

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF GENDER CURRICULUM ON  
ALIENATION: AN ASSESSMENT OF IMPLEMENTATION  
IN NORWEGIAN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

by  
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Rim Albitar

# ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Title: Examining the Impact of Gender Curriculum on Alienation: An Assessment of Implementation in Norwegian Educational Institutions

The Norwegian policy framework is deeply rooted in the promotion of inclusivity and tolerance towards diverse identity groups within Norwegian society.

In 2020, Norway initiated its school curriculum renewal, incorporating topics related to gender identity. While this curriculum intends to cultivate inclusivity and respect for diverse identity groups, it has faced criticism and concerns regarding its potential role of indoctrinating children. This research aimed to delve into two main issues surrounding the implementation of this curriculum: the underlying factors driving opposition to the inclusion of the LK20 curriculum and whether it is perceived as an imposed hegemonic conception of the good or not. 18 textbooks in Norwegian primary schools (grades 3-5) were analyzed and 15 in-depth interviews were conducted to explore the informants' perspectives. A notable finding is that the majority of the interviewees expressed feelings of alienation towards the gender identity curriculum, while a minority indicated support for its inclusion. The drivers of this alienation included perceived threats to religious beliefs, traditional stereotypes, individual expression, family authority, and concerns for the children's and parents' well-being. Conversely, supporters of the curriculum emphasized its contribution to tackling societal issues like racism by promoting tolerance, respect, individualism, and freedom as integral components of the Norwegian policy initiatives.

**Keywords:** School Curriculum, LGBTQ+, Gender Fluidity, Gender Identity, Sexual Orientation.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Background and Legal Educational Debates

Today, the increasing significance of the LGBTQ+ movement and its promotion throughout the Western world has become a fundamental objective of many nations' state policy. The advancement and approval of diversity within a society, particularly concerning the expression of gender identity in various forms, while aiming to combat all forms of discrimination, have demonstrated a complex and challenging trajectory to realization. In 1981 Norway was one of the first countries in the world to enact a Penal Code, prohibiting discrimination, and promoting equality based on gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and any form of characteristics within an individual<sup>1</sup>.

In contrast, if we date back to Norway's oldest body of laws, The 1687-established Christian law "Gulating Code of Laws", any form of same-sex intercourse that was against "nature" resulted in the death penalty (Halsos, 2007). Subsequently, the punishment was reduced to penal labor for a period between six months to three years. The Norwegian Parliament passed a new section in 1902, §213 in the Penal Code:

"If immoral Intercourse Takes Place between Persons of the Male Sex, those who are found guilty, or those who contribute to it, will be sentenced to Prison for up to one year. The same Punishment will befall anyone who engages in Immoral Intercourse with Animals, or who contributes to it. The prosecution will only take place when public Interest so demands<sup>2</sup>."

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<sup>1</sup> The Norwegian Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act, section 1. Purpose. (Lovdata, 2022). <https://lovdata.no/dokument/NLE/lov/2017-06-16-51>

<sup>2</sup> The Decriminalization of homosexuality (The Norwegian Parliament, 2022). [https://www.stortinget.no/en/In-English/About-the-Storting/historical-highlights/the-decriminalization-of-homosexuality/#\\_ftn1](https://www.stortinget.no/en/In-English/About-the-Storting/historical-highlights/the-decriminalization-of-homosexuality/#_ftn1)



Within the realm of legal discourse, Friday 21st of April 1972, marked a historic date for contemporary Norway decriminalizing homosexuality, a law introduced by the Norwegian Confederation of 1948 (an organization advocating for the rights of homosexual individuals) which set down the foundation for all fights to come in achieving acceptance of same-sex sexuality and a larger diversity of gender and sexuality. In January 2009, the Norwegian Parliament passed the same-sex Marriage Act, and same-gender couples received a legal endorsement to get married and the right to adoption<sup>3</sup>. In 2016, discussions and debates began after the Norwegian Church approved same-sex marriage to take place in the church. Many individuals perceived this modification of the Christian faith as a dream that came true. In contrast, others were exposed with a feeling of sorrow and disappointment, since this endorsement contradicted the Episcopal meeting of 1997, which regarded this introduction as heretical and apostasy from the teachings of the Holy Bible and Jesus' words on marriage (Pettersen et al. 2016).

Presently, the discussed reforms in the Norwegian state policy on gender diversity and efforts to eliminate discrimination are unfolding within the Norwegian educational system. The Norwegian Directorate of Education (2023) highlighted the importance of including the topic of "gender identity" in the newly introduced school curriculum, "Læreplanverket 2020" (LK20), which is implemented in Norwegian primary schools and onwards. In comparison to the school curriculums in the United States, the Norwegian curriculum aims to promote the option of making responsible life decisions, developing a positive self-image, normalization of diversity, and breaking traditional norms (The Norwegian Directorate of Education, 2023). The LK20

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<sup>3</sup> The Marriage Act, Section 1. Gender. (Lovdata, 2024) <https://lovdata.no/dokument/NLE/lov/1991-07-04-47>

curriculum works on understanding values, interpersonal relationships, boundaries, and respect for others, all within the context of social justice and equity<sup>4</sup>. Additionally, research has shown that the term “gay” is until today utilized in Norwegian schools as a pejorative term (Slåtten et al., 2007, as cited by Smestad, 2018). For instance, in Hilde Slåtten’s Ph.D. dissertation, she reported that 54% of male students and 30% of female students have used the word “gay” as a pejorative term towards their friends at school and during leisure time (Torp, 2016). The lack of students’ comprehension of LGBTQ+ terms and issues is interconnected with the use of the word “gay” as a negative term, this lack of education contributes to problematic teaching (Røthingen & Svendsen, 2008, as cited in Smestad, 2018). Similarly, research has revealed that many Norwegian youth have a negative attitude towards LGBTQ+ people (Anderssen & Slåtten, 2008, as cited in Smestad, 2018). Other surveys have found that there is still a need for invisibility among LGBTQ+ individuals, especially for transgendered and bisexual people (Anderssen & Malterud, 2013; van der Ros, 2013, as cited in Smestad, 2018). Hence, researchers have demonstrated that many textbooks internationally are utilized in schools that censor or ignore LGBTQ+ content completely or include them in negative issues such as the Holocaust or HIV/AIDS (Schmidt, 2016; Temple, 2005; Wylie, 2012, as cited in Smestad, 2018). A professor at Oslo Met, Åse Røthing, reported that gender themes and gay tolerance are part of Norwegian culture, in contrast to other Western and non-Western nations (Smestad, 2018). For instance, textbooks utilized at schools reproduce what is viewed as the image of the “Western Nations” which is referred to as “liberal” and “progressive” in contrast to the “Non-Western

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<sup>4</sup> Støtte til undervisning om kjønn og seksualitet (UDIR, 2022). <https://www.UDIR.no/laring-og-trivsel/lareplanverket/stotte/Stotte-til-undervisning-om-kjonn-og-seksualitet/kjonn-og-seksuell-orientering/>

Nations” (Honkasalo, 2014, as cited in Smestad, 2018). It is interesting to observe the evolution of the LGBTQ+ community’s journey from advocating for political rights and legal protections to the current debate over integrating ‘gender identity’ into school curricula. Many Western nations are utilizing educational institutions as tools to foster a more inclusive, tolerant, and educated society that values respect, dignity, and acceptance, and supports diverse forms of self-expression.

Yet, all these changes do not pass without contestation. Recalling the event at the Norwegian church meeting in approval of same-sex marriage in Norwegian churches, over 40,000 church members decided to discontinue their membership after the approval in 2016<sup>5</sup>. For instance, the Norwegian priest, Steinar Sund, who served 18 years in the Norwegian Church shared that his main reason for resigning was due to the heresy that was introduced into the liturgy.

The Norwegian priest, Sund (2024), stated the following:

“The most vital reason was that the Norwegian Church had left the scripture which is a supreme guideline for faith, life, and teaching<sup>6</sup>.”

The Norwegian Church is viewed more as a ‘political party’ pushing for social reforms, including environmental protection, rather than solely as a church (Sund, 2024). Today, the debate is still ongoing but has shifted to the realm of education, as the new Norwegian curriculum (LK20) introduces students to themes that encompass diverse gender identities and expression, promote inclusivity and respect for individuals of different gender identities, and encourage children to explore their gender identity.

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<sup>5</sup> The Norwegian Church: Membership statistics (Statistics of Norway, 2024). <https://www.ssb.no/kultur-og-fritid/religion-og-livssyn/statistikk/den-norske-kirke>

<sup>6</sup> The full publication on the Norwegian priest's decision to resign (Sund, 2024). <https://www.bygdeposten.no/derfor-forlot-jeg-den-norske-kirke/o/5-10-616079>

This has elicited another concern among parents in Norway, and whether this curriculum aims at a specific political agenda or not remains unclear.

## **1.2. Research Objectives**

The imperative of incorporating rights for all individuals irrespective of their background is crucial in many nations worldwide. The endorsement of vulnerable groups, such as the LGBTQ+ community, is associated with a step toward modernity, progress, and liberal society (Honkasalo, 2014, as cited in Smestad, 2018). Although the Western world is recognized as progressive, there are debates about the extent of rights for LGBTQ+ individuals and whether these rights conflict with different sexual orientations or with what was classically perceived as “hegemonic heteronormativity”. Some argue that advocating for LGBTQ+ rights could have specific impacts on certain groups. For instance, the Norwegian priest, Steinar Sund (2024), raised concerns about the approval of same-sex marriage in churches, which could impact the religion and practices of Christians.

Today, the integration of gender identity topics has become more visible as government entities and stakeholders view the introduction of these topics and other LGBTQ+ issues as essential in schools. They promote respect, inclusivity, and acceptance of diversity among the new generation, not only in school but also during their leisure time and within the growing society.

Conversely, the rising debate has shifted to educational institutions, as some parents oppose lessons that educate their children about gender identity. Therefore, the curriculum is viewed as a threat in several aspects of their lives, potentially affecting some families’ interests, well-being, desired values, and preferred way of life.

This study aims to assess the perception of various stakeholders on the recently implemented Norwegian school curriculum (LK20), focusing on the gender identity content in Norwegian primary school grades 3 to 5. Building on the primary research aim, three supplementary objectives were set to:

1. Provide an overall development of gender identity curriculum in Norwegian educational institutions to comprehend its evolution and primary principles.
2. Analyze the content of the gender identity curriculum in textbooks and online digital platforms to identify the key concepts, themes, and learning outcomes.
3. Explore the perspectives of various stakeholders, including parents, educators, psychologists, and school nurses on the implementation of the gender identity curriculum.

I predicted that this research would identify the challenges and obstacles encountered by Norwegian educational institutions, parents, and other stakeholders in efficiently implementing and evaluating the gender identity curriculum. I aimed to explore the extent to which this curriculum has affected the parents' perceptions of their children, their understanding of gender-related issues, and whether there are any potential feelings of alienation and/or inclusion. Additionally, this study aimed to determine whether the curriculum constitutes a 'hegemonic conception of the good' or not.

### **1.3. Relevance beyond Norway**

This study is highly relevant in today's world, particularly given the increased polarization within Western nations. The growth of the LGBTQ+ community and its significant influence on policymaking have yielded both positive and negative outcomes

for society. The present issue encompasses two factions: one comprised of individuals who endorse “gender fluidity” and “gender identity” in education, and the other group of individuals who perceive it as a threat to their conventional values, particularly concerning the family authority, and the endeavors aligned with the purportedly secular agenda. Thus, the primary debate centers on the family’s role within educational institutions regarding gender identity lessons and other LGBTQ+ content, alongside the fear of potential state intervention leading to changes in traditional values, culture, and beliefs. Moreover, given all the acknowledgment around Norway’s inclusive approach toward the LGBTQ+ community, it is significant to explore the political consensus on this issue, specifically the perspectives of families and individuals with religious affiliations and their conception of the good. This research aimed to determine which parties have a lesser or more extensive inclusive approach in terms of rights. Also, by studying attitudes from a tolerance perspective, the study may contribute to an overall understanding of political attitudes and the nation’s policymaking standpoint.

#### **1.4. Thesis Framework**

After this introductory chapter, chapter 2 presents the methodology deployed in this study where the research design, participant selection, recruitment process, and an exploration of the ethical considerations and reflective insights are addressed. Chapter 3 demonstrates the adopted theoretical framework and the existing literature pertinent to the research topic. Chapter 4 presents the research findings combined with a discussion section. Finally, chapter 5 provides a summary of the research findings, closing remarks, the inherent limitations of this study, and recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER 2

### METHODOLOGY

#### 2.1. The Research Design

The adopted research design in this study is a qualitative content analysis of the newly implemented LK20 curriculum in Norwegian educational institutions, combined with in-depth interviews. The curriculum and content analysis process encompassed examining content on “gender identity” and “gender fluidity”, which were meticulously examined in 18 textbooks, school guidelines, and the two digital online platforms “Salaby” and “Skolenmin”. The analysis of the 18 textbooks, used by grades 3-5 students in primary schools in Norway, comprehensively investigated subjects such as Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, Norwegian, English, and Religious Studies. Among the selected textbooks, 3 were Natural Sciences, 2 addressed Social Sciences, 3 covered both Natural- and Social Sciences, 4 were Norwegian language and literature, 4 were English language, and 2 focused on Religious Studies. Hence, the decision to focus the research on three grade levels (3-5) was imperative to thoroughly examine the curriculum on three primary school grade levels.

Regarding the interviews, one of the most influential scholars of qualitative research, Irving Seidman, discussed the significance of interviews in his book *Interviewing as Qualitative Research* (2006) in understanding people’s experiences and perspectives in a detailed and nuanced manner. Thus, a total of 15 in-depth interviews were conducted to explore stakeholders’ perspectives regarding the revision of the Norwegian LK20 curriculum and their alignment or divergence with the proposed changes. The selection of participants emphasized the inclusion of foremost parents and professionals working closely with primary school students such as educators,

psychologists, and school nurses. The interview questions addressed several themes, including the revised curriculum on gender identity along with its potential challenges and benefits. The questions aimed to explore educators' and other stakeholders' experiences with parents who opposed and supported the curriculum.

## **2.2. The Participant Selection and Recruitment Process**

The aim of selected participants was first to encompass religious and non-religious educational institutions and staff, located in Oslo and Bergen in Norway, by ensuring diverse perspectives. However, taking into the ethical consideration led to the inclusion of participants exclusively from three public schools within the Bergen region. A total of 15 individuals, consisting of 8 females and 7 males aged from 26 to 65 years, were recruited. As a researcher, to address the unforeseen changes in the recruitment, the selected inclusion criteria were adjusted to incorporate individuals from the Christian faith, Muslim faith, and individuals with no religious affiliation. However, it is important to consider that individuals affiliated with the Christian or Muslim faith are not necessarily deeply religious; rather, they often adopt these beliefs based on cultural and traditional perceptions of the appropriate way of living. Similarly, informants with no religious affiliation may not necessarily hold only progressive views on the topic; but may also possess conservative perspectives. The selected informants consisted of parents, educators, psychologists, and school nurses with both Norwegian ethnicity and immigrant backgrounds. The conducted interviews were based one-on-one basis for a maximum duration of one hour unless participants opted to skip certain questions. The recruitment process adhered to the guidelines set forth by the Institutional Review Board of the American University of Beirut, which required reaching out to participants



in a manner consistent with ethical considerations. Leveraging my extensive social network facilitated efficient and expedited communication and recruitment of all participants. Many of the interviewees referred me to other potential participants who were eager to contribute to the study. Therefore, the recruitment process relied on a snowball effect, where participants referred other individuals who could contribute valuable insights to the research study. Based on the interview responses, it is evident that the snowball effect did not lead participants to exclusively refer only to those with similar views; instead, they referred to individuals with both opposing and supportive perspectives. Before each interview, all the participants were fully informed about the research topic, purpose, procedure, and their role as participants, through obtaining oral consent from each participant. Subsequently, consenting participants were provided with a consent form, and they were given the autonomy to select the preferred interview location, some felt comfortable doing it through Zoom, others at cafes, and some decided to invite me to their office.

### **2.3. Ethical Considerations**

The study entailed a minimal level of risk and aimed at providing benefits to all participants. The overarching objective was to enhance a comprehensive understanding of diverse perspectives regarding the gender identity curriculum in Norway. Measures were taken to safeguard the privacy and autonomy of the informants, by ensuring their voluntary participation, and the option to withdraw from the interview or decline to answer specific questions at any moment to safeguard their anonymity and well-being. In addition, the respectful collaboration with the informants ensured the acknowledgment of their expertise and concerns around the topic of study.

Throughout the interview process, participants were invited to share their viewpoints and any pertinent experiences they may have witnessed with others concerning the gender identity curriculum. All participants were explicitly informed and reassured of their freedom to disclose information deemed pertinent to them, the primary focus was to maintain their privacy and comfort throughout the interview process. Therefore, transparent communication was fundamental, especially with participants who provided comprehensive overviews by addressing any concerns promptly, and securely furnishing relevant information. All the participants received adequate time to formulate their responses and assurance was consistently given that no adverse repercussion would result from skipping questions or discontinuing the interview. Participants were assured the confidentiality of their data. As mentioned, oral consent was obtained from each participant, and explicit permission was sought for the recording before the interview. In instances where consent to recording was denied, recourse was made to handwritten notes, where the participants were offered to review and approve after the interview. In the virtual interviews conducted through Zoom, participants were offered to review and approve the notes after the session, to ensure their continued involvement in the data verification process.

Following the guidelines established by the Institutional Review Board at the American University of Beirut, the anonymity and privacy of each participant are of high importance. In ensuring secured storage, preservation, and protection of the data provided by the informants. Consequently, before conducting any interviews, the participants were explained the procedures for the research and safeguarding of the recorded materials, including the storage of audio files and the accompanying notes under password protection. A reflexive consciousness of potential power dynamics was

taken into consideration, the conducted research ensured the voices of the participants were highly respected and accurately presented. Also, participants were informed of the transcription process assured of the secure handling, and that the destruction of both original recording and transcribed documents would happen within a timeframe of five years.

Personal identifiers such as the informants' names and contact details were securely stored within a distinct password-protected file and computer system, separate from the source guard interview-related documentation. All thesis-related files were carefully preserved and secured on a password-protected computer, with all contact information archived in a separate password-protected file to maintain confidentiality and security. Access to interview recordings and transcriptions is strictly limited to authorized personnel and will not be accessible from any non-secure location. This ensures the integrity and confidentiality of the data collected. Dissemination of research findings is restricted to the presentation of the graduate thesis during the thesis defense, with potential utilization for academic presentations, conferences, and future research. The dissemination of the research findings has been tackled with care to avoid harmful stereotypes or further marginalizing vulnerable groups.

## CHAPTER 3

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter aims to critically examine the literature on gender identity curriculum implementation within educational institutions, along with the escalating parental alienation associated with it. It is divided into four sections: a comprehensive review of the literature on gender identity curriculum, the parental alienation on the implemented gender curriculum, liberal and conservative stances on LGBTQ+ discourse, and final remarks.

Within the socioeconomic sphere, there are rising levels of inequality, hazard, and marginalization, contributing to the destabilization of the political system and a rising sense of vulnerability in societies. For instance, the Oslo Pride attack in July 2022, resulted in two people being killed and over twenty individuals injured<sup>7</sup>. Despite Norway's commitment to uphold and safeguard the rights of individuals to freely express their gender identity, the tragic incident in Oslo heightened the Norwegian government's effort on the LGBTQ+ community by underlining unification and combatting all forms of extremism in the future. One of the tools employed by educational institutions in their gender identity lessons is to uphold what Rawlsian political liberalism referred to as the "conception of justice". According to this conception, all individuals deserve to live in a society where they perceive inclusivity without any form of discrimination or challenges to reach a protected way of living. Yet, this research scrutinized whether the imposed gender identity curriculum is part of the "conception of justice" or pluralistic "conception of the good" and how the family

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<sup>7</sup> Rapport etter Oslo-terror: Angrepet kunne vært avverget. (NRK, 2023).  
[https://www.nrk.no/norge/rapport-etter-oslo-terror\\_-angrepet-kunne-vaert-avverget-1.16435477](https://www.nrk.no/norge/rapport-etter-oslo-terror_-angrepet-kunne-vaert-avverget-1.16435477)

authority could be affected after its implementation in Norwegian educational institutions.

### **3.1. Theoretical Framework**

Theoretically, this thesis relied heavily on how Sari Hanafi (2023) made a critical assessment of gender fluidity. Hanafi argued that the bulk of the responses of the social sciences and/or sociology to the pathologies are defined as “being classically liberal but politically illiberal” - he termed this peculiar combination “Symbolic Liberalism” (SL). SL is not a problem for sociology alone, rather it manifests itself through many sectors of public life including the media, politics, law, and education. The problem of SL is present not only in the Global North but also in the Global South, thanks to a wide range of global convergence forces. To address the inherent problem with SL and as an alternative to it, Hanafi proposed the “dialogical sociology” (DS) as a form of balance between collective and individual political liberal projects, acting seriously against social inequality and in favor of the conception of justice while allowing the plurality of the conception of the good. For Hanafi (2023) and quoting John Rawls (2001, 9), the conception of the good is a set of “final ends and aims which specifies a person’s conception of what is of value in human life or, alternatively, of what is regarded as fully worthwhile life”. It includes one’s preferences and desires regarding dress, food, using spare time, ideals of personal character, friendship, and family.

In liberal democracy, political power derives from the collective will of the populace and the diversity among individuals is a fundamental aspect of democracy. How does the exercise of political power entail the enactment of laws on citizenry

characterized by its pluralism? Each citizen has their fundamental view on different aspects of life, whether it is right or wrong, good, or bad. They all have what John Rawls referred to as the “Comprehensive Doctrine” (CD). To understand this, it is important to know what the theory about “Political Liberalism” indicates.

Rawls defined his theory as “a moral conception concerned with the basic structure of a society and presented as a view that is independent of any (religious, philosophical, or moral) CDs”. Its central idea is to make all individuals free and equal, within its method of fairly resolving disagreement in a pluralistic society, it does not expect free and equal citizens to agree on one comprehensive doctrine. Despite the plurality of CDs in society, Rawls contended that people cooperate because they agree on political conceptions based on constitutional rules. For instance, people with different beliefs will agree to pay for poor people although they have different reasonings. Some might do it as solidarity, religious duty, or avoidance of poor people’s theft and hunger (Hanafi, 2023). Thus, all citizens, regardless of their background or beliefs, should formulate “moral reasoning” into a political concept, these justifications are called “public reason”. The overlapping consensus is created when people endorse political concepts from their point of view. Rawls believed like many liberals that the public debate is a collection of competing arguments that encourage “reasonable” rather than “rational” outcomes. The debate itself reconstructs the moral power of individuals as related to their capacity for a “sense of justice” and a “conception of the good”.

Today this distinction between these notions is blurred while citizens’ private lives in many places in the world are being commodified by the market and social companies, something that has been studied by some sociologists (e.g. Illouz, 2019, as cited by Hanafi 2023). Concerning the normalization of gender fluidity via the inclusion

of gender identity in the school curriculum, is it part of the conception of justice or the good? The concept of justice is about two domains: social justice and human rights that are inspired by the universality of human rights as abstract concepts (e.g. by The Universal Declaration of Human Rights- UDHR). However, what Hanafi (2023) criticized is how those who are “classically liberal but politically illiberal” – the Symbolic Liberals, want to take UDHR as a concrete policy and overemphasize the right while erecting group identities protected by the rights. When legal principles detach from real-life circumstances, these notions adopt a formal nature. In a legalistic context, human rights serve as a tool for both the vulnerable and the influential (Hanafi, 2023). For him, Symbolic Liberals (SLs) distort the definition of justice by deflating the concept of social justice, inflating the conception of the universality of human rights, and considering only one possible conception of the good as being an inherent part of the conception of justice. The Symbolic Liberals possess indeed power. Hanafi quoted the sociologist Musa Al-Gharbi (Al-Gharbi Forthcoming, as cited by Hanafi, 2023) in his recent book *We Have Never Been Woke: Social Justice Discourse, Inequality and the Rise of a New Elite* defines symbolic capitalism as a “New class of social elite” who attained their social position by owning material assets, nor by developing or trading material goods or services. Instead, they traffic in symbols, rhetoric, images, narratives, data and analysis, ideas, and abstraction. Because of their highly symbolic capital, some SLs can push their conception of the good into the (republican) public sphere, thanks to their domination in this sphere and their ability to use the law to enforce it in society. In doing so, they commit two errors; first, some SL groups sell their conception of the good as a universalistic conception of justice. Second, their individualism is ontological in the sense that society is built up from only individuals and nothing but individuals,

and, hence, it is nothing more than the sum of individuals and their properties. This will prevent the SLs from envisaging any evaluation of social structures and societal properties. For example, family and community are not viewed as important, even if they are salient to the individual well-being (Maffetone 2011, as cited by Hanafi 2023).

Today, with identity politics, we are facing a crisis concerning the concept of a common culture, as new identity groups seek legal protection and international recognition without considering potential conflicts with other groups (Hanafi, 2023). Of course, this concerns only hegemonic groups. While minorities like Muslims in France do not have such protection. For instance, the prohibition of wearing a scarf or abaya in French schools<sup>8</sup>, either in the name of justice or in defense of “Laïcité” (Secularism) infringes upon the rights of Muslims to practice their faith and express their cultural values freely. Wearing the abaya should be recognized as part of a comprehensive doctrine and a fundamental right, as it does not infringe upon the rights of others.

In contrast, the organized nude bicycle tour “Nude Tour de France” with both men and women cycling naked, has been viewed as a permissible right in France (hegemonic group). How can the abaya be perceived as a threat to secularism while the possibility of children encountering naked individuals is deemed acceptable? Despite being prohibited in multiple French cities in 2023<sup>9</sup>, the tour was regarded as a social event before. Instead, the freedom to dress according to one’s culture or personal choice is viewed as a challenge to French secularism. The right to preserve one’s culture is an

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<sup>8</sup> French Schools’ ban on abayas and headscarves is supposedly about secularism - but it sends a powerful message about who ‘belongs’ in French culture (Carol Ferrara, 2023). <https://theconversation.com/french-schools-ban-on-abayas-and-headscarves-is-supposedly-about-secularism-but-it-sends-a-powerful-message-about-who-belongs-in-french-culture-213543>

<sup>9</sup> ‘Nude Tour de France’ Banned in Several Cities After Decades of Issue-Free Races (Chris Malone Méndez, 2023). <https://www.mensjournal.com/news/nude-tour-de-france-banned>



inherent component of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and should be harmonized with the promotion of all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

### **3.2. From Political Tensions to a New School Curriculum**

In recent years, the topic of gender identity has gained a prominent standing in the field of education globally and particularly in Western nations. The renewal of the Norwegian LK20 curriculum was initially established in 2020 for grades 1-9, and in 2021 for grade 10. It is noteworthy to observe how the integration of gender identity discourse, alongside the promotion of diversity, inclusivity, and tolerance, has permeated educational institutions. Certainly, it is the societal challenges that are the main drivers surrounding human rights, social justice, and equity that determine legislative initiatives and political reforms. In a Western state like Norway, the adoption of an inclusive approach is present through its political efforts, among these endeavors stand the effective renewal and incorporation of gender identity curricula within the Norwegian educational institutions. In a legal context, the Norwegian Education Act (Section 9 A-2) stipulated the following:

“All pupils are entitled to a good physical and psychosocial environment conducive to health, well-being and learning<sup>10</sup>”

This legislation is based on the principle of ensuring the well-being of all students, which encompasses both mental and physical health combined with the students' safety within the school environment. The Royal Ministry of Education and Research in Norway oversees education, research, kindergarten, and integration. Hence, in an overarching section of the LK20 curriculum, it is addressed that the curriculum prioritizes that students should be able to nurture and develop their own identity while

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<sup>10</sup> Section 9 A-2. Right to a good physical and psychosocial school environment (Lovdata, 2019) [https://lovdata.no/dokument/NLE/lov/1998-07-17-61/KAPITTEL\\_11#§9a-8](https://lovdata.no/dokument/NLE/lov/1998-07-17-61/KAPITTEL_11#§9a-8)

also gaining insight into how other people live with their experiences, attitudes, and worldviews<sup>11</sup>.

In this context, gender identity topics have been incorporated into Norwegian school curricula for two reasons: to promote social justice and equity and to address the elevated rates of suicide among the Norwegian population<sup>12</sup>.

First, and foremost the necessity is to establish an inclusive learning environment that prioritizes social justice and equity by acknowledging and valuing students across ethnic, racial, orientation, ability, socio-economic, and academic dimensions (NSES, 2020). This liberal project is expanding on a global scale, where numerous nations have already integrated gender identity into their school curricula to tackle societal challenges through both anti-discrimination and inclusion policies. Indeed, integrating this into school curriculum have carried numerous benefits, particularly in societies that are facing fast development, where the lessons taught to students are relevant and forward-looking. As highlighted by a 40-year-old heterosexual and male Norwegian educator in Bergen, Norway:

“LGBTQ+ individuals, along with others, are freely expressing their identities. Just as white individuals are afforded rights that safeguard them, LGBTQ+ individuals deserve equal rights. Given their growth in society, they must be institutionalized to ensure the fulfillment of their rights. Their integration into society is inevitable, regardless of any personal preferences. They have always been present within our society, and their visibility has increased notably in recent times.”

LGBTQ+ individuals are more susceptible to hate speech, prejudice, and ostracism in their daily lives, and the inclusion of gender identity lessons is aimed to be

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<sup>11</sup> The overarching section of the LK20 – Values and Principles for Primary Education (UDIR, 2024). <https://www.udir.no/lk20/overordnet-del/opplaringens-verdigrunnlag/1.2-identitet-og-kulturelt-mangfold/>

<sup>12</sup> Section 2.3.1 Prevention of mental illness and suicide in schools, under the Norwegian Government’s Action Plan 2020-2025 (The Norwegian Government, 2020)

a way to diminish potential discrimination against them (The Norwegian Government, 2023). According to the Statistics of Norway's 2022 Survey on Quality of Life, it was reported that 48% of non-heterosexuals reported low satisfaction with their mental health, in contrast to, 25% of the heterosexual population rated low satisfaction with their mental health<sup>13</sup>. In the same vein, the Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth, and Family Affairs, released in the National Safety Survey Statistics in 2022, that a rate of 4% of bisexual individuals and 11% of homosexuals have experienced hate crimes, compared to a 1% rate of heterosexuals being exposed to hate crimes<sup>14</sup>. The records revealed also that transgender individuals are exposed to higher levels of discrimination across all societal domains compared to other groups within Norwegian society (Bufdir, 2022). Another report on Life Quality in Norway confirmed that the LGBTQ+ population scored lower on all indicators of subjective quality of life compared to heterosexual individuals (Statistisk Sentralbyrå, 2023). Within the age group 18-24, a ratio of more than half (54%) of the LGBTQ+ individuals were dissatisfied with their mental health, in comparison to a lower ratio (34%) of the dissatisfied heterosexual population (Statistisk Sentralbyrå, 2023). According to the Norwegian Government (2023), equality and equity are two values that have been fought for throughout history and should remain upheld and reinforced within society. Within the promotion of social justice and equity, The Norwegian Directorate of Education and Research (2022) highlighted two fundamental aspects in the renewal of the LK20 curriculum: "sexual

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<sup>13</sup> The Norwegian Government Action Plan on Gender and Sexual Diversity (The Norwegian Government, 2023). <https://www.regjeringen.no/en/dokumenter/the-norwegian-governments-action-plan-on-gender-and-sexual-diversity-20232026/id2963172/?ch=2>

<sup>14</sup> View graph on report «Vulnerability to hate Criminality» (Bufdir, 2022). <https://www.bufdir.no/statistikk-og-analyse/LHBT/hatkriminalitet-diskriminering>

health” and “human rights” which is evidenced by three factors: students’ rights, knowledge, and empowerment.

First, in terms of rights, it has been strongly exemplified by the Norwegian government’s supportive stance on sexuality, openness, and respect for gender diversity. Educational institutions play a vital role in fostering and striving to enhance students' awareness of their rights to define their own identities without constraint.

Secondly, the Norwegian Directorate of Education and Research stressed the importance of understanding gender identity topics within the LK20 curriculum before individuals encounter situations where this knowledge is necessary (The Norwegian Government, 2023). Educational institutions and school staff are responsible for upholding these rights by educating children on the lesson.

Thirdly, among the three interdisciplinary themes introduced within the LK20 curriculum, “Public Health and Life Skills”, seeks to provide students with skills by promoting good mental and physical health, enabling them to make responsible life decisions. This is affirmed by both the Norwegian government (2023) and the Norwegian Education Directorate (2022). Thus, the Norwegian government emphasizes the idea that a society that ensures the development of a positive self-image and sexual identity is crucial and will result in the promotion of good health choices that impact public health. Similarly, the Norwegian Directorate of Education (2022) stated the following:

“Students should be provided with equitable opportunities to make independent choices.”

In that context, educational institutions have a pivotal role in nurturing the advancement and development of students’ identities, enhancing their confidence in

their viewpoints, and introducing shared values essential for embracing diversity, engaging actively, and preparing for the global future.

According to the Norwegian Directorate of Education (2020):

“Every individual may experience moments of standing out and feeling different, therefore the Norwegian LK20 curriculum aims to embrace these differences by acknowledging and valuing them.”

The renewal of the LK20 curriculum aims to generate a curriculum that reflects diversity through gender identity, sexual orientation, and other LGBTQ+ topics. Based on that objective, the LK20 curriculum values and principles can be outlined in three sections<sup>15</sup>:

1. **Inclusive Curriculum:** encouraging schools to expand the curriculum that reflects diversity and respect for gender identities and sexual orientations.
2. **Teacher Training and Support:** providing the right resources and training for educators to effectively address and include discussions about gender identity and sexual orientation in their teaching.
3. **Promoting Understanding and Acceptance:** comprehension by respecting and accepting diversity among students and the staff is crucial.

Thus, educational institutions have a major responsibility for imparting comprehension and promoting attitudes to safeguard these values. Students are expected to discover various aspects of gender identity and sexual orientation as outlined in sections 1) and 3) (The Norwegian Directorate of Education, 2023). The gender identity curriculum is viewed as positively influencing students’ comprehension based on the following factors (The Norwegian Directorate of Education, 2023):

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<sup>15</sup> Core Component - values and principles of basic education (UDIR, 2020)  
<https://www.UDIR.no/lk20/overordnet-del/>

1. The promotion of the fundamental belief that sexuality is a natural aspect of human life, and that sexuality can enhance the quality of life through the promotion of well-being and contribute to good health.
2. Recognition of students regardless of identity, background, or level of functioning.
3. Provision of comprehensive information and dialogue with parents when planning development processes on gender and sexuality topics.
4. Adaptation of instruction to suit the student group, considering biological, social, emotional, psychological, religious, ethical, and cultural factors.
5. Inclusion of all students in instruction related to gender and sexuality topics, ensuring they receive the education they are entitled to.

The Second motivation behind the integration of the LK20 gender identity curriculum is the elevated prevalence of suicidal behavior and attempts in Norway. The Public Health Report recorded that Norway experiences an annual average of 650 suicides within its entire population, with a median age of 47 years old, where half are older, and half are younger<sup>16</sup>. Two-thirds of the suicide incidents involve male individuals, and a total of 650 suicides were recorded in 2022 (Stene-Larsen et al., 2023). However, all these statistics do not affirm whether this vulnerability in Norway is due to societal discrimination or other factors. Yet, the narrative of SLs strongly emphasizes the importance of addressing mental health and well-being through the school curriculum, where the focus is on the students and their personal development.

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<sup>16</sup> Suicide in Norway (Stene-Larsen, et al., 2023). <https://www.fhi.no/en/he/hin/mental-health/suicide/#data-source-and-glossary>

Looking beyond the objectives of the LK20 curriculum, in both the United States and Sweden their curriculum objectives align with those introduced in Norway. In the United States, a Curricula Advisory Council and Disability Specialist, Ashira Greenberg, addressed that some schools in the United States utilize the “Rights, Respect, Responsibility” curriculum established by an activist group and includes the “Pink, Blue, Purple” lesson designed for 1<sup>st</sup> graders. The curriculum aims to challenge traditional stereotypes and promote individual expression. It emphasizes the concept of gender fluidity through the notion of feeling different than the gender one was assigned at birth (Greenberg, 2022).

In the context of the Swedish school curriculum “Skoleverket”, gender identity is included in sex education. The curriculum aims to raise discussions and inquiries surrounding gender identity, sexuality, and relationships. Similarly to Norwegian schools, Swedish educational institutions view themselves as responsible actors for students to explore and develop their abilities and interests independently of gender affiliation. This includes matters based on gender identity, sexual orientation, functional disabilities, and ethnicity (Skolverket, 2020). Creating a school environment that aligns with the curriculum framework, will integrate students’ everyday experiences, interests, and comprehension. The emphasis on societal challenges by nations and educational institutions is significant for students in interdisciplinary education and serves as a key resource for them to address and overcome challenges.

### ***3.2.1. Content, Key Terms, and Implementation Practices***

The interdisciplinary theme “Public Health and Life Skills” is incorporated into all subjects within the LK20 curriculum, highlighting gender identity among its various

focal points within its framework. For instance, the subjects revolve around the notion of personal identity development across various academic disciplines that students engage with. According to The Norwegian Directorate of Education (2020), the subjects should contribute to students' ability to make good life decisions and deal with challenges related to sexuality, exclusion, life choices, and comprehension of tolerance for diversity and other individuals' values, and what they perceive as a good life. Also, making good life decisions in connection with issues related to sexuality, substance abuse, alienation, respect, human dignity, and tolerance for others and their communities are emphasized. The Norwegian Directorate of Education (2020) underlined that the main section of the curriculum is based on:

“The integration of public health and life skills as an interdisciplinary theme within the educational curriculum aims to equip students with competencies conducive to enhancing both their mental and physical well-being while facilitating the ability to make responsible life choices. Particularly critical during the formative years of childhood and adolescence is the cultivation of a positive self-image and a secure identity. A societal framework that facilitates sound health decisions for individuals significantly influences public health outcomes. Life skills entail the comprehension and influence of factors pertinent to self-mastery. This thematic approach seeks to empower students in navigating both favorable and adverse circumstances, as well as personal and practical challenges, in an optimal manner<sup>17</sup>.”

The integration of gender identity and cultural diversity is ranked as the second most fundamental component included in the LK20 curriculum following the theme of human dignity (The Norwegian Directorate of Education, 2020). Students in Norway are encouraged and exposed to education and comprehension regarding the value of “gender diversity”, recognizing significant variations in expressions of gender identity beyond traditional binary categories of “girl” and “boy”. Hence, each aspect addresses

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<sup>17</sup> Folkehelse og livsmestring (The Norwegian Directorate of Education, 2020).  
<https://www.UDIR.no/lk20/overordnet-del/prinsipper-for-laring-utvikling-og-danning/tverrfaglige-temaer/folkehelse-og-livsmestring/?lang=nob>



students' engagement, creative joy, and the urge to explore themselves<sup>18</sup>. The LK20 curriculum is designed to promote the notion that every student should feel at ease with their own gender identity, while also fostering an appreciation and respect for individuals regardless of their gender identity expression. A report on the LK20 curriculum by the Norwegian Directorate of Education (2022) confirmed that students are expected to develop new perspectives on their own lives and others through instruction. Students' identity is emphasized in subjects, where the development of a "positive self-image and a secure identity" is addressed.

Based on the above, three pivotal themes are extensively addressed and considered as the foundational elements for classroom discussions in Norwegian educational institutions: gender identity, sexual orientation, and self-determination and self-image.

First, the gender identity theme consists of examining aspects such as how societal gender identities, norms, and stereotypical perceptions of gender identity and sexuality can influence a self-image, self-determination, sexuality, and opportunities linked with their choices in life (The Norwegian Directorate of Education, 2023). Various norms are addressed with a comprehension of gender stereotypes and stereotypical expectations. Norms are connected to the characteristics and roles of men and women based on gender. The gender identity theme is structured to give the students comprehension of respect for gender diversity through education on the broad range of gender identity expression. Hence, in the Social Sciences subjects "gender identity" is viewed and taught to be dynamic and is underdeveloped throughout life.

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<sup>18</sup> Identity and Cultural Diversity – the foundation value of the education (The Norwegian Directorate of Education, 2024). <https://www.UDIR.no/lk20/overordnet-del/opplaringens-verdigrunnlag/1.2-identitet-og-kulturelt-mangfold/?lang=nob>

Secondly, the sexual orientation theme involves the notion that “no one should influence others’ sexual orientation<sup>19</sup>”. In democratic and diverse societies, citizens are free and have the legal right to live following what they perceive as their sexual orientation without being exposed to discrimination or subjected to threats, violence, or other negative social control. Educators are encouraged to convey the lessons to students to enhance their comprehension and raise awareness of diverse terminologies related to sexual orientation. This is also linked to the normalization of various family structures, where students are taught acceptance of their own, and others’ family structures such as students who might have same-gender parents. The theme of sexual orientation is not only based on the acceptance of gender diversity but also on the development of positive attitudes toward sexual diversity.

Third, the self-determination and self-image theme stresses the individuals’ fundamental sexual right to make decisions about their bodies, and whom they want to be intimate with or to have sexual relations with. Students are expected to acquire skills in communicating about and regulating their emotions, and the ability to recognize, understand, and communicate about their and others’ feelings which contribute to good relationships and the student’s well-being. Furthermore, examining this topic not only highlights the protection of students but also avoids vulnerabilities to violations, abuse, and uncomfortable situations among others. The lessons elucidate that it is a completely natural part of our sexuality to have feelings, fantasies, drives, and desires. Students are therefore exposed to themes and topics on what emotions are and how identity

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<sup>19</sup> Støtte til undervisning om kjønn og seksualitet (The Norwegian Directorate of Education, 2023) – a supported resource for school staff, short and overarching texts that address various topics of gender and sexuality within the Norwegian LK20 curriculum. <https://www.UDIR.no/laring-og-trivsel/lareplanverket/stotte/Stotte-til-undervisning-om-kjonn-og-seksualitet/seksuell-orientering/>

development, family, and friend relationships, infatuation, and heartbreak can affect our emotions and behavior (The Norwegian Directorate of Education, 2023).

This type of change in curriculum is not only present in Norway but beyond. A national education writer at the Washington Post, Laura Meckler (2022), reported that education on gender identity and sexual orientation in New Jersey is presented in the first-grade curriculum where students are taught that “some boys may not feel like boys even if they have body parts that some people might tell you are boy parts”.

In the same vein, a former school governor, Dr. Julie Maxwell (2024) referred to the “Become your true self” lesson where educational institutions in the UK are boosting children’s self-esteem and educating them on how significant it is to “be themselves” and “whoever they want to be by just following their dreams”. Students are being instructed to critically examine their biological and physical characteristics, questioning how these align with their inner sense of identity shaped by gender stereotypes and personal feelings. Similarly to the Norwegian lessons and inclusion of “The Genderbread Person” within the LK20 curriculum, schools in the UK are employing “The Genderbread Person” (as illustrated in Figure 1.) which represents aspects of gender and sexuality as being on a spectrum. This figure has been adopted in the UK, prompting inquiries about identity and connections, especially for vulnerable individuals from unstable households, those in foster care, or situations with inadequate or absent role models. Maxwell (2024) stated that the lesson is taught to children to disregard biology and that “women can have male organs” or that “all genders can have menstrual cycles”.

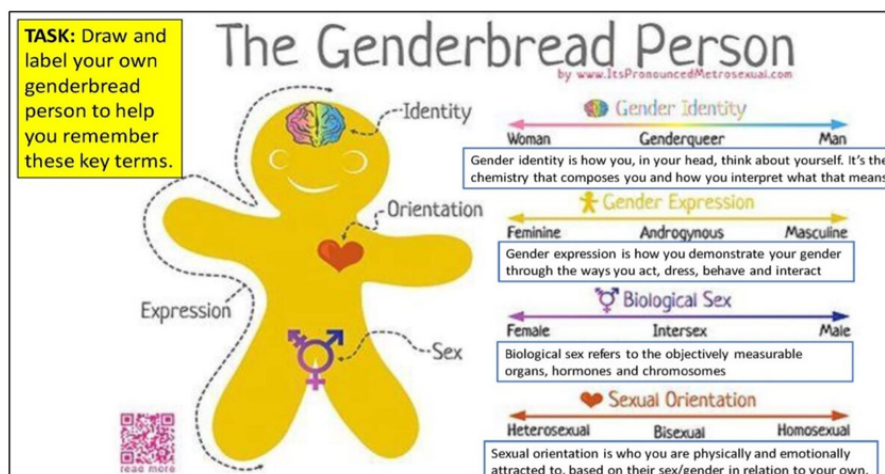


Figure 1. The Genderbread Person<sup>20</sup>

Several concepts and lessons form the basis of the discussions about the terminologies in the gender identity curriculum. For The Norwegian Directorate of Education (2020), lessons on terms such as “gender fluidity” and “gender dysphoria” are included for two reasons. First, to make students aware that differences between boys and girls are socially constructed. Second, to emphasize that all individuals have equal opportunities regardless of their gender expression and that any mismatch between their biological sex and their gender identity is not abnormal. Students’ comprehension of specific terms within the thematic discourse, aligns with the prescribed learning outcomes upon completion of the lessons. The lessons highlight key terms to ensure comprehension and awareness of various concepts related to gender identity. As such, the gender identity key terms outlined in the Norwegian LK20 curriculum include the following (The Norwegian Directorate of Education, 2023):

- **Biological gender:** the gender any individual is born with.
- **Psychological gender:** the gender any individual feels they are. This can sometimes be associated with “gender identity”.

<sup>20</sup> The Genderbread Person retrieved from <https://care.org.uk/cause/transgender/the-shocking-truth-about-what-is-being-taught-in-schools>

- **Social gender:** the gender others perceive you as and the one you are socialized into, sometimes this is also referred to as “gender expression”.
- **Legal gender:** the gender you are registered as in the government or population registry.
- **Cisgender:** an individual who identifies with the biological gender assigned at birth. This term emphasizes that everyone has a gender identity. Being cisgender is not related to sexual orientation as heterosexual, bisexual, homosexual, lesbian, and intersex individuals.
- **Non-binary/genderqueer:** a person who identifies as non-binary does not see themselves as a specific gender. Being non-binary is not defined by physical appearance. Some non-binary individuals identify as something between male and female, while others do not identify with gender at all. Often, the individual prefers to use “they” as a gender-neutral personal pronoun instead of “he” or “she”.
- **Gender Incongruence (Transgender):** gender incongruence is a persistent experience of one's assigned gender at birth not aligning with the gender one experiences oneself to be. Individuals with gender incongruence are often called transgender. Not all individuals experiencing gender incongruence identify as transgender. Experiencing gender incongruence is not related to sexual orientation.
- **Variation in bodily gender development (intersex):** variation in bodily gender development is a collective term referring to variations in bodily gender development that deviate from expectations of typical gender characteristics. Individuals with variation in bodily gender development may also identify with the term intersex.

Additional terms such as “queer”, “bisexual”, “homosexual”, “heterosexual”, “a-sexual”, and “pansexual” are integrated into various subjects as part of the lesson plan, aiming to enhance students’ awareness and understanding of these concepts (The Norwegian Directorate of Education, 2023). Any contestation of such complexity is

considered racism. As Maxwell (2024) put it, the “transphobic” term is associated with anything other than complete acceptance and celebration of a child’s declared gender identity. Similarly, in the New South Wales Education Standards Authority (NESA) in the UK, the Personal Development, Health, and Physical Education (PDHPE), K-12 syllabus, from kindergarten to grade 12, students are introduced to fundamental concepts emphasizing identity as a basis for health and well-being (NSW government, 2023). These key concepts are highly connected to identity, culture, and human rights. As per the New South Wales government (2023), gender and sexual identity significantly influence an individual’s sense of self and identity. These sub-concepts are employed to encourage students to engage in discussion and form assessments regarding how family, culture, and media influence their thoughts, feelings, values, and behaviors concerning sex, sexuality, and sexual health. Also, students are exposed to the world around them for biases based on gender, sexual orientation, culture, ethnicity, and race by questioning and rejecting stereotypes, avoiding discriminatory attitudes and behaviors, and advocating for the rights of others. The following key concepts concerning human development, sexuality, gender identity, culture, and human rights are outlined in the PDHPE K-12 curriculum:

- **Personal Identity:** the way a person identifies and shares themselves with the world.
- **Body Image:** the image people have of their bodies which affects their feelings and behaviors.
- **Acceptance and respect:** accepting and respecting each other’s differences and diversity can assist in building positive relationships and foster social and emotional well-being.

- **Values, attitudes, and sources of information:** values guide our behavior and give purpose and direction to our lives. Students will have a range of sources of information, attitudes, and values that impact how they think about sexuality and the way they make decisions about their health.
- **Norms and peer influence on sexual behavior:** perceived norms and influences will impact the values, attitudes, and behavior of children and young people about sexuality and sexual health.
- **Expressing sexuality:** people express their sexuality in various ways.
- **Sexuality, culture, and human rights:** society influences what people believe and how they feel about sexuality.
- **Sexuality and the media:** the media has a profound effect on sexual information, values, and behavior.
- **The social construction of identity and roles:** society portrays and shapes our views on masculinity or femininity and male and female roles and stereotypes.
- **Privacy and body autonomy:** some parts of the body are private. It is not OK for others to touch the private parts of people's bodies without permission or unless they are ill, injured, or need help to look after themselves.
- **Abuse, violence, and harassment:** no one has the right to coerce, abuse, or assault another person.
- **Sexuality and the law:** laws govern our sexual and reproductive rights.
- **Diversity:** our society has a diversity of sexual attitudes and behaviors, and these should be respected.

Similarly to the Norwegian LK20 curriculum, the PDHPE K-12 curriculum prioritizes each student to learn about themselves by being able to note how they are

different and the same, this includes the differences in their bodies, abilities, identities, and interests. The inclusion of key concepts is fundamental to the learning process of gender identity for students to build a block of respect towards others and interact with people respectfully and appropriately (NSW, 2023).

In the context of implementation practices, the Norwegian LK20 curriculum primarily involves one main method alongside several secondary methods. The main method employed is “in-depth learning”, which is promoted to a larger extent in comprehending the curriculum content and involves a higher quality of learning process and outcomes (The Norwegian Directorate of Education, 2020). The in-depth learning method entails fostering a profound and enduring comprehension among students, through enabling them to effectively apply acquired knowledge to their everyday experiences. As an outcome students will be able to transfer their comprehension from one context to another, by doing so the students are capable of acquiring higher knowledge and skills to solve problems in both familiar and unfamiliar environments. In the same vein, educational experts such as Bjørn Bolstad (2019) provided further elucidation between deep learning and surface learning. In-depth learning is perceived as a comprehension by students before knowledge into interconnected systems of concepts, through seeking patterns and underlying principles, to be able to reflect on their own understanding and learning process. Other methods utilized in Norwegian schools are such as textbooks, and online digital platforms “Salaby” and “Skolenmin”, combined with the TV program “Supernytt” serving both as an educational and entertaining resource. Whether it is utilized during lunch breaks or lessons, educators are including the TV program as an educational tool for students. Some of the episodes delve into topics such as: how to find their self-image, how to know if they are gay, and



how to share that they are gay<sup>21</sup>. Salaby is one of the digital platforms utilized in Norwegian educational institutions, where assignments in early grades 1-2, students are asked questions based on three aspects: to find themselves, their identity, and identity development. Some tasks are indirect, while others are more direct, such as when the students are asked to write a short paragraph describing their identity and feelings.

Furthermore, other implementation practices utilized beyond Norway, are direct implementation practices at New York University (NYU), where they utilize “Gender-Inclusive Language” and students’ preferred pronouns to motivate them to fully engage in their academic journey (NYU, 2024). Gender identity is not only addressed in classroom lessons but is also incorporated into the three implementation strategies adopted by NYU educators to promote inclusivity among students.

First, gender-inclusive language is part of the students’ daily lives to recognize transgender, gender non-conforming, non-binary, gender questioning, and other gender-diverse students. Hence, it consists of the application of gendered language such as “everybody”, “folks”, or “this person” to make everyone fluid.

Second, NYU’s implementation practices are also based on the inclusive settings within their classrooms. The elements consist of normalizing the notion of gender identity through the teachers’ introduction of their names with their preferred pronouns, including pronouns in the syllabus, and the educators’ email signature.

Third, additional implication practices contain readings or materials that comprise LGBTQ+ scholars and theorists’ perspectives, and case studies from the field throughout the syllabus whenever it is feasible. NYU highly addresses the mispronunciation of names or pronouns; this is also focused on students who cannot

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<sup>21</sup> Newton: Kroppen (NRK, 2024). <https://nrksuper.no/serie/newton-kroppen/DMYT24003819>

change their names. Therefore, the priority is for students to share their names with their entire class instead of educators reading their names from a list (NYU, 2024).

The school's new policy is supported by human rights organizations such as the Human Rights Campaign Foundation (NYU, 2024). The foundation seeks to change the institutions of daily life for LGBTQ+ people by addressing three fundamental approaches that can illustrate how implementation practices can secure a school system that nurtures academic achievement, provides physical and emotional safety, and is welcoming to all students.

First, the structural approaches are there to ensure an anti-bullying policy, specifically naming groups that are more exposed to harassment. Another notion is the allowance of children to use restrooms that align with their gender identity, reframing the dress codes at school without assigning clothing options to genders, and students' records to be private (especially for transgender students) by making them decide who has access.

Second, in the relational approach, inclusivity is highly stressed where inclusive phrases such as "students", "children", or "scholars" are used, and ideas of how you or people you know do things outside of gender stereotypes. For instance, teachers should model gender diversity in their manner of expression and encourage their students to find activities they like and enjoy which will contribute to developing social connection – also ensuring good communication with parents and caregivers in aiding them to see their child's strengths, combined with sharing ideas on how to communicate about gender that is affirming, inclusive, and developmentally appropriate.

Third, the instructional approaches are ideas on gender inclusion that can be integrated through an organized curriculum. Lesson plans can contribute to assisting

students in identifying gender stereotypes and limits by examining popular culture, advertising, picture books, or toys for students. Discussions and practical methods in preventing stereotyping and put-downs in school. The gender topics are integrated into the curriculum via story problems, writing prompts, readings, art assignments, or music. Additional activities within the classroom can be based on reading books that encourage a discussion of gender assumptions that challenge gender stereotypes and limits, with the inclusion of role models through books that show a range of occupations and achievements for all genders. Another method is to invite speakers to share their vision of ways to achieve and thrive that are gender expansive.

In contrast, some individuals take a more moderate approach to inclusive practices. Hence, the educator Kara Haugh teaches sex education in several Sacramento-area elementary schools in the US and prefers to not bring up questions of gender identity in her classes, which are mostly grades 5-6 (Meckler, 2022). Similarly, the controversial critic James Lindsay (Meckler, 2022) of what is considered excessive identity politics declared that these inclusive curriculums pose an unusual challenge. Lessons in schools amount to “cult grooming and ideological grooming”, in which students are taught that their gender is “fluid” and can be changed. Lindsay believes those children identifying as transgender, or gender nonbinary are “being driven by a culture that introduces the idea to children who might never have adopted it on their own”. There are also rising issues between educational institutions and teachers who prefer to not emphasize this topic or to use specific practices to make it more part of the student’s daily life.

### **3.3. Parents Vs. Schools: Who Decides?**

The incorporation of the gender identity curriculum represents a significant milestone in promoting inclusivity for the LGBTQ+ community and advocating for societal policies that prioritize the rights, respect, and tolerance of marginalized groups. Indeed, the aim of fostering an environment of inclusivity and acceptance among students within and beyond educational institutions is crucial. However, when considering the opposing viewpoint regarding the inclusion of the gender identity curriculum, various concerns have been raised surrounding potential harm to students. The integration has sparked tensions between parents and educational institutions, with parents feeling excluded from decision-making processes concerning what is perceived as their child's well-being. A Senior Fellow of Discovery Institute and Director of the institute's American Center for Transforming Education, Keri D. Ingraham (2022), addressed fundamental aspects regarding gender identity curriculum and how it can harm students.

First, Ingraham (2022) declared that as much as this is viewed to be a complex topic for students who are not fully mature, it can also breed confusion and insecurities which later might result in life-long negative consequences such as mental health issues. Hence, she connected the adoption of "Gender Unicorn" and/or "Genderbread Person" (as illustrated in Figure 1.) to "Indoctrination which fuels confusion in students as it conflicts with their biological reality".

Second, she associated the idea of harm with the instances of bathroom self-selection, non-binary cabin counselors, and males in female locker rooms, and on sports teams. According to Ingraham's view, this violates not only the privacy of the schoolgirls but places their safety at risk.

Third, she highlighted that promoting and providing access to gender-blocking hormones and body-change surgeries for children and teenagers inflicts additional irreversible damage, such as sterilization, and psychological and emotional abuse of children. Ingraham (2022) stated the following:

“States and districts within the US that forbid the disclosure of gender-ideology discussion and that conduct a gender-“transition” plan without parental consent or communication are not only damaging the children but also driving a wedge between parents and their children.”

Fourth, the following statement is connected to the notion that if parents are not supportive of the child’s claim on the transformation of gender identity, the educational institutions are more likely to interfere and declare that the child is in danger of their “unsupportive” parents and at imminent risk of suicide (Ingraham, 2022). An illustration of this is the incidents that occurred in several public schools in California, where educational institutions are advising students on what to say to trigger child-protective services and remove their parents’ rights to minors. As a result, this makes the child a step closer to obtaining hormones and body-change surgeries without parental consent and cost. According to Ingraham (2022):

“Parents are intentionally left in the dark about harmful ideas on gender being peddled to their kids.”

The complex process of physical and emotional change includes an understanding of who the children are apart from their parents, some sail through these changes while others struggle to a greater or lesser degree. Young adults are finding themselves in circumstances where they are being encouraged, whether it is through social media, friends, or material presented by teachers, to understand their difficulties through the lens of gender identity and come to trust that identifying with different gender identities is the answer to all distress. Hence, Maxwell (2024), reported that two-

thirds of girls who identify themselves as transgender have a pre-existing mental health condition, and around one-third have autism or another neurodiversity. In addition, 41% of the individuals identifying as trans do not identify as heterosexual, and this relates to instances of eating disorders, as well as bullying before adopting a trans identity.

Maxwell (2024) substantiated that the prevailing narrative driving the opposition to the gender identity curriculum is not limited to parents with religious affiliations but also encompasses a broader cohort of parents adhering to traditional views regarding gender, sexuality, and the concept of inclusivity. Similarly, she confirms that feminists, many of whom do not have religious affiliations, are increasingly advocating for women's rights but problematizing some of these rights when conflict with other rights. To illustrate, secular organizations such as "SafeSchoolsAlliance" are actively engaged in exposing and combating the promotion of gender ideology in schools. Their ideology and beliefs are seen as contributing to a clash with contemporary perspectives and societal aspirations concerning the well-being of children and creating a safe societal environment for all.

As a result, the ideological underpinnings of the gender identity material and associated activism have led to opposition among a significant number of parents, not only in Norway but on a global level. Several factors have contributed to the rejection and avoidance of discussions surrounding the inclusion of gender identity curricula.

These elements can be divided into three categories.

First, as affirmed by Ingraham (2022) education on gender identity can result in harm to the students. Not only are the children left with a feeling of confusion by the complex discussions surrounding gender identity, but parents are also left with a feeling of insecurity and concern for their child's well-being. The Chief Political Correspondent

for The New Civil Rights Movement, Brody Levesque (2022) reported a raging and upset attitude among parents when fifth-grade girls at the primary school in Los Alamitos California were placed with two biological males in the same cabins for three days and were instructed by the males to use “they” or “them” pronouns. The girls were left with a feeling of fear and confusion. Similarly, Peter Ladd (2024), Head of Content at Christian Action, Research, and Education (CARE), shared a story of a confused student, where she stated the following:

“There has been a significant influx of girls in my classes demanding that other children refer to them with biologically incorrect pronouns and “gender identities” such as “gender-fluid” and the like.<sup>22</sup>”

The student was afraid to speak against the accepted and established norm, fearing that she might be targeted. In the same vein, a Norwegian journalist in NRK (the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation), Ingvild Edvardsen (2024) stated a concern shared by a Norwegian father, teacher, and pastor in an independent church, Lars Lillevold, who was first informed about the gender identity lessons when his eight-year-old child explained to him an animation he watched in school where an individual turned out to be the opposite of his gender. Lillevold, as a father, believed that:

“Children should be children by enjoying their childhood without being subjected to questions about their preferred gender identity choice.”

In addition, Lillevold referred to an example in the updated Social Sciences textbook, *Arena 5* (2020) by the academic publishing company Aschehoug, for 5<sup>th</sup> graders where it stated the following:

“How your body looks, and which gender you belong to, do not have to be connected”

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<sup>22</sup> Gender Indoctrination in schools: a teenage girl’s testimony (Petter Ladd, 2024).  
<https://care.org.uk/cause/transgender/gender-indoctrination-in-schools-a-teenage-girls-testimony>

As a response to this statement, Lillevold expressed his thoughts on this:

“It is presented as if there is some kind of choice. As a father, I know how difficult it is for children to choose between low-fat and extra-low-fat milk. Then they are expected to take a stand on this, which goes so deeply into life. I feel that this is a thought planted that “maybe that’s why I’m a bit different”.”

In the same vein, Norwegian journalist Johnny Myhr-Hansen (2021) writing for the IDAG Newspaper in Norway, reported an instance of Norwegian parents who chose to opt-out their children from the gender identity lessons after their son was introduced to a third gender. Ingelinn Lossius-Skeie, the mother of the children, first deputy to the Norwegian Parliament, and board member of the Christian Party in Adger stated the following:

“In Norwegian legislation, we only have two genders and we do not want our children to learn about radical gender ideology in school<sup>23</sup>”

In response to the mother’s concerns, the school declined to apologize for the lesson taught. The principal of Tingsaker school, Roy Slettene, referred only to the LK20 curriculum objectives where he informed the following:

“There should be a discussion about both similarities and differences between genders, gender identity, and human reproduction”.

The parents were advised by the principal that if changes are desired, they must be addressed as a political issue on a national level (Myhr-Hansen, 2021). As a result, these contents and lessons added to the new gender identity curriculum in primary schools have contributed to a conflict between parents and educational institutions. This level of inclusivity has reached a point where promoting gender transformation has led to increased contemplation among students about ideas they might never have

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<sup>23</sup> Norwegian parents opting out their children from school (Myhr-Hansen, 2021). <https://idag.no/tok-barna-ut-av-skolen-etter-kjonnsundervisning/19.35655>



considered before (Edvardsen, 2022). A noteworthy statement made by the Norwegian father Lillevold:

“The fear is that some might take this curriculum as fact when in reality there is a big debate surrounding it.”

Second, another concern regarding the introduction of a gender identity curriculum to students is the perception of diminished family authority and control. A Science Reporter at the New York Times, Azeen Ghoryashi, confirmed that a significant number of parents have experienced a feeling of decline in their traditional family authority, specifically when they hold opposing views on gender identity education (Ghoryashi, 2022, as cited in Wemple, 2023). Today, children are allowed to change names, use different pronouns, and change clothes without parental permission or knowledge. In some instances, parents have been reported to social services for opposing these changes made by the school with the child.

Delving more in-depth on this issue of the matter. A senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), Robert Pondiscio (2023), reported that the advocacy group Parents Defending Education counted over 1,000 school districts in the US that educate more than 10 million children, and where teachers are encouraging and permitting students to undergo gender transition, including changing their pronouns, names, and gender expression without parental consent or notification. Often, these changes in the children’s lives occur while the parents are left out and the schools are in control and overseeing their development. For instance, the New York Times Correspondent, Katie J. M. Baker (2023) reported on a mother, Jessica Bradshaw, who discovered that her 15-year-old had identified as transgender at school after viewing an assignment with an unfamiliar name at the top. The public school Bradshaw’s child

attends is one of many US schools that support students to socially transition by changing their name, pronouns, or gender expression without parental consent.

Bradshaw stated the following:

“It felt like a parenting stab in the back from the school system. It should have been a decision we made as a family<sup>24</sup>”

Consequently, parents are frustrated by the response that schools should not intervene without notifying them, and they feel villainized by educators who presume to know what is best for their children’s “well-being” over the parents’ judgment. This has raised tensions and aggression between both parties.

Third, an additional concern regarding the introduction of the gender identity curriculum is connected to religious, cultural, and value-based considerations. As monotheistic believers, whether in Islam, Christianity, or Judaism, they all have in common one thing, which is the belief that every individual has been created by God and that our bodies are important. The introduction of gender identity in the school curriculum and its in-depth discussion on the ability to have characteristics such as non-binary individuals and the promotion of gender transformation have indeed raised aggression from both religious and non-religious parents. A journalist covering The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for Deseret News, Tad Walch (2023), revealed that parents find themselves lacking control over their children, and believe that this will affect their children negatively when schools are educating them about something that is considered to be sinful according to the family’s beliefs and/or values. The pastor and author Sam Allberry and the Biblical and religious studies professor, Carl Trueman, have explored several ideas based on this concern. Hence, Allberry

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<sup>24</sup> When Students Change Gender Identity, and Parents Don’t Know (Baker, 2023).  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/22/us/gender-identity-students-parents.html>

explored in his book *What God Has to Say about Our Bodies: How the Gospel is Good for our Physical Selves* (2021) that identity is something given to us by God the Creator and is not something we must decide or discover. Likewise, Trueman explored in his book *Strange New World* (2022) solutions and methods for Christians to ensure that their children are not deceived by what he perceived as “cultural ideology” and “expressive individualism”. Within both books, the issues addressed in them are closely connected to today’s debate and both contradict the current teaching on gender identity in schools today through their published work. Similarly, there are a significant number of Norwegian parents who have expressed their deep concern and rejection of the inclusion of gender identity in the school curriculum. According to the Christian Network Europe (CNE, 2023), one of the established organizations that oppose gender ideology in schools, Foreldrenet (2023), has clearly stated on their website the following:

“Pride is a political agenda, they want to indoctrinate the children.”

Another Conservative view was addressed by the Christian Network Europe (2022) when a Christian school in Norway came under media scrutiny for its conservative stance on homosexuality, transgender people, and abortion. The 73-year-old principal, Bjørn Valde, stated the following:

“According to the Bible, homosexuality is a sin, and we teach the students that. But we do not teach hatred<sup>25</sup>.”

According to Valde, Norwegian society is defined by two concepts “normless” and “abandonment” of the Bible. The notion he is connecting this to is the abandonment

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<sup>25</sup> Outrage about ethical position of Christian school in Norway (CNE, 2022).  
<https://cne.news/article/1894-outrage-about-ethical-position-of-christian-school-in-norway>

of the evangelical Lutheran religion, and the Norwegian society is abandoning the foundation on which democracy was built. Another matter Valde examined is the disruption of family structure, where the students are being taught that the family structure consists of a father, mother, and a child - not same-gender parents which are highly normalized in Western nations. According to Valde:

“You must honor father and mother and not break the marriage, but they are redefining marriage. According to the Bible, marriage is between a father and mother.”

After much criticism, the school was associated as “Ultra-conservative”.

A theologian and professor at Nord University, Idar Kjølsvik, stressed that ordinary conservative Christians are not like that. As a response, the Secretary General of Christian Free Schools (KFF), Jorunn Hallaråker Hegglund, approved an alternative curriculum with another school, where she declared that schools could teach homosexuality as a sin because several of their schools have ‘values documents’, where the views on cohabitation issues come to the fore. Hegglund believed that they are allowed to have this, she added that these possibilities come with great responsibilities (CNE, 2022). There is still a clash between religion and gender ideology, and this contributes to a significant challenge for many groups within society. According to the Christian Network Europe News (2022), the teaching of gender ideology is seen as contradicting established sciences. As a result, thousands of Norwegians signed a petition cautioning against such lessons. Notable supporters of the petition included prominent Norwegian Christians, like Sofie Braut, Tryggheim, an associate professor and columnist, Karl-Johan Kjøde, leader of the Norwegian Christian Student and School Youth Association, and Espen Ottosen, information leader in the Norwegian Lutheran Mission Association.

The petition stated that there are only two sexes, which cannot be changed. Teaching that gender is fluid is not biological, and therefore a breach of the Education Act, the appeal states:

“This non-scientific understanding of gender is included in the school’s new curricula from 2020. In addition, it has not been publicly discussed and scientifically quality assured. That makes it undemocratic, irresponsible, and very problematic<sup>26</sup>”.

### ***3.3.1. Parental Actions, Experiences, and Concerns***

As much as this lesson and discussion on gender identity have confused the child who is approaching puberty and adolescence. In the same vein, parents find themselves in a complex situation where the process of their children’s challenging physical and emotional change is being explored apart from them. In response to parental concerns and experiences regarding the gender identity curriculum, several actions have been taken. On a global level, parents have mobilized and protested against the gender identity curriculum and what they perceive as a loss of influence over their children’s choices. Mason, a Women’s Gender Studies professor, and Hamilton, Vice Dean for Research and Community Relations and Professor of Organizational Behavior (2023) reported the emergence of the Canadian protest, in September 2023, known as the “1 Million March for Children” which captured international attention. The protest sparked by parents’ concerns over the school curricula, specifically called for the elimination of elements related to sexual orientation, gender identity, pronoun usage, gender ideology, and mixed-gender bathrooms (Mason et al., 2023). At the heart of the protest lay various fundamental concerns shared by parents, including a Lebanese mother residing in Canada who decided to return to Lebanon due to her apprehensions

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<sup>26</sup> Norwegian Christians protest against gender education (CNE, 2022). <https://cne.news/article/548-norwegian-christians-protest-against-gender-education>

(Aljadeed, 2023). She expressed some of her concerns during her appearance on the Lebanese TV show “Below Eighteen”, which were similar to those highlighted by The 1 Million March for Children. These concerns focused on four primary issues: the denial of parental rights, the targeting of inclusive public education, the denial of the traditional family authority, and the schools exerting control over crucial aspects of the children’s lives (Mason et al., 2023).

This criticism intensified the polarization in society, as for many the September 2023 protest was viewed as an anti-LGBTQ+ movement. The protest aimed to address the parental alienation of the school’s position in encouraging their children to gender transition (Mason et.al, 2023). Hence, the Lebanese mother concentrated specifically on this concern and stated the following:

“We are parents, we are the ones responsible for educating our children about this topic in a proper way. It is not the school’s nor the teachers’ job to educate our children on this. It all starts with the teachers’ giving the child a choice of preferred name and pronoun, then they will support them to conduct hormonal treatments without the parents’ consent and knowledge.” (Aljadeed, 2023).

In the instance of the state of Maryland, A journalist for the Middle East Eye, Zainab Iqbal (2023), affirmed that the school system revised the parental notification policy, where parents were no longer informed in advance about the lessons being taught in class, and were prohibited from opting out their children. On June 6<sup>th</sup>, 2022, another protest was organized by “Family Rights for Religious Freedom” (FRRF) outside Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) headquarters in Rockville, Maryland with over 400 individuals protesting for the reinstatement of the opt-out (Iqbal, 2023).

Wael Elkoshairi, an organizer with FRRF, stated:

“We have rights under the First Amendment. This was an opt-out that was already in place. It was already afforded to us. It was already there. We were already opting out. We are not anti-LGBT. You know, this is not a monolithic society we live in. We understand people have different lifestyles and we respect everybody’s rights to live those lifestyles.”

A mother, Momina, with two daughters in the MCPS school system expressed her disagreement with the exposure of sexual and gender identity books for young children, she stated:

“They are too young. I don’t want my daughters reading and discussing straight or gay identity. I am not saying that these discussions shouldn’t be allowed in schools. If people want them, then fine. I am saying that we should have the option to have our kids opt out if we please. Sex does not belong in schools.”

In the same vein, a staff reporter for the National Register and editor of the New Boston Post, Matt McDonald (2023), reported a similar perspective to Momina’s, where parents at a public charter school in Minnesota are objecting to books that teach about same-sex attraction and gender identity in elementary grades, with dozens of children reportedly being pulled at least temporarily from classes over controversy. Another Muslim father, Aboubakr Mekrami (McDonald, 2022), stated the following at a school board meeting:

“We teach our children to basically respect others. However, when the topic of LGBT comes up, we strongly believe that we need to be the ones who approach it and teach it to our children based on our beliefs.”

For a significant number of parents, the gender identity curriculum content goes against their beliefs, and where it is not acceptable to have any ‘wiggle room’. The protests are not about banning any books or excluding anybody but having the ability to interfere on behalf of their children to raise them in the way they were raised by their parents.

Another Muslim mother, Amna Soussi, (McDonald, 2022) stated the following:

“The curriculum introduces many sensitive and controversial topics, such as ‘same-gender marriage’, ‘boy wants to be a girl’, ‘girl wants to be a boy’, ‘two moms’, and ‘two dads’. We have no animosity or hostility towards people who choose to practice a lifestyle different from ours. We have coexisted in this school for years.”

The parents were opting for their rights to introduce these sensitive, controversial, and religious-based topics to their children when they felt it was the appropriate time and age to do so. They view the curriculum as an opening-up box in their children’s minds and prefer not to tamper their children with these topics, which will create unnecessary stress, anxiety, and worries within their children because it goes against their fundamental beliefs and religion (McDonald, 2022). No curriculum, no teacher, no one else but parents themselves want to have this key to this box. The material in this curriculum is viewed to be “a strip that will strip them of that right”. Maxwell (2024) emphasized the idea that the belief of Christians’ identity comes not from what other thinks of them, nor how they feel inside, but from the Creator God.

In contrast, not all educational institutions have left parents without any option to opt-out their children from the gender identity and sexuality lessons. For instance, Minnesota school districts allowed Muslim families to opt-out their children of gender identity and sexuality lessons which has been incorporated into its elementary schools. The Religious Freedom Institute (RFI) worked and put in a lot of effort for months with a group of partners to demand this vital change (RFI, 2024). Similarly, a Norwegian established organization in 2022, “Foreldrenettverket”, contributes resources to Norwegian parents who do not want their children to be involved in the established Pride concept, which has limitless perspectives on gender and sexuality.



The organization created by parents stated clearly on their website:

“We encourage saying no thank you to these markings by keeping the children at home while the rainbow flag is being raised at the school or kindergarten, or in other ways indicating that one does not want the child to be exposed to this harmful influence. Let us stand together!” (Foreldrenettverket, 2020)

Correspondingly, CNE (2022) reported that parents in France protested against the ‘LGBTI propaganda’ taught at a Catholic high school, Saint-Remy de Soissons High School. The teacher gave students the assignment to compose an LGBT-friendly tweet during their English class. They had to appeal to the American film industry to be more open towards LGBT representation. As a response to this assignment, a father, Jean-Charles Metras, wrote a letter to the school, which was signed by around 40 individuals. Metras addressed the promotion of gender teaching at the Catholic private high school, where he argued the following:

“The issues are likely to collide with the conscience of young people who need reliable points of reference.”

He criticized the school by stating that he and other parents pay a tuition fee for a private school so that their children will be taught values in a Christian atmosphere (CNE, 2022).

Another movement and action by parents involved the lawsuit filed by parents with different religious beliefs. The journalist covering The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for Deseret News, Walch (2023), addressed this parental movement where a lawsuit was filed by different parents with different religious affiliations. The parents sought their right to opt-out their children from the lessons that included LGBTQ+ storybooks. The lawsuit was filed by Muslim, Christian, and Jewish parents who wanted to opt-out their children from what they viewed as ideological instruction on family life and sexuality, including gender identity. The request consisted later of an

injunction to allow them to opt-out their children out of story books that promote gender transitioning, pride parades, and pronoun preferences for their children as early as in their pre-kindergarten stage (Walch, 2023).

As a response, the parents were met negatively by school board members and associated as individuals with religious reasons who were “looking for another reason to hate another person” (Walch, 2023). The school board made it clear that any student who enters the lesson and the classroom, their parents will lose the right to opt-out them out of the gender instruction. The school board referred to this as seeking to disrupt the child’s comprehension and opinion on gender and sexuality (Walch, 2023). The religious parents placed an effort to request the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals based on an emergency injunction pending appeal. The vice president and senior counsel at Becket, which represented the religious parents, Eric Baxter (Walch, 2023) stated the following:

“Children deserve the guidance of their parents when learning about complex issues around gender and sexuality. That is why we are asking the Fourth Circuit to step in to protect the right of parents to guide their children’s education consistent with their religious beliefs.”

The U.S. District Court judge denied the injunction, by prioritizing the school year to begin with the planned curriculum which aimed to include all the students in lessons without informing parents or asking for their consent. The school board challenged the parental authority by assuming their role and implementing the gender identity curricula at a time and manner they deemed appropriate (Walch, 2023). Hence, Becket believed that the books champion controversial ideology and referred to assignment examples, where 3- and 4-year-olds are asked to search for images from the word list as “intersex flag”, “drag queen”, “underwear” and the name of a celebrated

LGBTQ+ activist and sex worker (Walch, 2023). As a solution, the board decided to give the parents a notification when they will work on material related to LGBTQ+ topics and that they could opt-out their children. However, it was revealed later that the Council on Islamic-American Relations filed another declaration with the court via an email from an open records request which presented that the elementary school principals opposed the board's decision to continue ahead without any notice to parents or the ability to opt-out (Walch, 2023).

Another growing concern is the drag culture which has increasingly become mainstream through shows – often with men dressed as women with exaggerated makeup, singing, and/or entertaining audience which is today becoming entertainment for young children. The target audience for this introduced “entertainment” is children, which has raised concerns for parents and provided reasons for protests. The journalist for the Norwegian Newspaper Dagbladet, Roger Grosvold (2024), reported that the US was the first to introduce the first drag shows which were held for children in schools and at the Public Library in California in 2015. Since then, the concept has extended to other regions across the globe. In the context of Norway, the Drag Queen, also known as the “The Queen Hour” has been holding different events starting on the new tour in Northern Norway, where the entertainment is for children from grades 1-4 (Grosvold, 2024). The Cultural Backpack (DKS) has been part of the Norwegian government's cultural policy initiative for schools since 2001. It implies that students across various school levels in Norway get to experience professional art and culture through the DKS initiative. Grosvold (2024) emphasized the notion that this event or entertainment promotes the children's possibility of being whoever they want by encouraging them to

enjoy dressing up as stated on the website of the initiative (Den Kulturelle Skolesekken, 2024):

“Enjoy dressing up because so do drag-queens!”

In the same vein, the Drag Queen in the US, Birgitte Bandit stated the following (Grosvold, 2024):

“The messages in my self-written fairy tales are about being yourself, whether you’re a boy or a girl, a boyish girl, or a girlish boy. That being yourself is enough.”

Events such as “The Troll Wish” were met with success at the National Museum in Norway, and the drag queen Nabi Yeon Geisha was invited to several schools to perform “The Queen Hour”. Yet, Grosvold (2023) addressed that this has not been met positively by everyone, especially not by parents. Many parents view this performance by drag queens as indoctrination of their children and prompting their children to believe that they have the option of changing their gender. Not only is the aggression coming from parents, but also conservative forces such as feminists, conspiracy theorists, and far-right groups. It is believed by many that society is always working on making citizens busy on a specific theme, this went from the focus on COVID-19 vaccine resistance and is today replaced with protests against Pride and Drag Queen events, which are claimed to harm children and promote pedophilia. Hence, on the 9th of March 2024, the youth group, “The Youth of the Norwegian Democrats” (NDU), protested in front of the library in Åsane in Bergen, Norway against a drag show performance held for children<sup>27</sup>. The Deputy leader, Fredrik Fauske, of “The Youth of the Norwegian Democrats”, organized and led the protest. NDU criticized the public for

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<sup>27</sup> NDU har avholdt demonstrasjon mot drag for barn! (NDU, 2024).  
<https://www.ndungdom.no/2024/03/10/ndu-har-avholdt-demonstrasjon-mot-drag-for-barn/>

arranging an event such as a drag show for children. It was contended that the arrangement is associated with an ‘adventure moment’ for every child to be able to explore “a fantasy world without the traditional gender norms”. Fauske (cited by NDU, 2024) believed that this performance is not of any added value for the children and that there are other powers behind it which leaves a question on what the reality behind this agenda is. NDU and Fauske stand for “children being children”, without being exposed to drag shows and not being utilized as political pawns in the adult world (NDU, 2024). Similarly, protests have also taken place by members of far-right groups who demonstrated against Drag Queen story hour outside the Queens Public Library in the US in December 2022. A journalist, Ali Bauman (2022), reported that at least one person was arrested in Queens during the protest against the drag queens reading to children. One of the protestors against this entertainment, Edwin de la Cruz (Bauman, 2022) stated the following:

“I just don’t want somebody who is transgender teaching our kids about whatever they’re talking about.”

In contrast, the president of the board of Drag Story Hour NYC, Allison Marino declared the following:

“The heart of our mission is teaching kids to express themselves as exuberantly as possible and helping them to be able to accept other kids and other people however they choose to express themselves.”

According to Grosvold (2024), approximately 1500 children experienced the “Queen Hour” in Norway in 2023, without any rejection from schools. In an interview led by two Norwegian journalists, Monica Strømdahl and Kari Mette Hole (2023) with the Dutch-Norwegian writer and literary critic, Carline Tromp. Tromp declared in her interview with the Norwegian Newspaper Aftenposten the following:

“Drag queens are contributing to a Cultural war. Men in Sequins have overtaken immigrants as public enemy number one among anti-woke sections of the far right and Christian conservative groups<sup>28</sup>.”

According to Tromp (Strømdahl et al., 2023) what she viewed as interesting is that within the Western world only a few years ago these right-wing defended liberal Western values, such as pride and queer rights, against what they labeled “authoritarian Islam”. The notion has spread, and it is believed that there is a targeted plan, Tromp mentioned that what we are witnessing within society is much bigger than we imagine. The targeted plan is directed by the state, the media, or LGBTQ+ associations, which might wipe out women and men and teach children that there is no gender (Strømdahl et al., 2023).

In contrast, Jonathan Hamilt, the executive director of Drag Story Hour in New York, a nonprofit organization featuring drag artists reading to children, believed prejudice is the motivation behind every alienation and protest, he stated the following:

“If drag did not have its roots in queer culture and environments, I don’t think this would be discussed. No one is banning clowns or miming. This is not new; it’s just the 2023 version of what homophobia looks like.”

On the other hand, the social debater, lecturer, and author, Kjell Skartveit (2023) shared in a post that several states in the US will ban drag shows for children.

The Republican State Senator, Jack Johnson, shared the following on drag shows for children:

“I am responsible for protecting children from being exposed to sexually explicit drag shows that are inappropriate for a minor audience. It is similar to laws that prohibit children from entering strip clubs.”

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<sup>28</sup> Dragkampen om barna (Strømdahl et.al., 2023).  
<https://www.aftenposten.no/amagasinet/i/3EQoP0/dragkampen-om-barna>

On the contrary, some parents believe that the parents themselves should decide what their children should encounter, some parents view it as entertaining but have a full understanding that other conservative parents can take personal responsibility in opting out their children rather than letting the state decide. For instance, a CBC journalist, Yvette Brend (2022) reported on a statement made by the executive director of Drag Story Hour, Jonathan Hamilt the following:

“We are not trying to make these kids queer or trans, instead we are trying to ensure that kids who do grow up to identify as LGBTQ feel safe – and know that they have allies.”

In addition, Hamilt (as cited by Brend, 2022) clarified that:

“We just want them to not kill themselves or be killed because of who they are. That’s the raw truth.”

It is vital to avoid any societal challenges whether it is mental health issues, discrimination, anxiety, or insecurity. However, the issue at hand revolves around whether parents who oppose such forms of entertainment are recognized and respected, rather than categorized as conservative or unsophisticated individuals.

#### **3.4. Progressive and Conservative Stance on Curriculum Awareness of LGBTQ+**

Nations on the global scale vary in their stances and adoption of different ideologies, beliefs, diversity in traditions, and societal norms constructed by the nation's political systems, economic structures, and historical events. This makes each nation different in its response to the globalization of new ideas that lead to a nation’s development and/or reform. In the context of the introduced gender identity curriculum within the educational system, some connect this implementation to an imposed

hegemonic conception of the good, creating hierarchical polarization which will result in what Hanafi (forthcoming-b) defined as:

“A division or conflict which leads to the exclusion of the major groups in society, and this is why often hierarchical as entails power and domination.”

This is present largely as intolerant debates surrounding political, cultural, and social issues. Hanafi (forthcoming-b) referred to it as taking sides rather than a priority in making sound and explanatory arguments.

#### ***3.4.1. Progressive Stance on Curriculum Awareness of LGBTQ+***

In the context of the incorporation of the gender identity curriculum, some progressive nations have acknowledged their emphasis on policies in the promotion of equity and social justice. As a result, the school curriculum has served as a tool for their policy framework in challenging norms and promoting inclusivity among the vulnerable. Hence, the Norwegian Government (2023) has actively incorporated concepts of gender fluidity in school curricula where the shift in education went from the emphasis on “sexual inequality” to the promotion of “gender diversity”. The Norwegian government (2023) endorsed the so-called “Yogyakarta principles” which include a set of principles for the human rights of the LGBTQ+ people. These principles with Norway’s efforts in enacting the “1981 Anti-Discrimination Law” where (sexual orientation is included), the same-gender marriage law in 2009, the adoption rights, and supported impregnation treatments for lesbian couples highlight Norway’s support towards LGBTQ+ individuals. The current Prime Minister of Norway, Jonas Gahr Støre, expressed his support through the following statement:

“Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people have the same rights and are to be treated with the same respect for their integrity and entitlement to make their



own choices as all other people. Our work to support sexual minorities is a clear reflection of the principle that violations of human rights can never be justified<sup>29</sup>”

In addition, the Norwegian Government's efforts in promoting the rights of LGBTQ+ individuals can be associated with the established ‘Action Plan’ on gender and sexual diversity for the period 2023-2026. According to the Norwegian Government (2023), this proposal aims to promote queer people’s quality of life, safeguard their rights, and contribute to greater acceptance of gender and sexual diversity. It is stated clearly in the Action Plan that many individuals who have a connection to religious and belief-based communities, experience that their community’s view of their gender and sexuality is challenging. In the same way as ensuring equality through human rights, freedom, and diversity to benefit all people equally.

Similarly in Iceland, a Marketing Communication Specialist, Parker O’Halloran (2023), reported that Iceland scores a very high rate on the Worldwide Social Progress Index in inclusiveness and acceptance of LGBTQ+. For instance, Iceland’s former Prime Minister (2009-2013) and the first openly gay head of state, Johanna Siguarðardóttir, expressed her support during her speech at Toronto’s World Pride conference in 2014:

“It is absolutely imperative that every human being’s freedom and human rights are respected all over the world<sup>30</sup>”

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<sup>29</sup> Promoting the human rights of LGBT – lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender – people. (Norwegian Foreign Ministry of Affairs).  
[https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/upload/ud/vedlegg/menneskerettigheter/guidelines\\_hr\\_lgbt.pdf](https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/upload/ud/vedlegg/menneskerettigheter/guidelines_hr_lgbt.pdf)

<sup>30</sup> Former PM At World Pride: In The End Love Conquered All (Árnadóttir, 2014)  
<https://grapevine.is/news/2014/06/28/former-pm-at-worldpride-in-the-end-love-conquered-all/>

An Icelandic author and freelance journalist, Nanna Árnadóttir (2014), highlighted Sigurðardóttir's gratitude toward her native country for going towards acknowledgment and equality for the LGBTQ+ community. Sigurðardóttir stressed during her speech at Toronto's World Pride conference the following:

“If these rights are not enforced worldwide, then the world cannot consider itself truly free.”

The speech marked one of the first calls from a head of state to make LGBTQ+ rights a standard worldwide. Also, in Iceland, every individual has the right to ‘Neutral Gender Registration’ from the age of fifteen, the objective behind this act is to guard the rights of the individual to have physical integrity. In a post on Jurist News, Dwyer Arce, a former law clerk (2010) and current partner at the law firm Kutak Rock, underlined that same-sex marriage was granted in Iceland in 2010, and adoption rights were granted for same-gender couples in 2006 where they provided them same entitlements as any heterosexual couple in adopting, parenting, and assisting in insemination treatment. In the context of the Icelandic National Curriculum, the Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights Irrespective of Gender, and Reykjavik City's Human Rights Policy have obliged all schools to consider the teaching of LGBTQ+ people and issues (Reykjavik, 2024).

In the same vein, Sweden accepts LGBTQ+ rights as a norm, and it has been celebrated as one of the world's most inclusive and progressive countries, not only that, but Sweden is also considered to be an ideal destination for gay-friendly travel destination<sup>31</sup>. Certainly, since 2019 Swedish society has been celebrating the 75th anniversary of another key LGBTQ right - namely the decriminalization of

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<sup>31</sup> LGBTQ+ travel in Sweden (2024). <https://visitsweden.com/what-to-do/lgbtq/>

homosexuality. Hence, a non-profit organization, the Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex Rights (RFSL) stated that the Swedes refer to their country as a nation that has been gay since 1944. Same-sex marriage was applied and legal in Sweden since 2009 and this followed the adoption right for same-gender couples a month later<sup>32</sup>.

In the context of Sweden's adoption of gender identity education in schools, this initiative has been one of the grounds for non-discrimination policies since 2009. For instance, a journalist on Medium, Christine Kinori (2020) stated that the Swedish Equality Ombudsman published a manual that all Swedish preschools should have gender-neutral bathrooms and all children should learn about same-sex parents. This has contributed to facilitating sexual identity for Swedish LGBTQ+ individuals from a young age. The aim is to assist in sexual orientation and gender identity, Swedish students begin their sex education at 11 years old in their 5th year of primary school. They work towards creating a safe environment starting from the school facilities to home and in work areas. It is of great importance for the government to facilitate the adoption of LGBTQ+ curriculum schools. For Swedish policymakers, inclusive classrooms are a major factor in overcoming discrimination, homophobia, low self-esteem, and stigma. The curriculum aims to ensure that the right LGBTQ+ history is taught without bias, and it helps the younger generation to understand that it is not a crime but simply a different sexual orientation (Kinori, 2020). Countries that advocate for inclusiveness persist in their endeavors to promote equality and foster acceptance for all. Thus, Sweden's Prime Minister, Ulf Kristersson, stands in solidarity with LGBTQ+ individuals through his statement:

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<sup>32</sup> Our work at RFSL – A brief overview (RFSL, 2022). <https://www.rfsl.se/en/about-us/our-work-at-rfsl/>

“Any individual should have the same rights and opportunities as anyone else<sup>33</sup>.”

### ***3.4.2. Conservative Stance on Curriculum Awareness of LGBTQ+***

Conversely, it is stressed by Human Rights Watch (HRW, 2018) that states like Russia have adopted an opposing stance through legislation that aims at protecting traditional family values and protecting the child from being exposed to homosexuality. A Russian affairs reporter for the global news The Guardian, Pjotr Sauer (2022), highlighted Russia’s “Anti-gay law” as it bans the promotion of non-traditional sexual relations to minors and restricts access to information about LGBTQ+ individuals. The President of Russia, Vladimir Putin, slammed ‘cancel culture’ and vocally criticized teaching gender fluidity as monstrous. The Washington Post journalist Amy Cheng (2021) underlined that President Putin believes that this gender identity curriculum is associated with “a crime against humanity” dressed up in the flag of “progress”. Putin viewed giving the child a decision to choose their gender identity as like “calling a spade a spade”. In his opinion, this will contribute to the undermining of parents’ authorities, and therefore the Russian policy framework has prohibited same-sex marriages and child adoption by transgender individuals. In the same line, an Associated Press correspondent covering Russia, Dasha Litvinova (2024) reported that an Act that was endorsed in 2023 that prohibits gender transitioning procedures and gender-affirming care, as well as changing a person’s gender in official documents and public records. Likewise, in November 2023, the LGBTQ+ movement in Russia was banned and labeled as an “Extremist organization” (Litvinova, 2024).

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<sup>33</sup> Pride Shows the Fault Lines in Kristersson’s coalition (James Savage, 2023).  
<https://www.thelocal.se/20230807/politics-in-sweden-pride-shows-the-fault-lines-in-kristerssons-coalition>

Similarly to Russia, a Senior Researcher, Thomas Wahl (2022) declared that Hungary passed an “Anti-propaganda law” in 2021 under the Children Protection Act which aims at restricting content that pertains to ‘divergence from self-identity corresponding to sex at birth, sex-change, or homosexuality’ from being shared with individuals under 18-years-old. The law banned anything that shares information and/or is considered as a promotion of homosexuality or gender transformation to individuals below eighteen years old. A correspondent for The Guardian, Jennifer Rankin (2021), addressed a statement made by a Hungarian government spokesperson, where the following was stated:

“There are contents which children under a certain age can misunderstand and which have a detrimental effect on their development at a given age, or which children simply cannot process, and which could therefore confuse the developing moral values of their image of themselves or the world.”

European media heavily criticize such position of Hungary. France24 (2021) gave some details that this country has constitutionally prohibited same-sex marriage, but civil partnerships are recognized. Also, the Act affirms that only married couples may adopt children unless granted special permission by the Family Affairs Minister.

Furthermore, in examining an Eastern Asian nation stance, a journalist, researcher, and artist covering global identity, human rights, and politics, Jessie Lau (2024) revealed that China has a traditional position toward LGBTQ+ individuals and has pushed this community into the shadows. There are no laws in China that protect against discrimination based on gender identity or sexual orientation. Although homosexuality was decriminalized in 1997 and removed from the list of psychiatric disorders in 2001, same-sex couples cannot marry or adopt children. Also, within the LGBTQ+ community, China sets stringent criteria for accessing gender-affirming surgery, individuals must be aged 18 or over, unmarried, receive parental consent, and

have a clean criminal record. These criteria must be met to be legally permitted to change your gender (Lau, 2024). Nikkei Asia correspondent, Pak Yiu (2024), reporting on global news from an Asian perspective, underlined the event in January 2024, where Jin Xing, the country's best-known transgender celebrity photos and videos of the event dance performance took a bow with a pride flag bearing the slogan "Love is love, love, and gender are unrelated". The videos and photos quickly spread on Chinese social media before censors scrubbed the image from the Weibo social network. Chinese nationalists quickly attacked Jin for "poisoning children and destroying the traditions of marriage" (Yiu, 2024). In the same vein, the Beijing Bureau Chief for CNN International, Steven Jiang (2020) reported that the Chinese government has occasionally cracked down on LGBTQ+ activism, censoring online content related to LGBTQ+ issues and shutting down LGBTQ+ events, such as the "Shanghai Pride", China's longest-running and only major annual celebration of sexual minorities, abruptly announced its effective shutdown in 2021. The organizer of the group shared the following "Canceling all upcoming activities and taking a break from scheduling any future events" (Jiang, 2020). Also, a BBC journalist and producer, Annabelle Liang (2023), recorded that dozens of accounts dealing with LGBT topics on the popular messaging app 'WeChat' were reportedly deleted in 2021. Regarding the nation's perspective of the LGBTQ+ curriculum, it is not incorporated in China's educational system, they tend to focus more on reproductive health and traditional gender roles rather than promoting the exploration of diverse gender identities and expressions. LGBTQ+ issues are generally not addressed in formal education, and there are no specific guidelines or curriculum materials related to gender identity. Instead, in recent years China has proposed teaching efforts on 'cultivating masculinity' among young

men. The CBC News reporters (based in Hong Kong) Zixu Wang, Xin Chen, and Caroline Radnofsky (2021) addressed critically the educational approach in which in 2021, China's Education Ministry published plans to 'cultivate masculinity' in boys from kindergarten through high school. This involves hiring and training more physical education instructors, testing students more comprehensively in physical education, making health education compulsory, and supporting research into issues like the influence of the phenomenon of internet celebrities on adolescents' values. According to the adviser, Si Zefu (Wang et al., 2021) stated in a policy proposal:

“Chinese boys have been spoiled by housewives and female teachers. Boys would soon become more ‘delicate, timid, and effeminate’ unless action was taken.”

In proposing this, they interconnect it with the matter of national security and the warning of the feminization of Chinese boys which threatens China's survival and development. Considering the increasing popularity of male Chinese pop stars who wear makeup and androgynous, sparkly clothing has also influenced the Chinese youth's culture. Taking inspiration from Confucianism and South Korean pop culture, China's young style connoisseurs have embraced the “gentle style” look, a softer form of masculinity that stands in sharp contrast to traditional tough-guy tropes, allowing more diverse forms of self-expression (Wang et al., 2021). The Chinese government has a more conservative view of how men and women should act. Hence, gay relationships are banned from Chinese television under a 2016 law barring “vulgar, immoral, and unhealthy content” and while homosexuality was decriminalized in 1997, no law prevents discrimination based on sexual orientation (Wang et al., 2021). Examining Chinese leaders' views on LGBTQ+, they undoubtedly avoid discussing anything related to LGBTQ+, and public statements on the matter are rare. In brief, there are countries where conservative stances on LGBTQ+, marked with caution are adopted

such as Russia, Hungary, and China. In contrast, Western nations like Norway, Sweden, and Iceland, embrace LGBTQ+ individuals and their rights, integrating and promoting them in educational materials and beyond.

### **3.5. Conclusion**

In retrospect, the literature on gender identity curricula in educational institutions revealed that the lesson has sparked a global debate. This incorporation has reached the academic framework to address both the inclusion of a particular identity group (LGBTQ+) and to mitigate societal challenges this group might encounter. The incorporation of this curriculum and the renewal of the Norwegian curricula in 2020 is part of a “liberal project” expanding globally. Governmental entities, including Norway’s Ministry of Education, view this incorporation as essential for creating an inclusive learning environment that prioritizes social justice and equity by recognizing and valuing students’ diverse ethnic, racial, orientation, ability, socio-economic, and academic backgrounds. However, while the narrative for the SLs emphasizes the importance of mental health and well-being for everyone, a large proportion of parents perceive this implementation as exacerbating problems and confusion for both them and their children. Countries like Norway are pushing for a certain “conception of justice” through education that embraces the inclusion of gender identity. In contrast, other conservative societies have an opposing stance, such as Russia, Hungary, and China where laws are enacted to protect the traditional family values and to avoid what they perceive as harm to their children. The decision-making processes concerning the inclusion of this lesson in schools, including kindergarten, prioritize one perspective as beneficial while neglecting the opposing viewpoint. A state should remain impartial and



refrain from imposing any dominant conception of the ideal way of life. Does this lead us toward a hegemonic conception of the good? Is the state together with educational institutions taking over the parents' role over their children? This matter needs to be further investigated, and as such this research has extensively explored the narrative surrounding opposition to the introduced gender identity curriculum in Norwegian educational institutions. Also, it investigated several stakeholders' perspectives on the implementation of the curriculum and whether the school curriculum is part of the conception of justice or the conception of the good. Thus, the next chapter of this thesis aims to present the findings to the following research questions: "How is the Norwegian school curriculum contributing to parental alienation, and how do some stakeholders perceive its implementation in the context of potentially imposing a 'hegemonic conception of the good'?"

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the findings of the conducted analysis on 18 textbooks from grades 3-5 utilized in Norwegian primary schools and the 15 in-depth interviews with inclusion foremost of parents and professionals working closely with children.

#### **4.1. The LK20 Gender Identity Curriculum**

In the analysis of educational materials, including textbooks and the digital online platforms (Skolenmin and Salaby) employed in Norwegian educational institutions, the attention has been directed toward themes surrounding “gender identity” and “sexual orientation”. This analysis aimed to examine the content within the newly introduced gender identity curriculum that might be a prospective cause for the increased parental alienation. Like many other Western state projects, the normalization of “gender fluidity” within the school curriculum is considered a way of addressing societal challenges alongside the school’s role in fostering a healthy and fulfilling “life project” for students. Hence, this “life project” includes educating students about their bodies, emotions, and thoughts through understanding the complexities surrounding them. Thus, the recently established LK20 curriculum can be associated with three underlying factors: the interdisciplinary theme “Public Health and Life Skills”, societal challenges, and life projects. While some consider it a commendable initiative within the educational and political framework, there are increasing concerns among certain individuals that policymakers have failed to adequately assess its potential drawbacks, resulting in rejection and criticism.

#### ***4.1.1. Textbook and Content Analysis***

Through the analysis of 18 textbooks in various subjects and the two digital platforms (Skolenmin and Salaby), the Norwegian school curriculum shifted its focus from “gender equity” to incorporating themes surrounding “gender identity”. The gender identity lessons opt for the normalization of the option of acting beyond societal norms, such as encouraging students to embrace their gender identity and advocating strategies to aid themselves in self-identification that challenges conventional stereotypes. A Norwegian Professor, Bjørn Smestad (2018), confirmed in his research on LGBT issues in Norwegian textbooks that the previous curriculum in Norway (LK06) introduced in 2006, had less material on sexual orientation, gender identity, and same-gender topics. The content analysis conducted on the textbooks- and digital online platforms material (Skolenmin and Salaby) revealed that Social- and Natural Sciences subjects within grades 3-5 in Norwegian primary schools examine themes surrounding “gender identity”, “sexual orientation”, and other LGBTQ+ themes the most. The digital online platforms have been reviewed to align with the objectives and learning outcomes for each subject outlined in the LK20 curriculum. Within the digital online platforms, “gender fluidity” and other related LGBTQ+ topics are discovered through online material, podcasts, animations, reflective queries, and interactive discussions.

The overarching section of the LK20 curriculum consists of several sections, among them section 1.1 which addresses “human dignity”. According to the Norwegian Directorate of Education (2020):

- “The purpose clause is based on the inviolability of human dignity and the notion that all individuals are equally valuable, regardless of other factors that may differentiate us.”

- “All students will be treated equally, and no students should be subjected to discrimination<sup>34</sup>”.
- “We can all experience feeling different and out of place. Therefore, differences must be acknowledged and valued”.

In connection with the school’s responsibility of a “life project”. Section 1.2 on “Identity and Cultural Diversity”, addresses this point by the following statement:

“The school will provide students with historical and cultural insight and anchoring and contribute to each student’s ability to uphold and develop their identity within an inclusive and diverse community<sup>35</sup>”.

The shared objective within the school material on gender identity is to educate the students that there is no longer something referred to as “boys’ stuff” or “girls’ stuff”.

Initially, the examination of the Social Sciences textbooks in conjunction with digital platforms (Skolenmin and Salaby), focused the analysis on grades 3-5. The analysis explored themes concerning gender identity and various LGBTQ+ topics within the context of human rights, historical perspectives, cultural dimensions, same-sex marriage, prejudices, societal norms, and related areas of discourse. Hence, in the Social Sciences textbook *Social Sciences 4* (2022) published by Cappelen Damm, in the chapter “I choose”, taught to grade 4 students, the term “gender identity” is defined as:

“Your identity is under development during your whole life. Your family and friends influence who you are. Your interests and environment can also be part of your identity development.”

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<sup>34</sup> Section 1.1 Human Dignity (UDIR, 2020). <https://www.UDIR.no/lk20/overordnet-del/opplaringens-verdigrunnlag/1.1-menneskeverdet/?lang=nob>

<sup>35</sup> Section 1.2 Identity and Cultural Diversity (UDIR, 2020). <https://www.UDIR.no/lk20/overordnet-del/opplaringens-verdigrunnlag/1.2-identitet-og-kulturelt-mangfold/?lang=nob>

Also, it is noteworthy to address specific statements made in one of the Social Sciences textbooks, *Arena 5* (2020) published by Aschehoug that examine lessons on gender identity to a high extent. The book contains the following statements:

- “How your body looks, and which gender you have, do not always have to align together. We have the right to express our gender identity as we want.”
- “Many boys do not think that their gender role as a boy fits with their identity. But they are boys.”
- “Gender identity is your personal perception of which (or which) gender you are. It is not as easy as everyone identifying as either male or female. For most people, their gender identity matches the gender on their birth certificate, i.e. the gender they are born as. This does not apply to everyone. Today, we have included more genders than males and females in the concept of gender identity. The most common are female, male, intersex, trans, and non-binary.”
- “A nice thing is to show openness and respect around the gender identity topic. Introduce yourself with your name and your gender whether it’s a girl, boy, or in between. It will be easier to use pronouns on others and easier to mention which pronoun you prefer.”
- “Pronouns are words we use instead of using the name on things, animals, or humans. Instead of saying ‘the book’ you can say ‘it’. Instead of saying Kris you can say ‘him’ or ‘her’. Some use the pronouns ‘they’ or ‘them’. This comes back to what the individuals wish to be called. Everyone should choose the pronoun which will be used by them.”

After the following statement on pronouns, students are asked in the *Arena 5* (2020) Social Sciences textbook: “Which pronoun would you like to be used on you?”. Students in 5<sup>th</sup> grade are taught within the lessons in the Social Sciences textbook, *Arena 5* (2020), about the idea of exploring their own gender identity, and it is clearly stated that “the parents are no longer the child’s hero”. This statement among many others within the curriculum might be considered as encroaching upon the family authority. Also, a recurring idea within the *Arena 5* (2020) textbook is that “Norms are learned, changed, and always in development” which can be associated with the gender identity curricula as a whole and that society, culture, and environment influence how

individuals think or feel. In connection to law legislation, the student is informed about their rights with significant emphasis on the Convention on the Rights of the Child (OHCHR) and that each one of them deserves to be “safe, seen, and heard”. For instance, in one of the sections within the *Arena 5 (2020)* Social Sciences textbook, the promotion of the child’s ability to make its own life decisions is stated as follows:

- “You know best who you are, and how you should be. You have the right to be the one you want to be.”
- “We are all shaped by different characteristics we inherit from our parents, environment, society, and culture. Not all are formed - each one of us should decide who he or she wants to be. Everyone must determine what holds the greatest significance in their life.”
- “There are no law implementations that say how a girl or boy should be.”

In historical instances, history relates to norms in the *Arena 5 (2020)* Social Sciences textbook which refers to expectations in previous eras when children used to smoke pipes/cigarettes and sell newspapers. Today this is uncommon. In other words, the curriculum seeks to normalize the idea that “one society may be normal, but abnormal in another”. This concept is discussed in the lessons to illustrate how certain countries might permit practices like “gender fluidity”, whereas others may regard such practices as “abnormal” or even “illegal”, based on their adapted norms, laws, beliefs, or other values they adhere to. Another illustration is the 2016 approval of same-sex marriage in churches in Norway, which was normalized afterward, but if we mention this in some conservative states it is more likely to be associated as “sinful” and “abnormal” where traditional expectations clash with what is perceived to be the “modern life of living”. In the Social Sciences textbook, *Arena 5 (2020)*, a portrait of Franklin D Roosevelt is presented from the 19<sup>th</sup> century with Roosevelt wearing a dress at a young age. Indeed, it is a representation of him in the typical fashion of that era,

which reflects prevailing cultural norms. Many of the lessons are designed to normalize the idea that a biological male could be born as a boy but internally identify as a girl. Or vice versa, and maybe some might feel that they are both a girl and a boy or neither (gender fluid). In the same vein, marginalized voices are also incorporated and connected to historical narratives as presented in the podcast episodes of “Queer Talk” in the digital online platform “Salaby” for grade 5. The real-life narratives are illustrated where individuals share their stories about the changes they underwent in their lives and where terms such as “homosexuality” and “gender fluidity” are strongly emphasized. In the example of Asmund Robert Vik, the podcast episode shed light on his experience as an identified homosexual during a period when such identity was criminalized and could potentially lead to imprisonment and loss of careers and houses. This is further linked to a podcast episode, featuring a policewoman, Monica Lillebakken, who expressed the Norwegian Polices’ support and that they have participated in the pride parade since 2005. For the Norwegian police, the aim is to “actively support the movement’s effort in self-expression and the freedom to love without restrictions”, this is linked with Norway’s principles of democracy in ensuring freedom of speech while also enforcing legal repercussions for threats against and dehumanization of LGBTQ+ individuals. The focus on combating hate crimes is prominent within all the materials covering LGBTQ+, extending protections to individuals of various religions, cultures, and racial backgrounds. Legal frameworks safeguard the LGBTQ+ community, highlighting the necessity of legislation to shield vulnerable populations. Also, to combat hate crimes, lessons on “modern family structure” have received a significant standing within the curriculum, reflecting its increasing integration and normalization within Norwegian society. In several sections in the digital online platform, Skolenmin

for grade 5, the notion is illustrated alongside an image of two same-sex couples with an infant with the following statement:

“We are in a period where norms, regulations, and laws change after society is in development.”

Hence, the lesson refers to the 2009 Act in the approval of same-gender individuals to get married and their rights to engage in the adoption of children. This is informed in the curriculum material, as they declared to normalize it among students and to avoid instances of bullying/discrimination against children who might have parents of the same gender. Other illustrations of worksheets distributed to 5<sup>th</sup>-grade students at the digital platform, Salaby, consist of the following inquiries:

- 1) “**To come out**’. Mention why Silje was scared to come out and mention why you believe one should think to change if you are **queer**. Is having short hair a requirement to be considered ‘queer’?
- 2) How have you become **the one you are** today? write down a list of what influenced you to be who you are today.
- 3) Write down 3 things that make you **different** (you don't need to show this to anyone in class).
- 4) What would you say to your friend who came out? What can we do to make coming out less daunting? Can you explain what **prejudice** is? How can we find out who and how someone is?
- 5) Victor mentions the importance of reading books and watching series and movies where you can find characters like yourself and the presence of **queer role models**. Why do you think it's important to see **characters we can relate to**?



- 6) **Imagine you are a girl**, but all the characters in the series/movies were **ONLY boys**. How would that be? Imagine if all the characters were adults, not children, how would that be?

Similarly, in the *Social Sciences 4* (2022) textbook published by Cappelen Damm, the chapter “I choose” is introduced to students in 4<sup>th</sup> grade where the students are asked questions related to Pride and other LGBTQ+ topics. Before that, the chapter examines the definition of Pride:

“Pride is a celebration of love. Pride is about everyone should be the one he is and love whoever he wants. Many join the Pride parade to celebrate love and diversity.”

In addition, the students are taught that the Rainbow flag created in 1978 is a symbol of:

- “Freedom and community”.
- “Everyone is allowed to belong to the community and have the same rights”.
- “You decide who you want to fall in love with”.

Hence, the questions asked within this section are the following:

- 1) How can you celebrate Pride at your school?
- 2) Many who celebrate Pride say, “Love is love”. What do you think they mean by that?

In the context of LGBTQ+ terms addressed in the Social Sciences textbooks are such as: ally, bisexual, discrimination, prejudice, heterosexual, homosexual, identity, coming out, lesbian, LGBTQ+, diversity, pansexual, pride, rainbow flag, sexual orientation, queer, and transgender person.

In the analysis of the Natural Sciences subject, it was discovered that the subject undertakes a deeper exploration into what defines a girl or boy, underscoring the principle that individuals are entitled to self-identify in alignment with their beliefs and

perceptions. This decision-making encompasses the freedom to choose pronouns such as “he”, “she”, “it”, or any other designation reflecting personal autonomy.

The topics encompass expectations, norms, puberty, sexuality, gender roles, and legislative measures. Also, the “freedom of choice” emphasizes the theme of “love”, whereas the Natural Sciences subject delves deeper into the notion that individuals determine their boundaries. Similarly to the Social Sciences subject, the Natural Sciences subject rejects the idea that “only boys are interested in playing with cars” or that “girls are confined to domestic roles, while men work outside the home”. The aim is to highlight that whether you are a girl or a boy, there are no limitations and that we are all fluid and capable of choosing our way of living without any restrictions. Hence, in the Natural Sciences textbook *Solaris 3-4* (2022) published by Aschehoug, the chapter “Who Am I?” introduced to students in grades 3-4 gender identity is defined as:

“Your gender identity is your thought of who you are, and how you view yourself. You can think of yourself as a boy or girl, or neither. You can wish to be called he, she, or it, or whatever you wish to be called.”

Likewise, students are taught the idea through the following statement:

“Medical professionals assign an individual’s gender based on their genitalia at birth, while hairstyle, clothing choices, and other factors may influence their gender identity expression.”

This statement is added next to a figure of a “Gender Bread Person<sup>36</sup>” like the one utilized in schools in the UK<sup>37</sup>. An additional statement included next to the

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<sup>36</sup> An example illustrated of the «Genderbread» in grade 3-4 textbooks in the new Norwegian LK20 gender identity curriculum. <https://verdinytt.no/indoktrinerer-attearinger-med-skeiv-teori/19.676>

<sup>37</sup> The Genderbread Person utilized in schools in the UK. <https://www.knowsleyscp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/The-Proud-Trust-Genderbread.pdf>

introduced “Gender Bread Person” in the Natural Sciences textbook *Solaris 3-4* (2022) is the following:

“You can express that you are a girl, boy, or maybe both or none of the mentioned. What you express can match your born gender or not.”

The following statement is connected to the example of “Princess Ivar” a cartoon story, where the main character (a biological male) with a male name “Ivar”, decided to dress up as a Princess on a skateboard for a gathering with his friends. In this book section, it is evident that the example of Ivar is to normalize that any individual can wear anything they feel comfortable with and that gender identity is self-determined.

Furthermore, historical instances are connected within the Natural Sciences subject to the theme of self-expression as demonstrated in the section “Who am I?” on the digital online platform “Skolenmin”. The lesson example of King Ludwig in the 15th century is illustrated with him wearing shoes with heels, which was common for kings in Russia, Germany, and Spain. They viewed it to be smart and started wearing it. This can be perceived as an indirect example utilized in the curriculum, while other examples can be more direct in the discussion of gender fluidity. For instance, the lesson example of an earthworm was defined as “bisexual because it gets both ovaries and testicles when it reaches puberty”. The lesson explains that earthworms exhibit male and female characteristics, as evidenced by the statement, “When two earthworms mate, both can lay eggs afterward”. This phenomenon is known as “gender fluidity” and is associated with puberty, highlighting the continuous development of all human beings and that from the age of 11-12, children develop and change faster than before.

Similarly, like the Social Sciences subject, the digital online platform “Skolenmin” includes a section on gender identity within its Natural Sciences content

for fourth-grade students, highlighting that our society encompasses more genders than just male and female. Hence, it presents that the most common are female, male, intersex, trans, and non-binary. Among other terms “gender fluidity” is defined as “some people identify sometimes as female and sometimes as male, and sometimes as something in between”. Non-binary individuals are defined as “people who see themselves as neither female nor male”. Terms the online digital platform “Skolenmin” for grade 4 delves into are terms such as innate, gender difference, genitalia, upbringing, bisexual, heterosexual, pansexual, a-sexual, and other LGBTQ+ terms. In a section in the Natural Sciences textbook, *Yggdrasil 5* (2006), published by Aschehoug for 5th-grade students, homosexuality and heterosexuality are examined in a section where “emotions” are connected to “falling in love” where the lesson mentions that:

“You can fall in love with the opposite gender or the same gender regardless of who you fall in love with, you will have the same feeling.”

Homophily and heterophily are defined as:

“Homo means you are alike (love between two of some gender) while philia means that you like, heterophily is love between a man and woman”.

The Natural Sciences textbook, *Yggdrasil 5* (2006), focuses significantly on the idea that:

“Your limits are chosen by you, and you decide how you want to define or express yourself, your interests, or your gender”.

Questions included in the Natural Sciences textbooks are less personal and demanding compared to the subject of Social Sciences. Students can encounter questions such as:

- 1) It is called “**To Come out of the closet**” when a boy or a girl shares that they are homosexuals, why is it called that?
- 2) What are the **similarities** between girls and boys during puberty?
- 3) When you grow up, you can have **romantic feelings** for anyone you want. What does that mean?
- 4) What does it mean to **get to know oneself** better?

To conclude, in the analysis of the content on “gender identity” and other themes surrounding LGBTQ+, it has been discovered that these topics are included mainly in Social- and Natural Sciences subjects. Conversely, within the Norwegian subject, marginalized voices are incorporated where images such as pride flags and other LGBTQ+ symbols are shown. Factors that might lead to parental alienation are such as in-depth instruction on gender identity, sexual orientation, and the introduction of a third gender. Therefore, the use of language, terminology, and inclusion of marginalized voices, including the introduction of third gender and the promotion of exploring gender identity, can be provoking topics for parents. Also, the emphasis made on the child’s rights and ability to visit the school nurse at any time and be transferred to professional assistance is among the promotion factors. Hence, in many of the Social- and Natural Sciences textbooks and digital online materials, students are provided a phone number and website “the youth’s phone”, offering them the option to call or chat anonymously through [skeivchat.no](http://skeivchat.no) (queer chat) with volunteers knowledgeable on various LGBTQ+ topics.

## **4.2. Interviews: Parents and Other Stakeholders' Perception**

This section delves deeper into the underlying reasons for the alienated perspectives of the interviewees on the gender identity curriculum introduced in Norwegian educational institutions. The alienated perspectives and responses are divided into four distinct sections: first, contradictions with beliefs, culture, and tradition; second, concern for the child's well-being; third, lack of family authority; and fourth, the option to withdraw children from gender identity lessons.

### ***4.2.1. Contradictions with Beliefs, Culture, and Traditions***

In this section, the perspectives of alienation have been examined based on the alienated perspectives rooted in the parents' beliefs, culture, and traditions in response to the gender identity curriculum in the renewed LK20 curriculum. A 53-year-old heterosexual clinical child psychologist with an immigrant background has dedicated the past three decades to this field and highlighted "belief" as the primary cause of parental alienation towards the gender identity curriculum. She attributed the curriculum to a clash with three main factors: history, culture, and religion. She referred to a significant example in the rejection of gender identity topics:

"Gender fluidity cannot be like neurological diseases or epilepsy, because if you are sick, you are sick. Gender fluidity is something you can say no to. History, culture, and religion have different perspectives on it and that is where everything clashes."

The LGBTQ+ community and its integration within society have been associated with what the Western nations perceive as "modernity" and "development". A 48-year-old heterosexual Muslim father expressed his belief that introducing a 'third gender' is unconventional. He articulated the following:

“In my religion, there is no third gender, unless the individuals are born in the wrong body or there are other medical reasons. Otherwise, it is abnormal in my opinion.”

In the same vein, a 54-year-old heterosexual Norwegian mother and educator who adheres to Christianity and has been working in a primary school in Norway for the past 20 years expressed the following:

“Individuals belonging to the Christian community in Norway will never accept this, it ruins the family. We will be labeled as religious extremists but in reality, we are following our religion, the Biblical scripture. Anyone who does not believe or have the right relationship with God will not care about this matter. But I care and I do not want my children to be exposed to this topic.”

Furthermore, a 27-year-old heterosexual Norwegian educator shared her experience of encountering a Muslim mother who responded negatively to the curriculum, due to the clash with her culture, traditions, and beliefs. The educator stated the experience between her and the Muslim mother:

“The mother rejected the idea that her child would read a Norwegian text about an LGBTQ+ individual who married her partner of the same gender. The mother believed this text was harmful to her child, and that there was too much focus, which again goes against her religion. Another issue she raised was that parents should be well-informed in advance when the educators will address these topics. The situation escalated since I responded to her by saying that “LGBTQ+ individuals are part of our society, and this is a curriculum material that must be addressed”. This resulted in meetings with the school principal, me, and the mother to address the issue further together.”

Based on the interviewees’ perspectives, it was observed that in the past certain teachers exhibited an estranged demeanor towards subjects on sexuality and puberty. These teachers refrained from delving in-depth into the topic, despite its brevity within the curriculum. In the context of gender identity, a 34-year-old heterosexual immigrant mother and educator revealed that:

“Many teachers are avoiding the topic of gender identity; many are against it and believe that this is a topic that should not have reached this far. During my time

at school, I had a teacher who avoided teaching topics on sexuality and puberty, although it was a small chapter. Similarly, some teachers today are completely against gender identity topics and are not comfortable discussing themes related to gender identity but cannot show or express it because it might lead to discrimination.”

In addition, she referred to a colleague who was a conservative Christian educator and viewed the gender identity lesson to be wrong. In the conservative Christian educator’s view, she believed that it should not be an option to talk about it even with her other colleagues during lunch break. This educator avoided the topic and any discussions surrounding it at any time. The sense of alienation is evident not only among parents but also among educators. A 40-year-old male heterosexual Norwegian educator expressed openly that he was against the idea of exaggerating this lesson which has already been implemented:

“As educators, we are obliged to consider everyone’s feelings. We have not talked in depth about gender fluidity, but we are going to teach about puberty and sexuality where gender identity topics will be included. I believe there is no need to go in-depth as the LGBTQ+ community is doing by having their symbols, flag, letters, and parade. Instead of just making it simple by allowing anyone to like anyone else. We do not need to exaggerate it.”

He explained that within his lessons he found it unnecessary to have discussions on ‘pronouns’ which is something that does not matter in his perspective. The top priority for him is to demonstrate understanding and respect towards children who might define themselves differently than their biological sex. Also, he explained that he would never exaggerate the topic as many Norwegian educational institutions are beginning to work on it. He found it peculiar that traditions he was taught as a youth are gradually fading away over time, and replaced by approaches and ideas that are going against the beliefs, values, and traditions of many households. The confusion is present and felt by many, especially those who adhere to a religious faith and believe in God.



In contrast, a 37-year-old heterosexual and female Norwegian educator and mother supportive of the LGBTQ+ community stated the following:

“I support the LGBTQ+ individuals and I do not find the idea of the integration of gender identity curriculum nor the approval of the LGBTQ+ couples to get married in the church as strange or sinful. LGBTQ+ individuals are still humans and can also have a choice to believe in God. I have friends who recently got married in a church in Norway, and I think it is beautiful to see that all individuals are welcome into God’s house. In my opinion, if a believer is not in support of LGBTQ+ individuals, he is more likely to be questioned about how religious he is when he is against the existence of a group of people that God created.”

Similarly, to this idea, a 26-year-old homosexual male educator with an immigrant background, raised in Norway, stated the following:

“I was born into a very religious and traditional family, where my father is a religious leader. I believe the LGBTQ+ community is very important and made it easier for me to explore who I am and my sexual orientation. However, my family was not supportive of this, and this resulted in me changing my first- and surname. Unfortunately, I do not have any relation to them anymore, but I am happy that I live in a Western state that allows me to be myself fully. I believe this gender identity curriculum will be helpful for many youths who were born in religious households like me.”

#### ***4.2.2. Concern for the Child’s Well-Being***

The second recurring issue emerged centered around concerns for the child’s well-being and the potential impact of gender identity lessons in school, which were generally perceived as beneficial by the state and the schools. This has caused numerous concerns among parents questioning their family authority, including the child’s upbringing, parental involvement in decision-making, and the fear of the child’s social and environmental surroundings, which in turn is posing challenges to the family authority and what the parents perceive as the “child’s well-being”. Many parents emphasized that, what is deemed “good” by policymakers, educational institutions and school staff has resulted in confusion, distress, and fear for them and their children.

A 54-year-old heterosexual Norwegian mother and educator with a Christian background highlighted the concern that children at this stage are still in a phase of developing decision-making skills, she stated the following:

“The child is less mature and clever to make his own decisions. That is why the parents look after them all the time. They have been institutionalized to a certain age. From the age of 1 year, they will be met in kindergarten and told what they are going to do and almost what they can feel. They will always receive help from an adult to cope with situations. They do not have the experience to cope with different types of situations, many of them have different types of diagnoses and anxieties”.

The main idea behind the statement made by the Norwegian educator is that children at this age need support and advice from their parents on what is right or wrong. The rising issue within this discourse in educational institutions is that students at a very young age are exposed to inquiries through worksheets and other tasks on defining their gender identity. In some cases, this has resulted in children getting into the process of undergoing a gender transformation surgery. Yet, the statistics on that matter are unclear. Several participants in this study brought up the idea that this school curriculum can be perceived as a tool for the “secular agenda” imposed on children, and potentially sidelining parental involvement in their decision-making processes.

The 54-year-old Norwegian educator shared an outstanding story about a close family relative who underwent gender-transformation surgery at the age of 15, coinciding with a vulnerable period when she was diagnosed with Asperger syndrome. Before the surgery, her parents were summoned for a school meeting where the girl had already selected the preferred pronoun “he”, and the educators and other school staff accommodated and utilized it which led to a reaction of aggression from the parents as they were not informed about this in advance. The educator expressed her concern on this issue and stated how she would have reacted if it was her child:

“If I am approached by someone from the school who suddenly refers to my son with pronouns for a girl, I will not accept that. I want to be informed at the beginning and not at the end.”

Following these procedures, it became evident over the years that the motivation stemmed from a desire for attention. The Norwegian educator stated the following:

“A phase of loss does not mean that transforming your gender will solve your problems.”

It was mentioned during the interview that the child was motivated and advised by other LGBTQ+ individuals in her process of gender transformation, which the educator wanted to highlight and make others aware of:

“As our children develop, they will all be in different phases. My family relative was advised to research on specific forums and in these forums, there were LGBTQ+ individuals who advised her to take every step accordingly to make the process easier and faster to surgery. Many of the youth who are undergoing gender transformation surgeries are either from problematic households, have mental health issues, or are exposed to bullying. This does not mean that the individual is in need to change his gender.”

She highlighted the instance of her family relative following these procedures, it became apparent from a desire for attention that opting for gender transformation surgery led to increased challenges rather than solving them. After the surgery, she regretted her decision to gender transition. Also, the Norwegian educator recounted an episode involving one of her students:

“This student was in 7th grade and one day she wanted us all to call her Bob, other students accepted the idea that she wanted to be a boy instead of a girl. With time it was evident that she came from a problematic household where her dad was a criminal, and her mother was identified as bisexual or transgender.”

The Norwegian educator connected these concerns and considerations regarding gender transition as “a plea for attention”. She explained that it is vital to provide

support and lend an empathetic ear, rather than exacerbating their challenges by directing them toward gender transformation consultations. She does not want to be misunderstood, but the idea is to see if other issues can be solved before sending them to life-changing processes which later might be regretted. Several teachers, parents, and school nurses believe that the pressure is common in schools and that it involves the promotion of gender identity topics and transformation, the schools are responsible for making the children more aware of it via discussions and thoughts. For instance, a 40-year-old heterosexual Norwegian school nurse addressed that:

“Educators are highlighting a concept that might be influential on the children at a young age, some children will understand it positively while others might be affected. We can make the child think of something they did not think of before, especially at a young age. We are in an era where everything is so transparent that they can see this and read it everywhere, on social media, on a poster on the street, or on a newspaper stand. They grasp the information differently than what they would do at the age of an adult. It is vital to be careful.”

Similarly, a 38-year-old heterosexual male Norwegian educator highlighted that:

“The introduction of this topic aims at teaching students that they have the possibility and choice to be whoever they want to be. We must accept diversity, but the focus on it in almost all subjects is crossing the boundaries.”

Another 65-year-old heterosexual immigrant mother and educator believed that:

“The promotion that is taking place can harm the most vulnerable children, those with weak personalities, confidence, and perspectives. They might not be proud of themselves and have challenges in building their personalities and therefore teaching them about their ability to change gender identity and expression is something that might be influential for these vulnerable groups of children.”

Therefore, she adds that teachers, schools, and LGBTQ+ voices can influence these vulnerable groups easily. Over the past few years in Norway, it has been emphasized a lot that children have their rights and that they can do whatever they want. What is vital to address is that immigrant children are more exposed to taking this power and doing whatever they want compared to ethnic Norwegian children who have

had access to these rights since they were born. The 65-year-old immigrant teacher mentioned the following:

“This is done by showing their freedom and power based on their rights, but the ‘freedom’ is utilized wrong in many lessons, and they do not know that freedom has its limits also.”

A 34-year-old heterosexual immigrant educator and mother emphasized her thoughts surrounding the idea of “identity confusion”:

“I believe the child should decide to define himself or not. It is not a good approach to ask the children directly if they need assistance, because they are back and forth at such a young age. There is nothing positive with this material and the questions asked, this will evoke and contribute to thoughts they never considered before, and it will remain there.”

She referred to “identity confusion” as common for children who might be masculine or boys with long hair playing with girls. But this does not mean that a child at the age of 6 is homosexual or transgender. Similarly, a 54-year-old heterosexual Norwegian mother and educator with a Christian background shared a related idea:

“This curriculum evokes thoughts for the students, which contribute to confusion on their natural identity.”

Also, the method of the school’s assistance in connecting the child to the school nurse was viewed by parents as unacceptable. The 34-year-old heterosexual immigrant educator and mother mentioned:

“In many instances, the schools are creating scenarios that are not present because a child can mention something he was not aware of or did not mean it. This contributes to the child’s feeling of being uncomfortable, confused, and afraid of the detailed questions he/she is asked to answer, and where many do not know what right or wrong answers can be.”

A 48-year-old heterosexual Muslim father shared an idea related to this:

“The legal age in Norway is 18, and before that they are at an age, where they are not sure about themselves, but rather influenced by each other. A 7-year-old child

has not developed himself yet, the questions that are asked within the material are evoking a thought and forcing them to think of it. It is unnecessary and unacceptable for children in that age where their sexual identity is not yet developed.”

A 45-year-old heterosexual female Norwegian educator explained her alienation on an arranged event they have at school yearly, which is called “School of Pleasure”:

“On this day they talk about different themes. Last time they introduced a topic on “your feelings, self-esteem, and self-image”. The school presented a short animated film to 5th graders about an individual born in the wrong body. This animation prompted numerous questions from the students. I believe that it was too early to sit and explain to children between 7-8 years old about this and go in-depth. I think if this is necessary to include it is better to wait for children to reach puberty to be included within the school curriculum for the children’s best.”

#### ***4.2.3. Lack of Family Authority***

The raised conflict between parents and schools arises from the belief that schools are usurping the family authority, where the 54-year-old heterosexual Norwegian educator and mother with a Christian background addressed her point:

“It is not up to the teacher to decide on behalf of the children. They should seek professional help if needed, if not the parents should stay responsible.”

In the same vein, a 48-year-old heterosexual Muslim father addressed the idea that educational institutions and the state are specifically more in control of the children than the parents:

“Think about it, there is already more control from the school and the state. It has been like this for the past 20 years. Through the system where both parents are working, children must be placed in after-school care (SFO) and have extra-long days at school and kindergarten.  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the child’s everyday life is spent at the school. From 5-7 pm, they are at home, and that is the time when they eat, shower, and sleep.”

Another 65-year-old heterosexual mother and educator with an immigrant background addressed the view immigrants have of Norway as a state, and how they associate Norway with a state where the children are more likely to be lost:

“Parents with immigrant backgrounds have reacted negatively to this and do not want the child to learn about it. They are afraid and do not want such information to be shared with their child. Parents come from communities that do not have good competence on this topic and are uncertain about their upbringing. They listen to rumors. They need to be strong to help the child in a Western society like Norway, but they must delve into and educate themselves to be supportive of their children and have the right competence to handle it properly. The parents cannot control everything the child sees and encounters in their everyday life.”

Indeed, several parents fear the state's power and the fact that they are teaching children not only about the ability to change their gender identity but also that there are laws protecting the children. For many parents, this is not suitable and results in a challenge for them and the upbringing of their child. For instance, a 38-year-old heterosexual male Norwegian educator clarified the idea in his perspectives on how Western states work:

“In Norway, the children belong to the state. For instance, if a child comes to the school injured or has a bruise. We work in schools and have a duty to report to the school administration, which passes this to the parents if they do not have a clear explanation. The school is more likely to contact Child Welfare Services. The law is with the child, and the support is always there from both the schools and the state.”

Among one of the contributors, a 52-year-old heterosexual Muslim father with an immigrant background shared his motivation to leave the country due to this. The fear of moving to a Western state is common for immigrants, where it is perceived as a bad idea, loss of their children, and their family authority. However, a 54-year-old heterosexual Norwegian mother and educator stated the following based on the issue:

“I do not hope that the school will take over the family authority. It is easy for the children to be mad at their parents after comparing them with their teacher. It is therefore important to always have a dialogue between parents and school. The

parents are responsible for taking care of the child. We can be prejudiced. I do not know what might happen in the future, but everything is possible but the position as a teacher will be more demanding.”

The child’s upbringing plays a pivotal role, especially in a nation where the state is always a supporter of the children. The schools should consistently engage in collaborative dialogues with the parents, focusing on understanding what the parents perceive as beneficial, and that it aligns positively with their beliefs, values, norms, and traditions. A 52-years-old heterosexual Muslim father stated the following with fear in his voice:

“The state will become a big part; the state decides more than the parents. My daughter has rights from the age of 14. I cannot prevent her from doing it even though I am religious, the state will protect her and not me. I can motivate her to be religious and follow what is viewed right within our religion.”

In contrast, to the mentioned ideas, a 65-year-old heterosexual immigrant mother and educator stated the following:

“I don't think we live in a nation where parents are not allowed to decide on behalf of their children. But it is a place where parents have the least right to decide (it is more up to the school). For example, now if they are to have a vaccine, parents must sign. If a child is going to travel with the school, parents must sign. Soon it will be that everyone should travel. You have no reason to not send the children, and the state will cover it if the economy is an issue, which is positive for them.”

The child is going from its parents and into society, the child needs to be advised, and the parents should be there for the child in case it encounters any cultural shock. Parents play an essential role in the child’s life. The idea that “We should be equal regardless of our differences” has raised concerns. It is a highly sensitive matter for parents, and fostering open communication with the children to ensure mutual understanding and respect for each other’s perspectives is crucial. A 34-year-old heterosexual immigrant mother and educator emphasized the idea that the LGBTQ+



community is presented powerfully through language and power within the state to normalize it, one thing is to include them, and another thing is to normalize it among young children. She stated the following:

“It is also important to talk with the parents before we for example call their children with another pronoun. Teachers need to find the right method to learn about a topic in a suitable way because overthinking among children can cause pressure and confusion. Therefore, there must be trust between families and teachers for the children’s best.”

In contrast, biased perspectives were also present within the fieldwork where the idea of inclusion and the facilitation of all individuals based on their needs at home and school is a fundamental effort for the child’s well-being. A 50-year-old heterosexual male Norwegian psychologist connected the idea that all vulnerable individuals have one common thing:

“Racism is normalized, racism in Norway is enormous and all these vulnerable groups have one thing in common they are exposed to discrimination. Those who are physically, and mentally sick will result in depression and later suicidal thoughts. This can be referred to as “Xenophobia”. Individuals with different gender identities have always been part of us and part of diversity but not as focused as today. This is a phenomenon we might be shocked at first, and later it will be normalized.”

Other parents also viewed the inclusion of this topic in schools as essential for their children’s comprehension. For instance, a 37-year-old heterosexual Norwegian mother and educator expressed the following:

“It is vital because they will receive an introduction to this theme and be more knowledgeable and observant of different situations. Children have a brain as a sponge and the fact that they receive this knowledge through schools is better than being surprised in the future.”

Similarly, a 27-year-old heterosexual and female Norwegian educator stated the following:

“It is important that students are knowledgeable about the LGBTQ+ community. They should know that this group of people exists and that they have other needs in society. When they are taught this, they will not be shocked if they encounter them and would know by then that they should show respect instead of responding to them negatively.”

A 40-year-old Norwegian heterosexual and female school nurse expressed her support for the curriculum:

“It is very good that they learn to be themselves, but not necessarily to the extent that they change their gender but to have the thought that the person you are will be good no matter what. It is important to teach them real-life instances such as that there are children who have two fathers or two mothers. This is part of our society and our everyday life and not special anymore, and so will it be among the children also.”

Finally, she stated the following:

“The self-esteem should be focused on the individual himself, and not the others.”

#### ***4.2.4. The Option to Withdraw Students from Gender Identity Lessons***

During the interviews, some educators brought up the topic of instances where some parents wanted to opt-out their children from lessons on gender identity. A 54-year-old heterosexual Norwegian, Social- and Natural Sciences female educator associated lessons on gender identity as a complex issue. She expressed her idea that it is strange to include such topics within the curriculum:

“What is addressed in school and what the students are taught might clash with what they learn at home. I have not delved in-depth into this topic, and I prefer to not focus much on it in my classes. But as a school, we should have a closer dialogue with parents. I believe the option for many will be to opt-out their children or place them in Christian schools.”

She referred to an example of a mother who was against vaccination and wanted to opt-out her child from these lessons. They allowed her to, but on her responsibility. However, during a lesson on diseases, they addressed that vaccination is fundamental

and they encountered a problem with the child since he was not vaccinated. Similarly, a 65-year-old heterosexual educator and mother with an immigrant background mentioned an instance:

“The ability for parents to opt-out their kids from specific lessons in our school is already common. We have received complaints from different parents about the newly introduced gender identity lessons. Parents who are willing to opt-out their kids are usually religious parents (both Christians and Muslims) or parents who have traditional views and values on marriage and/or the family. An instance I encountered recently was with a Muslim father who wanted to opt out his 8-year-old son from the lesson and viewed this to be unnecessary and against the values he had taught his children. We as a school were requested to inform him that this is part of the lesson plan and the society. However, after several meetings with the school, he was allowed to opt out his son”.

In another instance, a 27-year-old heterosexual female and Norwegian educator shared the following:

“As a teacher, we are witnessing a difficult period especially when this curriculum is introducing a sensitive topic where many parents have reacted negatively. In the instance of the Muslim mother who wanted to opt-out her child, the situation escalated significantly in terms of aggression. I tried to inform her that this lesson is based on diversity and avoidance of discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals. But the mother viewed a narrative based on the real experiences of a marginalized individual and in general any topic surrounding LGBTQ+ as something that should not be prioritized in schools, and rather emphasize topics that enhance students’ knowledge”.

A 45-year-old female heterosexual Norwegian educator with a Christian background mentioned:

“I have had instances with very conservative Christian parents reacting to this curriculum and asking for permission to opt-out their children. We do our best to cooperate with the parents, but sometimes we should also make it clear to them what is behind the lesson plan and that this is something that all students should learn about. As a Christian, I believe the easiest solution to this is to choose a Christian school over a public school, or in other instances to choose home education which is allowed based on the Norwegian Education Act”.

A 34-year-old heterosexual immigrant mother and educator shared an instance with her friend’s daughter:

“The lesson is still very new in many schools. I have experienced one instance with a friend of mine. She is originally from Syria, and she shared with me the instance when she asked the school her daughter attends to opt her out of the gender identity lesson. The school declined her request and since that day the lesson was forced on her daughter. She believed that her child was too young at the age of 6 years old to be taught on this matter.”

Through the fieldwork of this study and the interview findings it has been discovered that the key factors contributing to parental alienation stem from the inclusion of gender fluidity discussions, the promotion of gender identity transformation, as well as lessons designed to promote the normalization of third-gender identities, and same-gender marriage and parenting. The raising concerns are more common among elder parents, compared to millennials. It is fundamental to understand that parents who express opposition to the gender identity curriculum are not advocating discrimination against the LGBTQ+ community; rather, they have specific preferences regarding the content taught to their children. Additionally, some schools allow parents to withdraw their children from specific gender identity lessons they consider inappropriate, while others decline such requests.

#### **4.3. Gender Identity Curriculum: A Potential Hegemonic Conception of the Good?**

Political power arises from the collective will within a Liberal democracy, where safeguarding diversity among individuals is fundamental. Despite the diverse “Comprehensive Doctrines” that individuals have, they can reach an agreement (overlapping consensus) beyond these CDs, once they formulate their moral reasonings in shared political languages (i.e. using public reason). In the context of integrating gender identity into the school curriculum, Christians, Jews, Muslims, and atheists have CDs and can articulate arguments in various languages. However, what we are

witnessing is that the state is using schools as a proxy to enforce a specific “conception of the good” (gender fluidity). To elaborate on this further, a society should agree on what is perceived as a “conception of justice” and leave the understanding of “the good life” to each household. This implies that each parent/household has its perspectives on what constitutes a suitable upbringing for their children. Hence, factors such as clothing choices, dietary habits, and life aspirations should be determined by individuals and communities, rather than by the state. Thus, educational institutions have a fundamental responsibility to ensure the absence of discrimination and the preservation of the conception of justice. Referring to the informants of this study, it is evident that the majority shared their public reasoning via complex arguments rather than sharing their religious reasons in a setting such as a town hall meeting in school. Within these complex arguments, the well-being of the child and the parents, combined with the significance of the family authority is emphasized. According to John Rawls, he believed that even if people have different comprehensive doctrines, societal issues can be addressed using political language instead of religious language. This was observed after the interviews, built on the potential harm that the gender identity curriculum could pose to their children. Hence, a 54-year-old heterosexual Norwegian mother and educator with a Christian background expressed the following through political language:

“This curriculum evokes thoughts for the students, which contribute to confusion on their natural identity”.

In contrast, an illustration of religious language utilized by the 54-year-old heterosexual Norwegian mother and educator who adheres to Christianity expressed the following:

“Individuals belonging to the Christian community in Norway will never accept this, it ruins the family. We will be labeled as religious extremists, but we are following our religion, the Biblical scripture. Anyone who does not believe or have the right relationship with God will not care about this matter. But I care and I will not accept my children encountering this topic”.

The current issue does not revolve around citizens’ (regardless of their background/religious affiliations) ability to express their opinions or not. Instead, the current issue in Norway is that the state is imposing its knowledge through the symbolic liberals (left & right) by imposing a certain conception of the “good life” on all Norwegians via the introduction of gender identity in the school curricula. This is evident from the analysis of textbooks and interviews that the plurality of conceptions of the good is not respected, so we may argue the prominence of classical liberals in Norway, i.e. classically liberal but politically illiberal. Hence, the normalization and inclusion of gender fluidity within society, along with laws protecting an identity group, are evident. Meanwhile, the values of other identity groups are under threat, as gender fluidity has been sold as the plural conception of justice. Instead, it is about the conception of the good within a society, the SLs have made an error by not distinguishing between the conception of justice and the conception of the good. The conception of justice is based on that we should not discriminate against LGBTQ+ individuals. A significant example that should be considered, is the instance that heterosexual couples cannot impose on all citizens that a good life is a marriage between a man and a woman. Similarly, gender fluidity is a metaphysical concept and behind it, there is the notion of “absolute pleasure” that cannot be imposed on others. Thus, a state cannot base the present discrimination on LGBTQ+ individuals and impose gender fluidity on all citizens.

#### ***4.3.1. Gender Fluidity: A Conception of the Justice or Good?***

A common endeavor of stakeholders is to prioritize the well-being of their children and to prevent any form of discrimination and/or oppression, which is also a crucial objective that the Norwegian government is committed to addressing. An illustration is a statement made by a 50-year-old male heterosexual Norwegian psychologist that connects racism to the conception of justice:

“Racism is enormous and if there is one thing all these vulnerable groups have in common is the high chance of being exposed for ‘discrimination’. Those who are physically or mentally ill might later contribute to depression and later to suicidal thoughts. This can be connected to ‘Xenophobia’, the LGBTQ+ community, or those who define themselves with different gender identities has always been part of society, diversity, and us but the topic has not been focused on as of today. This is a phenomenon we might be shocked at first and later it will be normalized.”

According to the psychologist’s statement, actions categorized as “discrimination” or any that do not stigmatize or discriminate against LGBTQ+ individuals fall within the realm of justice. Another 53-year-old heterosexual clinical child psychologist emphasizes the idea of ‘good health’; if parents are not knowledgeable and supportive, it will contribute to a disadvantage for the child who might be facing difficulty in coming out or expressing his identity. For her, the significance of the inclusion of gender identity is the following:

“The inclusion of gender identity in schools and seeking help at the right time by avoiding problems at an early stage is vital. Right help at the right time. There is always a vulnerable group within a society we must consider and include. In every period, there is something new whether it is a topic, identity group, or something else we must address and work on it. Family dialogue in health consultations is required and the focus will develop from every year that passes.”

Similarly, to the psychologists’ perspectives, other stakeholders advocated for the principles of inclusivity and non-discrimination, irrespective of an individual/group’s identity expression. However, behind many of the perspectives, the

opposing stance was still present in that the choice of gender identity and that topics surrounding LGBTQ+ should not be promoted whether it is in the school curriculum, mainstream media, or other platforms. Another 65-year-old heterosexual immigrant mother and educator mentioned the idea of teaching respect and demonstrating respect to this group whether it is in the classroom, workplace, online, or during their leisure time. It is vital and it should not be a topic that is associated as taboo, because they are part of our society and environment. For instance, she addressed her time in her home country and connected the implementation of discussion on gender fluidity to how it was taboo to be a masculine girl during her teenage years:

“During my teenage years in my home country, I could tell who was feminine or more masculine. It used to be taboo to talk about these themes and there was a lot of bullying. I believe that students are being taught something good for their comprehension and their knowledge, but no need to go in-depth and start working on it (promotion of gender transformation).”

Another informant, a 40-year-old female and heterosexual school nurse examined the idea of eliminating discrimination and bullying as an important factor for all students and parents:

“The idea of making a child more knowledgeable and observant in different situations is vital, rather than sending them out in society and learning it themselves. As school staff, we are responsible for protecting our students. We must avoid and eliminate bullying. I am in favor of accepting people who belong to the LGBTQ+ community through avoiding bullying and focusing on competence, without promotion of gender identity choices.”

As we notice from this citation family was not identified as a key player in the child’s education. Similarly, a 40-year-old male and heterosexual Norwegian educator examined the idea of inclusion and the exclusion of the idea of gender identity choices:

“It is not essential to introduce it too early but mentioning it and defining those people is fine. But not delving deeply into it. They can start discussing it after the child establishes his identity, and then they can see others and show respect. I



want my daughter to be aware that there are people like that. I explain to her if we see a male wearing women's clothing. I won't say "Go and try it". It's a choice and not something to encourage."

Finally, a 27-year-old heterosexual female and Norwegian educator emphasized the thought that the curriculum states facts, and if it was not included there would have been chaos in society. She connected the LGBTQ+ community to other groups of people:

"LGBTQ+ individuals are like groups of people who are dark-skinned, Africans, and immigrants. This is part of the acceptance. When we receive this 'queer information' we must be careful how we present it (special, normal, or not worthy like the other groups). It is better to have a systematic way to present this group which aims at avoiding discrimination. At the same time, we should have limits and not overdo it. It must be presented in a balanced way. It needs to have their way of presenting it. The educational institutions are responsible for having a balanced way of how much it should be emphasized."

It is believed that promotion is not needed, and neither is the motivation, influence, and invitation to change gender identity. What is important is the idea that LGBTQ+ individuals are like-worthy and are humans who also deserve to be respected by the rest of society. If they have good health, this contributes to good development within their environment both physically and mentally. Consequently, the Symbolic Liberals are imposing a hegemonic conception of the good on those who oppose the gender identity curriculum. As a result, this indicates a problem with the transformation of liberals into symbolic liberals, and that gender fluidity is instead a matter of justice that remains unfringed by the informants.

#### ***4.3.2. Re-evaluating the Good and Justice: Benefitting Some at Others' Cost***

Throughout the interview process, most of the participants directed their attention toward challenges rather than the benefits of integrating and highlighting

gender fluidity and other LGBTQ+ topics in educational settings. The pursuit of positive outcomes for one group has led to adverse consequences for the values and well-being of others. The prevailing perspective among stakeholders is that citizens are all “pawns” within a broader societal and political framework. In this context, the inclusion of gender fluidity and LGBTQ+ topics into educational institutions is perceived as a politically constructed agenda led by the state, wherein language and legislation serve as instrumental mechanisms for exerting power. Multiple concerns in different fields were raised during the interviews following the renewal of the school curricula:

- 1) The effort where gender identity is factoring religion.
- 2) Justice is served selectively to specific identity groups.
- 3) Sexuality has been stigmatized and/or promoted and normalized.

Certainly, a 34-year-old heterosexual immigrant mother and educator addressed this issue by stating her perspective:

“The increased focus on the LGBTQ+ community and their rights has been politically implemented by the state. We are under an agenda where normalizing their rights and inclusion within society is happening through language. Language is power.”

Indeed, language holds considerable power, as demonstrated by the LGBTQ+ community’s prominent position in daily discourse and extensive coverage across mainstream media and social media platforms. An exemplary illustration provided by one of the contributors to this study pertains to the delivered speech by King Harald V of Norway on September 1, 2016 (Also included in one of the digital online platforms, Salaby for grade 3). Whether the aim was to make powerful voices to demonstrate support for LGBTQ+ individuals or not, the King emphasized in his speech reverence

for all Norwegians, irrespective of their background, religion, ethnicity, or country of origin. Notably, he integrated a segment in a dignified manner that endorsed and acknowledged respect toward LGBTQ+ individuals, by articulating the following:

“Norwegians are girls who like girls” and “Norwegians are boys who like boys”<sup>38</sup>”

As articulated by Truls Olufsen Mehus, a social commentator and lecturer affiliated with the Christian organization Christian Resource Center, the evolving language paradigm in contemporary discourse is closely linked with the notion of pride. It is posited that “He who controls the language controls the masses”. Presently, the terminology has shifted, as exemplified by the choice of terms such as ‘birth person’ instead of ‘mother’ for individuals giving birth. The participant further elucidates that while this shift in language reflects a broader agenda, not all individuals engage deeply with these changes, viewing them more as personal considerations between the child and their preferences. According to a 48-year-old heterosexual Muslim father, the following was stated:

“The process and proliferation of advocacy for LGBTQ+ individuals originated in specific regions, notably the United States and Canada, where most agendas emerge from and spread globally. These nations bestowed significant attention upon this community to the extent that it became overwhelming, resulting in a loss of control. In countries formerly governed by religious doctrine, all major religions historically opposed this movement. Presently, there has been a notable erosion in the reverence and respect accorded to religious morals and values. Religion, traditional values, and morals have been marginalized, with pastoral authority advocating for adherence to religious precepts. However, contemporary pastoral influence has waned, yielding precedence to state authority, which sometimes prioritizes policies perceived as harmful rather than beneficial.”

Similarly, a 54-year-old heterosexual mother and educator who adheres to the Christian faith stated the following:

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<sup>38</sup> Hagefest i Slottsparken: Velkomsttale (01.09.2016).  
<https://www.kongehuset.no/tale.html?tid=137662&sek=26947>

“Religious norms and values and many generations have been destroyed.”

Examining the historical context of pastoral power, which held sway globally in the past, it is apparent that a concerted agenda over the last four decades, particularly since 1980, has aimed to destroy the pastoral authority in the Western world and secularize it. This protracted effort entails a transfer of power to the state with a concurrent objective of eradicating religious influence. Hence, a significant development in Norway occurred when same-gender marriage was permitted in Norwegian churches in 2016. This decision provoked hostility and disillusionment among adherents of Christianity who upheld the principles of the biblical scripture. Also, the 54-year-old heterosexual Christian mother and educator expressed her perspective on this enactment:

“I find it abnormal that the Norwegian state approved for same-sex couples to get married in the Church. I do not have anything against them, but is it necessary for them to do it in the Church? If so, their relationship with the religion is not right.”

The LGBTQ+ community is also instrumentalized in regulating the Christian faith through the legislative and authoritative powers of the state. This engenders a conflict between religious beliefs and what the state perceives as the conception of good. A 40-year-old Norwegian male and heterosexual educator, who does not identify as a Christian, stated the following:

“There is no doubt that the anti-discrimination law should apply to everyone, including the LGBTQ+ community. Everyone should have the choice to identify themselves, but I do not understand how the approval of two of the same sex can get married in the Church. It is clearly stated in the Bible that a marriage should be between a man and a woman. I am for everyone to get married, but the idea that two of the same sex are getting married in the church is a sin itself.”

A 48-year-old heterosexual Muslim father addressed a question regarding the progress achieved in facilitating support for the LGBTQ+ community via legislation, compared to the lack of similar progress for Muslims. This discrepancy should be considered indicative of a political agenda:

“The more laws we implement, the more is needed. I believe that it has reached a limit and that there are always specific groups of people who are prioritized over others. Why wouldn't the Norwegian state facilitate laws for Muslims to have days off on Fridays? It has reached a stage where it is too much to facilitate for everyone. But why are the LGBTQ+ people's needs all facilitated within Norwegian society?”

Another issue that is rising based on this “liberal project”, implies a move towards pedophilia. Several participants raised the issue of adoption and that same-sex couples are not only able to get married in the church, but they also have the right to adopt children. A 65-year-old heterosexual immigrant mother and educator shared her concern on this issue by mentioning a case in Sweden:

“Two men in Sweden adopted a child. The girl they adopted came from Syria and was vulnerable due to the civil war experiences. I believe this will ruin the child both physically and mentally. The child will end up being mentally sick because of this. Most of the people live normally as father and mother. In doing so we do not know what the child might be exposed to in the future.”

A similar idea was addressed by another 40-year-old male and heterosexual Norwegian educator:

“I am against LGBTQ+ couples adopting children, who will see themselves between two parents of the same gender. This can create confusion for the child who may have gone through a difficult upbringing. This is not an effective way to include a vulnerable child among two parents of the same gender. This will affect future generations. A natural life consists of a father and a mother. Not mother and mother or father and father. This child might become a "victim" in a same-gender parental setting, which could potentially lead to pedophilia.”

The issue of pedophilia is a current debate in many nations, similar to the idea that heterosexuals are being stigmatized while LGBTQ+ individuals are part of inclusivity. Some of the participants in this study shared that gender fluidity is becoming so normalized that being heterosexual increasingly results in being labeled as “boring” or “traditional”. A 54-year-old heterosexual Norwegian mother and educator shared her niece’s experience related to this:

“My niece attended a party where she noticed that everyone attending was either lesbian or bisexual. After a few hours, they started making fun of her for being heterosexual. It's sad to see that the situation has switched, and being heterosexual is stigmatized. I believe in openness but with limits. It seems the whole situation has gone too far, which I believe is not beneficial. Everyone should feel free to be themselves while also treating others with kindness. My niece was able to tackle the situation, but unfortunately, not everyone may have the courage to stand up for themselves in such situations”.

In contrast to the colorful flag the LGBTQ+ community embraces, the flag for heterosexuals is composed of black and white lines. Are we encountering a reversed scenario? Is it a shame to identify as heterosexual? LGBTQ+ individuals have their rights and deserve respect. Similarly, this principle should apply to everyone, regardless of identity, religion, ethnicity, or background. Otherwise, we cannot say that there is any plural conception of the good with the implementation of gender identity curriculum, but rather a conflict in the sense of identity politics.

#### **4.4. Discussion**

The Norwegian LK20 curriculum shifted its emphasis from focusing on gender equity (LK06) to prioritizing gender identity (LK20). The curriculum is linked to three fundamental elements: the interdisciplinary theme “Public Health and Life Skills”, societal challenges, and the fulfillment of students’ life projects. The interdisciplinary

theme emphasizes gender identity and sexual orientation topics, where it aims to address societal challenges and support students in their life projects by educating them about their bodies and emotions, with a primary focus on understanding the complexities surrounding them. In consideration of the societal challenges such as mental health and high suicide rates in Norway. The Statistics on Norway's 2022 Survey on Quality of Life reported that 48% of non-heterosexuals reported low satisfaction with their mental health compared to 25% of the heterosexual population rated low satisfaction with their mental health (The Norwegian Government, 2023). Additionally, it revealed that a rate of 4% of bisexual individuals and 11% of homosexuals have experienced hate crimes, compared to a 1% rate of heterosexuals being exposed to hate crimes (Bufdir, 2022). As for the high rates of suicide and suicidal attempts, The Public Health Report recorded an annual average of 650 suicides within Norway's entire population (Stene-Larsen et al., 2023).

The Social Sciences and Natural Sciences are the subjects that examine gender identity and sexual orientation the most, the lessons are contextualized in connection to human rights, history, same-sex marriage and parenting, societal norms, and culture. Hence, The Norwegian Directorate of Education and Research (2022) highlighted sexual health and human rights as two fundamental aspects in the renewal of the LK20 curriculum, as evidenced by the curriculum's emphasis on educating the students on their rights, knowledge of gender identity topic, and motivating them to fulfill their life project. The primary objective is to highlight that regardless of a child's biological sex, there are no limitations, as individuals are fluid and capable of choosing their identity. Hence, both subjects underscore the idea that individuals have the freedom to choose their preferred pronouns such as he, she, it, or any other designation that reflects

personal autonomy. Yet, while the Social Sciences subject frequently presents thought-provoking questions compared to the less challenging inquiries found in Natural Sciences, the textbook materials and online digital platforms (Salaby & Skolenmin) also emphasize other critical topics. These include a strong focus on children's rights and the encouragement to contact volunteer experts on LGBTQ+ topics via phone or online chat anonymously. Likewise, a Curricula Advisory Council and Disability Specialist, Ashira Greenberg (2022), addressed the curriculum objectives in the US that aim to challenge traditional stereotypes and promote individual expression, where the concept of "gender fluidity" is stressed through the notion of feeling different than the gender one was assigned at birth. Also, a national education writer at the Washington Post, Laura Meckler (2022) confirmed that gender identity education in New Jersey is presented in the first-grade curriculum where students are taught that "some boys may not feel like boys, even if they have body parts that some people might tell you are boy parts".

Furthermore, some informants within this study articulated that inclusion and support of introducing lessons on gender identity are intertwined with the individual's needs and are essential for a child's well-being. Central to this well-being is the child's ability to express themselves without fear of hate crimes or discrimination, while also respecting others. This fosters good health, where the support of parents and other stakeholders is deemed essential in facilitating self-expression. It has been declared that good health contributes to positive physical and mental development within their environment.

In contrast, most of the informants focused on the difficulties posed by the gender identity curriculum rather than its potential benefits. In other words, the pursuit of positive outcomes for one identity group has led to adverse consequences for the



values and well-being of others. The problem stems from the Norwegian state's imposition of its knowledge via Symbolic Liberals, influencing conceptions of the ideal life for all Norwegians through the educational curriculum. Thus, the curriculum has clashed with three vital drivers: history, culture, and religion which has led to criticism, rejection, and conflicts. Lessons on third gender have been perceived as unconventional by many, particularly those adhering to religious beliefs, who view it as a threat to their religious teachings and the preferred upbringing of their children. These concerns stem from the lack of family authority and parental involvement in the child's decision-making, which is exacerbated by the child's social and environmental surroundings. Not only do parents express alienation from this curriculum, but some educators also hesitate to delve deeply into it due to the topic's complexity and the significant responsibility involved, fearing its potential impact on children's perspectives. Maxwell (2022) reported that two-thirds of girls who identify themselves as transgender have pre-existing mental health conditions, and around one-third have autism or another neurodiversity. Based on the parents' concerns and the perceived harms regarding this curriculum, the lesson is connected with "indoctrination which fuels confusion in students as it conflicts with their biological reality" and this might later result in life-long negative consequences such as mental health issues (Ingraham, 2022). However, it is crucial to recognize that stakeholders opposing this curriculum are not necessarily opposed to LGBTQ+ individuals themselves, but rather to the lessons taught to their children which conflict with the beliefs and values taught within their homes.

Building upon Hanafi's (forthcoming-a) conceptualization of Symbolic Liberals (SLs) who imposed what he referred to as a hegemonic conception of the good, by that some countries have reached all forms of full visibility of sexual orientations in the

public sphere, others have not. Indeed, visibility (including the heterosexual one) is a component of the conception of the good, and how this will be regulated in the public sphere, which is different from that of the Muslim veil that many Muslims consider as part of their comprehensive doctrine and thus society should permit it (forthcoming-a). For instance, in France, the 2004 legislation banned Muslims from wearing headscarves in schools and public sectors. I believe the reason behind this distinction between identity groups, constitutes a clear infringement on the freedom of religious expression. This prompts inquiries into the SL's selective choices of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by favoring components that suit their secular agenda rather than embracing the broader understanding of the plurality's good.

Based on Maffetone's (2011, as cited by Hanafi, 2023) definition of the conception of justice, it entails having far equal opportunities and priority in giving attention to the worst-off individuals by receiving opportunities to do what they would like to do with their lives referred to as "conception of the good". A crucial example raised by Hanafi (forthcoming-a) is the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, for him everyone who cares about the conception of justice should denounce the criminalization by Qatari authorities of the LGBTQ+ community. Hanafi (forthcoming-a), referred to arguments that were made on carrying the Rainbow flag in promotion of the LGBTQ+ as part of the conflicting conceptions of the good that the Qatari society should debate in the public sphere, and by that, they denounce how some foreigners wanted to impose it in Qatari societies' conception of the good which can be acknowledged as "cultural imperialism". In this context, it is fundamental to consider Joseph Massad's book *Desiring Arabs* (2008). Disciple of Edward Said and a Professor at Columbia University argued against any institutional recognition and public visibility of LGBTQ+

in the specific context of the Arab World. The criticism targeted the Western-driven activism constructing “homosexuality” in societies that traditionally did not view sexual desire as fitting perfectly into binary categories based on the gender of the sexual object choice and did not envision sexual preferences as the basis for social identity. He believes that too often gay activists dismiss this as false consciousness and “homosexual homophobia” (Hanafi, forthcoming-a). For him, the effects are pernicious since activism is contributing to a backlash against what is viewed as the spread of Western prurience and shamelessness. Hence, state persecution is often motivated by factors such as aroused public opinion, is intensified, replacing traditional and benign notions of tolerating private sexual idiosyncrasies if carried out discreetly (forthcoming-a).

I do not entirely agree with him; instead, I find Hanafi’s argument for a culturally driven model of application of non-discrimination based on sexual orientation vital. One can inquire whether gender fluidity and the delinking of gender roles from sex roles should be celebrated in all regions and whether pleasure and desire can be deculturalized. Indeed, pleasure is an integral aspect of the conception of the good, and this prompts the discussion on whether parents can assert their right to educate their children on what they perceive as a “good life”. If a community wishes to celebrate heterosexual normativity, should this celebration be considered against the conception of justice (i.e., no discrimination against queer community)? Is gender fluidity a conception of the good that has its own metaphysics which celebrates ephemeral gender identity based on a hedonistic project of absolute pleasure and self-expression? Based on the concept of “absolute pleasure”, can the community tolerate polygyny and polyandry, such as Melanie Heath (as cited by Hanafi, forthcoming-a) problematizes this, particularly in the postcolonialism context. Are Giddens’ “pure relationship” and

polyamory (“many loves”)<sup>39</sup> (Olson and Brussel-Rogers, 2022; as cited by Hanafi, forthcoming-a) not a form of polygamy, open marriages, and swinging? Is a conservative family able to defend marital-centered sexual ethics as the conception of the good without being criminalized by the social service labeled in Sweden as “honor-related repression”? As Hanafi (forthcoming-a) defined it, cultures have no rigid borders like nation-states, and therefore I do not have an intention to essentialize any culture nor assume uniformity of different cultures. However, the aim is to raise awareness and help individuals understand the idea that cultural changes are not set in stone, we should reflect on the power and emotion as a structure of feelings (heavily influenced by social media today) behind recognizing some aspects of SL’s “scientific” conception of sexuality and gender fluidity. How scientific is this conception?

According to Hanafi (forthcoming-a), several studies have shown that increasing gender nonconformity and transgender (e.g. LGBT identification among American youth between 2012 and 2021 tripled<sup>40</sup>). Within the domains of unsettled science, it seeks to explain the increasing gender nonconformity and transgender rate, whether it is due to primarily psychological and behavioral factors, and how these trends have interacted. Is it nature or nurture? Socialization or imitation? Are the increasing LGBT identifications or evolving sexual behavior among the Left/Liberal/non-religious individuals a result of a greater personal liberation? Or a manifestation of a new

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<sup>39</sup> I.e. emotional/sexual relationships that include multiple partners.

<sup>40</sup> See “LGBT identification in U.S Ticks Up to 7.1%” (Jones, 2022). <https://news.gallup.com/poll/389792/lgbt-identification-ticks-up.aspx>

political identity with a more progressive, transgressive youth culture, particularly among Generation Z and Millennials<sup>41</sup>?

In the US, several surveys have converged that there is a growing divergence between sexual behavior and identity among Americans under 30. In 2008, attitudes and behavior were similar, by 2021 LGBT identification was running twice the rate of LGBT sexual behavior (from 8.6% to 16.3%) and there is a strong correlation between sexual identity and political beliefs/ideology, influencing each other and both are related to some other variable (Kaufmann, 2022, 88; as cited by Hanafi, forthcoming-a). In addition, multiple surveys in the US have settled evidence of a large rate of mental health issues (anxiety and depression) among LGBT individuals, compared to same-age peers<sup>42</sup>. Within gender identity development, there are existing multifactorial impact factors, biological and social factors which are common among children between 3-5, and which result in them developing gender variant behaviors and interests (Fast et al, 2018, cited in NHS England, 2024).

Hence, the Cass Report was conducted for more than 4 years by the independent pediatrician, Dr. Hillary Cass (2024), she stressed the importance of considering the phenomenon within the context of poor mental health and emotional distress affecting the broader adolescent population. Reem Alsalem, a UN Special Rapporteur on

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<sup>41</sup> See about these issues (Kaufmann 2022; Habib 2021) and recent surveys such as the Pew one: <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2022/06/28/americans-complex-views-on-gender-identity-and-transgender-issues/>

<sup>42</sup> According to Center for Disease Control (CDC) data to show a marked rise in emotional problems among youth since 2015. A major study of nearly 40,000 teens in Wisconsin shows that LGBT mental health deteriorated significantly faster than heterosexual mental health between 2012 and 2018. Between these years, the share of heterosexual young people reporting anxiety the previous month rose from 32% in 2012 to 35% in 2015 to 41% in 2018. However, among young gay and bisexual teens it soared from about 55% in 2012 to 65% in 2015 to 72% in 2018. See Parodi, Katharine B., Melissa K. Holt, Jennifer Greif Green, Michelle V. Porche, Brian Koenig and Ziming Xuan. 2022. "Time Trends and Disparities in Anxiety Among Adolescents, 2012–2018." *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology* 57(1): 127-137. Cited by (Kaufmann 2022, 88);(Hanafi, forthcoming-a).

violence against women and girls (2024), addressed Cass's report findings and highlighted that between 2009 and 2016, the total of adolescent girls referred to Gender Identity Development Service (GIDS) increased from a total of 15 to 1071. Building upon this, the National Health Service (NHS) in England (2024) unveiled that within GIDS, difficulties such as bullying, low mood/depression, self-harm, and suicidality were common. The clinical policy statement by the NHS (2024) discovered that children experiencing gender incongruence/gender dysphoria are less likely to continue experiencing conflict between their physical gender and the one with which they identify into adolescence and adulthood (Ristori et.al., 2016 cited in NHS England, 2024). In other words, the number of children referred to NHS support are either suffering from depression or anxiety because of years of low self-esteem and body image dissatisfaction. Hence, Alsalem (2024) addressed Cass's holistic approach to care for children who are seeking gender therapy instead of immediately placing them on a medical pathway that usually begins with puberty blockers and is more likely to cause temporary or permanent disruption to brain maturation. Alsalem (2024) underlined the necessity for legislation on "conversion therapy" to ensure that there is a holistic approach and that gender transformation is not the only option that is acceptable to discuss. In the context of conversion therapy, I believe this is a fundamental debate within this research matter. First, dating back to 1976, "Exodus International" was a movement and later an established organization to promote an idealized version of life, where same-sex marriages and gender fluidity were perceived as threats to their idealized goals. Anything that went against the Christian faith and/or violated God's laws of nature of decency was perceived as a sin. In contrast, today, we are observing a promotion within the school system that motivates children at an early age to get on

hormones or conduct gender-transformative surgeries. Formerly, conversion therapy was regarded as sexual orientation on gender identity by religious leaders, licensed counselors, or in-peer-support are today considered as “harmful”. This shift is evidenced by the closure of Exodus International and Norway’s enacted legislation on December 12<sup>th</sup>, 2023, prohibiting conversion therapy. In my opinion, there is a clear vision behind this, if certain individuals view gender transformation or identifying as “gender fluid” as morally wrong and/or something that contradicts the word of God and seek to address it through conversion therapy, what rationale exists for its prohibition? While there are no legislative prohibitions regarding gender transformative processes in many Western nations. Also, with the growing curricula on gender identity across the world it is promoted, and where several instances have shown that educational institutions advocate for such changes, often without parental consent or knowledge.

Thus, a retired psychiatrist and former president of the British Psychoanalytic Society, David Bell (2024), referred to this promotion in schools as “the policy of affirmation”. Bell considered this as the rapid affirmation with a child that it belongs to a different gender that is present – in Bell’s opinion, this is an improper clinical approach influenced by activist groups and senior staff at GIDS, resulting in the disruption of the clinical fields. I agree with Bell’s point of view, everyone should be able to express themselves freely without any sense of discrimination – but placing children on a potentially damaging medical pathway procedure contains a serious and high risk of sexual dysfunction and sterility. In the same vein, Bell (2024) believed that characterizing a child as “being transgender” is harmful as it forecloses the situation and implies that is a unitary condition in which there is a unitary “treatment”. Instead, the description should be “the child suffers from distress about gender/sexuality” – and this

should be discovered carefully in terms of the narrative of the child's life difficulties, histories of abuse and trauma, and confusion about sexuality. According to Cass's report, the rates of suicidality are like the rates among non-trans-identified youth referred to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). Studies suggest that the majority of de-transitioners, a growing population, who are dealing with the consequences of being put on a medical pathway, do not return to the clinics as they are fearful of the consequences. The absence of dedicated NHS services for de-transitioners highlights the NHS's lack of concern for this group. Based on the evidence review conducted by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (2020) combined with other further published evidence NHS (2024) concluded that the evidence to support the safety or clinical effectiveness of PSH and to make the treatment routinely available is not possible at this time. Central and related to the NHS England decision is the lack of an evidential base of good quality that claims the effectiveness of young people being prescribed puberty blockers/medical pathways to transition. Bell (2024) and many other clinicians were concerned about the risks of long-term damaging consequences of early medical intervention. The pendulum is already swinging towards a reassertion of rationality. Cass's achievement is to give that pendulum a hugely increased momentum and according to Bell (2024):

“In years to come, we will look back at the damage done to children with incredulity and horror.”

In this regard, it is crucial to address the physical and psychological suffering of children experiencing gender incongruence or gender dysphoria at an early stage. Failing to do so may lead to an increase in children facing long-term damaging consequences from early medical intervention. As Bell (2024) declared there are no



reliable studies (for children or adults) that could support claims of low levels of regret. The studies often quoted (e.g. Butos et.al, 2021) have been criticized for using inadequate and erroneous data. Therefore, referring to the assertion made by (Hanafi, 2023) he put forth that these issues go beyond the legitimate conception of justice for individual choice of sexual orientation. There are conflicting normative conceptions of the good that society should debate when it comes to a shared space (e.g. public sphere, early school education). Hence, if a group in society wants to defend heteronormativity (as a conception of the good life), this attitude is not inherently homophobic but at the same time, heterosexuals should not only accept or tolerate other sexual orientations but protect them in case of a climate of homophobia (conception of justice). Thus, based on Hanafi's (2023) statement we are in a time of intolerant debate between conservative right and SLs, and thus I argue based on Hanafi's approach to dialogical sociology that calls for debating controversial issues such as sex versus gender identity and facilitates how strategically in a given society the abstract of the conception of justice (e.g. no discrimination against LGBTQ+) can be advanced. Without this critical dialogue, we succumb to what Wendy Brown (2002) called "progressist moralism", a concept also used by French feminist activist Elsa Deck Marsault (2023) to criticize some strands of French feminism and civil liberty movements. The Dialogical project is keen to soft secularism and culturalize sexuality and is based on the minimum standard of human rights set out by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (as well as international conventions), which are understood as abstract, universal rights (Hanafi, forthcoming-a). Simultaneously, to maintain viable national and communitarian systems of human rights, these concepts need to be contextualized locally according to existing normative systems and societal norms. For instance, the Universal Declaration notes the equality

of humans and in the framework of the nation-state, the equality of citizens, and this cannot be without principled distance between state and religion. As Hanafi addressed it (forthcoming-a) there is a need to conceive an appropriate system of secularism that is not inherently anti-clericalist and fits each local context. This Declaration points out as well that one should not discriminate against anyone because of one's sexual orientation and instead discover certain forms of social recognition and institutional arrangement for the LGBTQ members of the society. What is controversial is how today delinking gender from biological sexuality becomes identity politics and is perceived as universal. In Hanafi (forthcoming-a) Raewyn Connell (1994; cited by Kiwan 2023) sees in the field of gender, some of the most creative work in the Global South arises from the critical appropriation of Northern ideas, in combination with ideas that come from radically different experiences. There is a need for mediation between the natural, the social, and the cultural to make a theoretical reassessment of gender and sexuality, in a way of disentangling the conception of justice from that of the plurality of the conception of the good (Hanafi, forthcoming-a).

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

#### 5.1. Summary of Research Findings

The study aimed to explore the following research questions:

- “How is the Norwegian school curriculum contributing to parental alienation, and how do some stakeholders perceive its implementation in the context of potentially imposing a ‘hegemonic conception of the good’?”

The research on gender identity curriculum is rooted in the alienated stance and the broader societal context within the Western world’s political framework. What some nations and stakeholders might perceive as unconventional, are viewed as “positive” and “progressive” developments by others. The political reforms and legislative initiatives are based on the societal challenges that have been the main drivers surrounding human rights, social justice, and equity. The debate on gender fluidity has received a prominent standing globally, in which educational institutions, human rights, and gender identity curricula have served as tools for both the vulnerable and the influential. In the LK20 curriculum, lessons on gender identity are primarily included in Social Sciences and Natural Sciences subjects. The curricula address topics on gender identity, sexual orientation, and other LGBTQ+-related topics. For instance, it has introduced themes that encompass the exploration of gender fluidity, in which the students are encouraged to challenge traditional, cultural, and societal norms by embracing change. This consists of lessons on the normalization of different family structures, the children’s rights and protection, and that differences between boys and

girls are socially constructed. In other words, traditional genders (female/male) are perceived as outdated in the lessons by advocating a fluid understanding of gender expression, including pronoun usage, and the ability to adopt a gender identity distinct from one's biological sex. Hence, in the Social Sciences textbook, *Arena 5* (2020), a recurring statement was mentioned related to this matter "Norms are learned, changed, and always in development". This reflects much of today's debate on the gender identity curricula on how societies, cultures, and environments influence citizens' thoughts or emotions on a specific matter.

Nevertheless, the most striking finding indicated that most of the informants, both ethnic Norwegians and individuals with immigrant backgrounds expressed feelings of alienation towards the gender identity lesson (including in-depth coverage of gender fluidity and sexual orientation), while a smaller quantity demonstrated support for its inclusion. Taking into consideration the progressive views on the gender identity lesson, the lesson has been perceived as essential for children's well-being and their ability to express themselves freely without fear of hate crimes or discrimination. It is also viewed as a benefit for students' physical and mental development by fostering respect.

In contrast, the study discovered that stakeholders opposed the curriculum due to the inclusion of gender fluidity discussions, the promotion of gender identity transformation, the normalization of third-gender identities, and the inclusion of same-gender marriage and parenting. Thus, the curriculum is perceived as a threat to the parents' upbringing, the family authority, and the parents' involvement in their children's decision-making. Additionally, some educators in Norwegian schools have expressed alienation from this curriculum, where they also hesitate to delve in-depth into the topic due to its complexity and the responsibility involved, fearing its potential

impact on children's perspectives. It is essential to comprehend that stakeholders who oppose this curriculum are not advocating for discrimination against the LGBTQ+ community; they simply have preferences regarding the material taught to their children.

However, the current issue does not pertain to citizens' ability to express their opinions, regardless of their background or religious affiliations. Rather, the issue in Norway is revealed to involve the state's decision-making, through the symbolic liberals (both left and right), by imposing a particular conception of the good on all Norwegians by incorporating gender identity into school curricula.

According to the informants, another concern is that promoting of gender transformation through the curriculum is likely to harm vulnerable children who suffer from mental health issues, bullying, or come from challenging family environments. Those with low self-confidence, fragile personalities, and limited perspectives are particularly affected and may engage in these processes as a "plea for attention".

As a result, citizens in the Western world are perceived as "pawns" within a political agenda led by specific political entities. The Symbolic Liberals seek to restrain the visibility of religion in the public sphere and prevent individuals from freely expressing their moral reasoning inspired by religion. Instead, their efforts focus on a marginalized group (LGBTQ+), endeavoring to ensure their integration into society without any form of discrimination. In other words, they prioritize individualism and freedom, at the expense of disregarding and/or violating others' values. This is evident through the modification of the Christian religion in Norway and principles to align with the perceived benefits for the SLs (via the LGBTQ+ community). This change has threatened the Christian faith, and often, those who oppose decisions risk being labeled

as conservatives, extremists, homophobic, or transphobic individuals resistant to inclusivity. Indeed, the identity group (LGBTQ+) has been utilized by policymakers in which polarization is emphasized to widen the space between those who oppose them and those who support them.

For the Symbolic Liberals, the normalization of the conception of gender fluidity has been promoted as part of the conception of justice, but in reality, it falls under the conception of the good. The conception of justice is based on what we as citizens should not do, such as that we should not discriminate against any identity groups. Thus, gender fluidity is a metaphysical concept with the underlying notion of absolute pleasure, like the religious concept of heteronormativity. In this context, the belief that a marriage between a man and woman is a good life cannot be imposed on others. Similarly, the conception of justice cannot be addressed by asserting that the world will be better with non-binary, as this has not been scientifically proven, instead this leads to a moral conflict within society. Therefore, the state cannot impose the notion that there are no standards anymore and that we are all the same and we can all change. As a solution, Hanafi (2023) suggested dialogical sociology (DS) which is keen on culturalized sexuality and balance between the collective and individual political liberal projects. It is supposed to act seriously against social inequality and in favor of the conception of justice while allowing the plurality of the conception of the good.

## **5.2. Research Limitations**

The study exhibited several notable research limitations. Initially, the objective was to conduct interviews with stakeholders from both public schools and Christian religious schools in Norway. Yet, all the Christian schools that were contacted,

including one I previously attended, declined due to the “sensitivity of the topic” as a reason for the reluctance to contribute to the study.

Second, not all participants within the public schools and external groups were fully familiar with the gender identity content of the LK20 curriculum; educators demonstrated limited comprehension. Some were still in the process of receiving instructional materials and textbooks from their suppliers, leading to unmet expectations regarding specific findings.

Third, some textbooks were not accessible or were under revision, which limited the content analysis of the other subjects like Norwegian, English, and religious studies. Consequently, during the fieldwork period, the schools relied heavily on digital online platforms (Salaby & Skolenmin).

Fourth, accurately determining the religious affiliations of informants, and whether they adhered to specific traditional or conservative perspectives, posed a challenge. Similarly, for informants without religious affiliations, discerning whether their responses reflected a liberal or conservative perspective posed significant difficulties.

Finally, some interviewees declined to respond to specific questions regarding parental alienation, and the perceived advantages and disadvantages of integrating this curriculum into educational institutions. A significant number of participants found the topic to be overwhelming and taboo to discuss. Therefore, despite assurances of the informants’ anonymity and ethical safeguards adopted by the Institutional Review Board at the American University of Beirut, there is still uncertainty about how accurately the respondents’ answers reflect their true beliefs.

### **5.3. Future Research**

This research has raised several concerns that necessitate further investigation. First, in the context of religion, it is needed to elucidate and identify the impact of gender identity on factoring religious beliefs and practices within the Western world.

Second, favoring a specific identity group while excluding others is increasingly common due to their perceived way of self-expression. Thus, it is crucial to understand how justice is selectively applied to a specific identity group and what considerations drive this selection.

Third, several instances throughout the fieldwork indicated that heterosexuality is perceived as conventional and less modern compared to others. Thus, it is imperative to examine how sexuality has been stigmatized and/or promoted and normalized within societies.



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