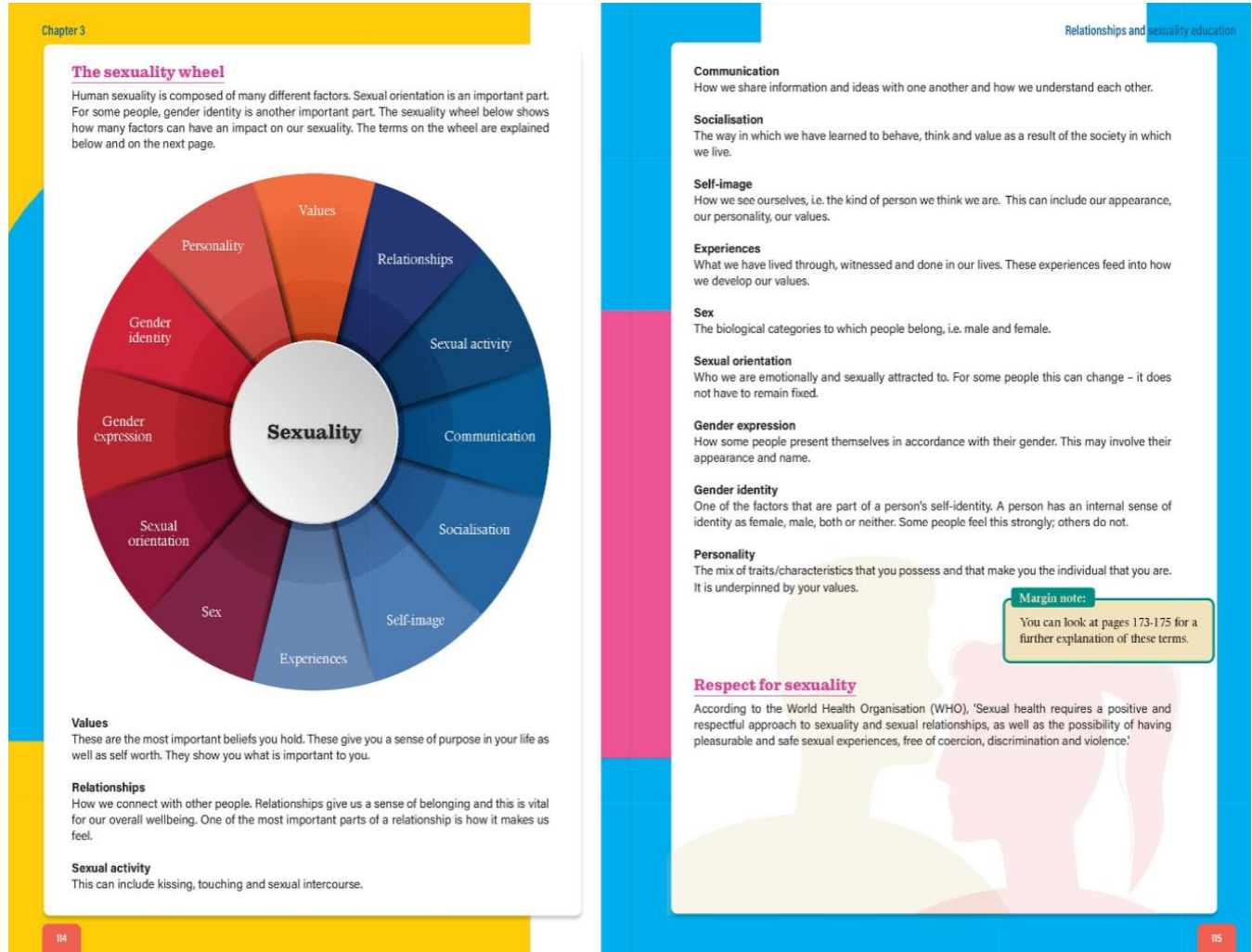


Figure 1: Sexuality Wheel ,Mentor Books- My Wellbing 1, Page 114-115

Tables

Frequency and percentages of themes across different hit groups' wordcounts (H2)

	Heterosexual (only)		Queer (only)		Both	
	Sum	%	Sum	%	Sum	%
Sexual Practice	4231	44.4%	771	7.2%	443	6.7%
Puberty	0	0%	303	2.8%	278	4.2%
Dating/relationships	4644	48.74%	867	8.1%	605	9.2%
Marriage	120	1.26%	0	0%	0	0%
Family	721	7.57%	62	0.6%	2	0.03%
Mental Health	198	2.08%	4408	41.0%	19	0.3%
Discrimination	13	0.14%	4364	40.6%	81	1.2%
Human Rights	16	0.17%	1054	9.8%	57	0.9%
Gender	35	0.37%	2456	22.9%	2976	45.3%
Sexuality	16	0.17%	3412	35.8%	4803	73.1%

*The total percentage exceeds 100% due to multiple themes being allowed to be coded for a single hit

Code Book

1 Title

A content analysis of LGBTQ+ Topics in Irish SPHE (Social, Personal and Health Education) textbooks

2 Current Project

12 textbooks are analysed to examine the amount and content of queer representation in the Irish SPHE textbooks compared to the heterosexual representation.

Data Collection

3 Information about the source

Described in the sheet 'textbooks'

Number

Number given to the source, in chronological order

Title

Title of the textbook

Year of publication

The year the book was published

Publisher

Name of publisher

No of pages

Number of pages in the book

School Year

School year in which the book is used, 1st, 2nd or 3rd year

Age of students in the year

1st year- 12-13, 2nd year- 13-14 and 3rd year 14-15

4 Hits

Described in the sheet 'Data'

Hit Number – Column A

The number given to the hit is in chronological order

Hit – Column B

A hit is a word, sentence, paragraph or page(s) that relates to sexual and gender identities and topics, more specifically heterosexual and queer identities and topics.

This excludes gender stereotyping, for example, ‘boys are taught to be strong while girls are taught to be caring’ and ‘boys can wear feminine clothes’

This excludes topics of relationships and dating that are not related to sexual orientation or gender identity, for example, ‘when you enter secondary school, your friend might start to get into relationships, but there should not be any pressure until you feel ready’

This also excludes biological puberty changes, however, it should be considered a hit if the texts refer to intersex biology.

This excludes uses or pronouns used in the books, such as ‘he/she’ vs ‘they’; this is only relevant to a person's romantic/sexual partner or interest. In addition for the terms ‘boyfriend/girlfriend’ vs ‘(romantic) partner’ when used in a sentence only the term itself is considered a hit and the rest of the sentence is ignored unless otherwise relevant to a queer or heterosexual reference.

Both these terms can be considered a queer and heterosexual reference as it is depended on the preference of the reader except girlfriend/boyfriend confirms the gender binary while partner challenges it.

The length of the hit is how many words are given to the specific reference, for example, if the reference is about the variety of sexualities, the length of the hit is determined by how long it discusses the variety of sexualities. If a paragraph is discussing stereotyping and using an example of how queer people are stereotyped only the example is considered a hit and the rest of the paragraph can be ignored.

Textbook – Column C

The textbook reference is from

Chapter – Column D

The chapter the reference is from

Page no – Column E

The page the reference is from

Format – Column F

Indicate if the reference is a sentence (text), a Picture, a Link to a website, or an exercise activity

If the hit is a picture, describe the picture. If the picture contains multiple pictures in a single picture, each depicting a different identity (example, a picture of a straight, gay, and lesbian couple), count the picture as 1 hit and check each identity on the hit. If the picture has an unequal number of identities (for example, 2 straight couples and one gay couple), code each picture as an individual hit to account for this difference.

Do not include pictures in which we cannot assume the gender of a person (for example, close-up of two people holding hands, where only the hands are seen).

For ambiguous photos (where it is not clear if it is queer reference or not) mark the hit as unspecified.

For links that are used when discussing topics of sexuality or gender, check the link to see if it is a queer or heterosexual reference.

Word count – Column G

The number of words that text, exercise, and link hits contain. This does not apply to pictures.

Heterosexual – Column I

Enter 1 if the hit references a heterosexual topic or describes cisgender heterosexual people

A heterosexual topic is a topic that relates to the heterosexual orientation, these topics may be referenced when discussing content such as sexual education, puberty, and relationships.

Example: 'During sexual intercourse between a man and a woman'

A cisgender heterosexual person is someone who experiences same-sex attraction and also identifies as the gender they were assigned at birth.

Example: Picture of a straight couple together and 'She told him that she didn't want a boyfriend and he said that was okay with him - he was happy to stay friends.'

Queer – Column J

Enter 1 if the hit references a queer topic or describes a queer person.

A queer topic is any topic that relates to any sexual orientation and gender identity that exist outside of heterosexual and cisgender identities. These topics may be referenced when discussing content such as puberty, sex education, and discrimination.

Example: 'Stereotypes can also be positive, such as 'Gay men have great fashion sense' and 'the highest rates of discrimination were reported by people who identify as LGBTQI+'

A queer person is someone who identifies outside of heterosexual and cisgender identities. These people may identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender or non-binary.

Examples: 'Picture of a gay couple touching foreheads' and 'Peter is always getting spiteful messages online about being gay'

It is important to note that sometimes a hit can be both heterosexual and queer as the hit may be describing sexuality and gender identity more broadly for example or use terms such as girlfriend/boyfriend or romantic partner to leave the interpretation open to the reader for example:

'As adolescents experience emotional and social changes during puberty, they may question their gender and sexual orientation,' and 'Some people may start having girlfriends and boyfriends in their teenage years, and some don't'

In this case enter 1 for both the heterosexual and queer.

Type of queer identity – column L-R

If entered '1' for queer indicate which queer identity is referenced, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender or non-binary. The hit can also reference LGBTQ+ as a whole, for example, 'every child should have equal access to education regardless of the child's gender or sexual orientation' Hits that are both heterosexual and queer some may not reference a specific identity or the LGBTQ+ community. For example 'Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of having a long term boyfriend or girlfriend as a teenager' for these queer and heterosexual hits do not enter '1' for any queer identity.

For hits that are both heterosexual and queer but reference a queer identity enter '1' for the identity that is referenced. For example: 'Gender identity describes how you feel inside - it refers to whether someone feels male or female or something else.' For this hit it would be both queer and heterosexual and the queer identities it refers are LGBTQ+ and non-binary.

Multiple identities can be referenced in a hit.

If other queer identities are mentioned, specify in 'other'

Confirms/Challenges binary-column T

Enter '0' if the hit confirms the gender binary. This means that it assumes that gender is a binary between man/woman and boy/girl and fails to acknowledge other gender identities outside of these. For example, ' you may be interested in having a boyfriend/girlfriend' and 'talk to your mom/dad about this'

Enter '1' If the hit challenges the gender binary. This means that the hit does not assume that gender is binary and allows for the inclusion of gender identities outside of the binary. For example, 'Gender identity refers to whether someone feels male or female or something else' and ' you may be interested in a romantic partner'

Any inclusion of transgender and non-binary people and identities challenges the gender binary.

It is important to note that only hits discussing gender identity and gendered/ non-gendered terms will confirm or challenge the gender binary, so this will not apply to all hits. Example: 'gay men have great fashion sense', this neither confirms nor challenges the gender binary

Specified- Column U

Only for queer hits (including queer hits that are also heterosexual)

Is the queer reference specified, in that it includes queer identities or describes a queer experience.

Enter 1 if the reference specifies a queer identity or experience, for example;

- 'Male, female, and non-binary'
- 'Someone may physically be male but identify as a woman'
- 'The highest rates of discrimination were reported by people who identify as LGBTQI+'
- 'Picture of a gay couple holding hands'
- 'asking someone if they live with their mam and dad, when they might have two mams or two dads (or one, of course)'

Enter 0 if the reference the reference describes a topic or person that could be outside of heterosexual or cisgender identities but doesn't not specify a queer identity or experience.

Example;

- 'male, female, and other'

- 'You may be interested in having a boyfriend or girlfriend'
- 'Every child should have equal access to education regardless of the child's gender or sexual orientation'
- 'Making fun of or spreading rumours about a person's sexual orientation'

Themes

For the Columns W-AG Indicate (1 = YES, 0= NO) whether the reference includes the following themes

- Sexual practice
- Puberty
- Dating/relationships
- Marriage
- Family
- Pathology
- Mental health
- Discrimination
- Human rights
- Gender
- Sexuality