

# WHY, AND HOW, SHOULD ONE MAKE CLASSROOMS LESS HETERONORMATIVE?

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# 40 YEARS OF TALKING. NO REAL CHANGE

*Homosexuality does not exist in English-speaking countries; there are no EFL teachers in Britain or overseas who are not resolute, healthy heterosexuals. This may sound like something of an exaggeration, but it's really just stating baldly what is implied by teaching materials and by the policies of most EFL schools.*

*Alex Hirst, Gay's the Word, but Not in EFL, 1981*

# ELT IS NOT NEUTRAL...

Schools force people to behave in a “socially sanctioned way.”

“Bodies in these spaces tend to be disciplined in accordance with a multiplicity of interlocking systems of power and privilege.”

– Samek & Donofrio (2013)

...and neither are our students

Generation Z are currently between 5-25 years old

50% of generation Z identify as something other than heterosexual

# A GIRL NON-BINARY PERSON CALLED JACK

**9 A** Put sentences a)–d) in the correct paragraphs to complete the profile of Jack Monroe.

- a) Jack grew up in Essex and left school aged sixteen.
- b) Jack is now a successful journalist who campaigns against poverty.
- c) Jack Monroe was a 24-year-old mother of one who started writing an online blog ('A Girl Called Jack') when she was unemployed and looking for work.
- d) She sold almost everything she owned (car, watch, TV, phone) in order to buy enough food for her and her two-year-old son to eat, but she found they were still hungry.

## A girl called Jack

<sup>1</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ She became an overnight celebrity when she wrote a blog post called 'Hunger Hurts' talking about how difficult life is when you're living on very little money.

<sup>2</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ She had a well-paid job with the Fire Service until she had a baby, and it became difficult to find childcare to allow her to work nights. After 18 months of being unemployed, she found herself living in poverty.

<sup>3</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ She started the blog to talk about her experiences, and give people recipes for eating healthily using very



“Non binary, in simple terms, means outside of the binary gender norms of ‘male’ and ‘female’ It’s somewhere in between, one of the may many shades between the society-imposed candy pink and baby blue.”

*Speakout Pre-Intermediate, 2nd edition, Pearson, 2015, p. 121*

*Jack Monroe, New Statesman, 20 Oct 2015*

# WHY CAN'T STUDENTS SEE THEMSELVES IN THE TEXTS?

“Heteronormative thinking, in theory and in practice, assumes that the heterosexual experience = human experience.”

- Yep, (2002)

“LGBTQ students are excluded from equal standing in the community because of their sexual citizenship.”


- DesRoches & Sweet (2007)



Pervasive heteronormativity means queer learners need to run a continual evaluation of the effect of being out.

Students who do not feel safe must hide and closet themselves.

The lack of willingness to address marginalized identities and create inclusive classrooms removes agency from learners.



In 2016 an anonymous online survey of queer learners studying EFL in Europe, the Middle East and North America revealed:

90% didn't feel their identities were represented in books

>66% couldn't see their sexuality represented

19.8% didn't see their gender represented

28.7% felt that the instructors they encountered either were not, or would not be, supportive of their identities

# ACADEMIC DRAG

*A polite avoidance of the things we shouldn't talk about.*  
– Samek & Donofrio (2013)

The way in which those in the academy play the role they are expected to.

Self censorship – we can't be sure we'll be punished for breaking the rules, but we can't guarantee we won't either.

*“In graduate school, we learn to adhere to these frameworks, even as they may reflect sexist...and heteronormative beliefs in the name of our ‘professional’ development.”*  
- Samek & Donofrio (2013)



# QUEERING THE MATRIX

Exclusion comes through vocabulary with which to describe one's identity.

Elizabeth Atkinson & Renée DePalma (2009) looked at queering consensual heteronormativity.

Examined Butler's heterosexual matrix (AKA heterosexual hegemony) and established that if we withdrew our consent from it we could subvert it.

Butler and Atkinson & DePalma state that we can be within the matrix, even if we just need to follow the rule, we do not need to follow the spirit of it.

# WHY DOES IT EVEN MATTER?

Nelson (2010) found that hiding part of oneself often require the running of a meta consciousness

'often experienced as a running meta narrative about how dynamics in particular spaces control...or provoke self representations'

Such a practice is exhausting and sleeves students excluded form full citizenship of the classroom.



The current state of materials...  
Or normative dating 101

*Empower* uses a man-woman romance narrative to advance conversational English through the series.


Annie and Leo flirt awkwardly as they are utilized to teach language for everyday life.

Here their budding relationship is used to demonstrate ways to show interest and emphasize what you say.



*Empower A2, CUP, p. 75*

# A WOMAN, HER MOTHER, SOME MEN and TINDER

- b**  **1.20** Now listen to Elspbeth describe her first two dates. What does she think of her mum's choices?
- c** Listen again and match the phrases to the two men. Write **J** for John or **S** for Sebastian. Which man do you think Elspbeth prefers? Why?
- |   |                          |                                |   |                          |                                            |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------------|---|--------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> | He's tall, dark, and handsome. | 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> | He's from Germany, but he lives in Dublin. |
| 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> | He's very tall.                | 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> | There isn't a spark.                       |
| 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> | He's a teacher.                | 6 | <input type="checkbox"/> | He's a real gentleman.                     |

# QUEERNESS AS FAILURE AND ERASURE

## Extract - *Sexual Identity as Linguistic Failure* - Anthony J. Liddicoat (2009)

T: Y Sam. (.) ¿Como es tu novia?

And Sam. What's your girlfriend like?

Sam: Mi uhm (0.2) novio es alto y:: delgado.

My uhm (0.2) boy friend is tall (m) and slim (m).

(0.4)

T: ¿alta y delgada?

Tall (f) and slim (f)?

Sam: ¿alta y delgada?

tall (f) and slim (f)?

(0.3)

Mi novio (.) uhm es alta y delgada.

My boyfriend (.) uhm is tall (f) and slim (f).

T: Tu novia es alta y delgada.

Your girlfriend is tall (f) and slim (f).

Sam: .hh uhm:: (n-) ¿novia?

hh uhm:: (n-) girlfriend?

T: Sí tu novia e::s::

Yes your girlfriend i::s::

Sam: O::h no es novio. Mi novio es alto y delgado. (0.2) Y tiene una barba.

O::h no it's boyfriend. My boyfriend is tall and slim. (0.2) And he has a beard.

(0.7)

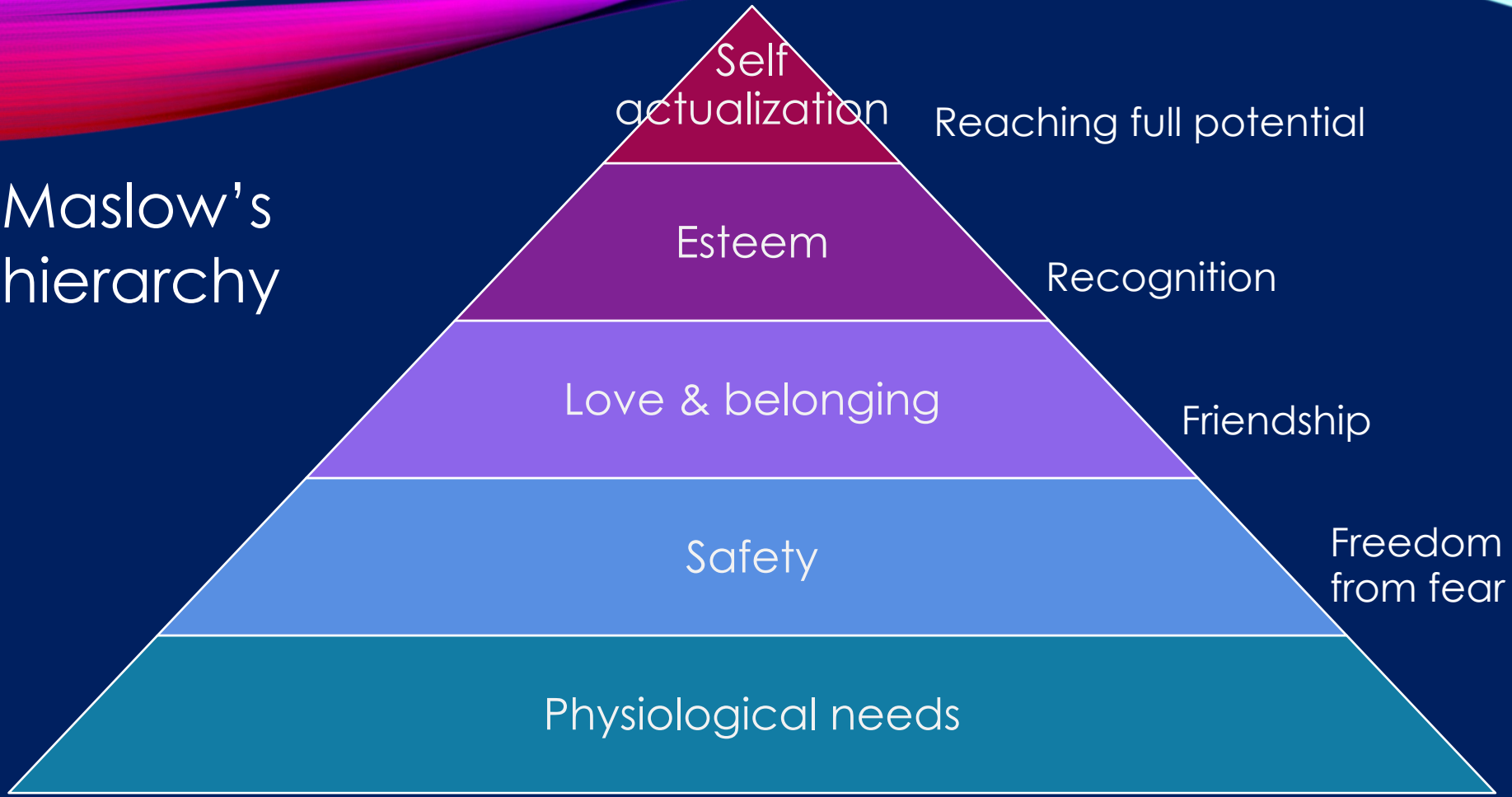
T: Lynn. (.) ¿Como es tu novio?

Lynn (.). What's your boyfriend like?

Sam: Mi novio es guapo y alto

My boyfriend is handsome and tall.

# Maslow's hierarchy





Ashna Ali

@doctordushtu



First week at new job. Queer non-binary students are so excited about a prof who uses they/them pronouns. One ran up four flights of stairs to catch me in my classroom, said "I don't have a topic, just wanted to talk, I've been waiting for you for 4 yrs"

14:20 · 07/09/2019 · [Twitter Web App](#)



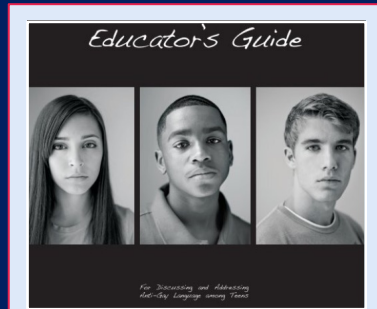
# HOW TO AVOID HETERONORMATIVITY



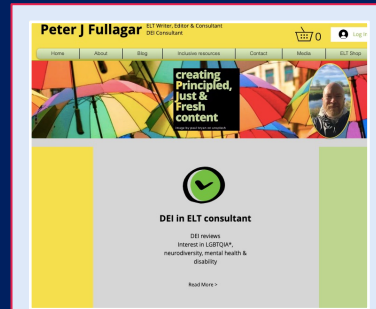
# RESOURCES



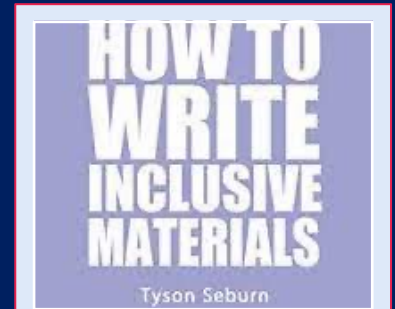
Genderbread person



GLSEN Think B4 You Speak



Peter J Fullagar



Tyson Seburn

Links to these resources can be found here:  
<https://bit.ly/3aDP0GB>



James Baldwin



Leslie Feinberg



Jack Monroe

Use real-life narratives to introduce gender-diverse and queer people to your learners. Using a local context can help this process

# FINAL THOUGHTS

Language education isn't just about delivering vocabulary and skills – it's about giving a voice to people

We need to meet our learners where they are and for some that's in a queer place

Materials aren't going to queer themselves – we have to do the work

## ...AND FROM THE STUDENTS

Having gay/lesbian couples dating/holding hands etc would be a big step forward in changing the normative perception on lgbti+ individuals on such an important time (when both bias and gender identities are shaped) [sic].

- 2016 survey respondent

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