

Using the Sexualitree in the Classroom

The Sexualitree is a conceptual model of sexuality that is designed to be interactive and personalizable. The ways that you can use it in the classroom are extensive, and depend on your students¹ (their age, existing knowledge of the range of ways that people are sexual, openness to dialogue and introspection, etc.) and the group dynamic (are you teaching or facilitating, how many people are present, what are your and everyone else's goals, how much time do you have, etc.). Given the wide range of potential answers to all of those questions and more, providing one concrete way to use The Sexualitree seems very limiting! Instead, here are a few guidelines and a few examples of how it might be done.

To being with, it is important to keep in mind the top aspects of sexuality that are brought forward in The Sexualitree:

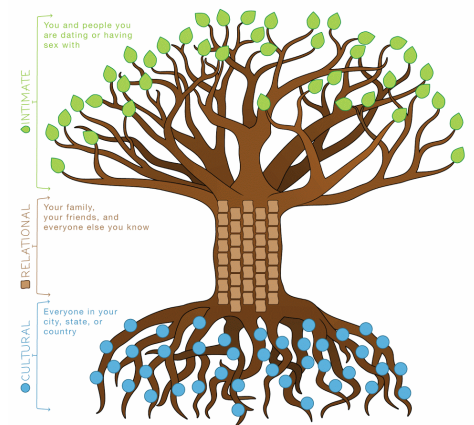
Global Ideas

These are concepts that are important to The Sexualitree:

- Sexuality is complex.
- Cultural, relational, and intimate influences all affect sexuality.
- Sexuality influences the way people view their culture, and relationships -- both intimate and social.
- Each person's sexuality is unique because of the ways that their cultural, relational, and intimate experiences with various elements of sexuality interact.

¹ I will use the word "student" loosely throughout. Basically, it means the group of people who you are working with, whether you or they consider themselves students or not. This word also applies to peer-facilitated groups and other dynamics where student does not exactly describe the educator's relationship to the rest of the learners. Where this distinction is important, I make explicit note of it.

THE SEXUALITREE by **UNHUSHED** is a personal & relational
The Sexualitree is a way to see how we experience sexuality in different ways. Sexuality affects us on different levels of our lives, and each person uniquely.



3 levels of sexuality (Intimate, Relational, Cultural), 45+ different elements
Each bubble (●) can be filled in with any of the numbers below, representing the ways you experience various aspects of sexuality.

- | | | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Abortion | 13. Family | 25. Medical Theory | 37. Sexual Anatomy |
| 2. Abstinence | 14. Fantasy | 26. Oral Sex | 38. Sexual Orientation |
| 3. Access to Healthcare | 15. Fashion | 27. Physiology | 39. Sexual Response System |
| 4. Age | 16. Fetish | 28. Pornography | 40. Sharing |
| 5. Anatomy | 17. Gender | 29. Psychological Theory | 41. Skin Hunger |
| 6. Body Image | 18. Healthcare System | 30. Puberty | 42. STI Prevention |
| 7. Caring | 19. Intercourse | 31. Race | 43. STIs |
| 8. Communication | 20. Laws | 32. Rape | 44. Technology |
| 9. Consent | 21. Liking | 33. Religion | 45. Vulnerability |
| 10. Contraception | 22. Loving | 34. Reproduction | 46. _____ |
| 11. Disability | 23. Masturbation | 35. Risk Taking | 47. _____ |
| 12. Education | 24. Media | 36. Sex Toys | 48. _____ |

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What's Missing?
Add your own!

Depending on classroom or activity goals, it may also be important to keep in mind one or more additional pieces of the groundwork of The Sexualitree.

More Specific Ideas

These are concepts that can be part of The Sexualitree, but that are not strictly necessary to each lesson, depending on the variables at hand:

- The cultural pieces of sexuality are deeply rooted. They can be changed, but only with great difficulty.
- The relational pieces of sexuality are the structure upon which intimate experiences are founded and spring out of.
- Intimate elements of sexuality can grow and change over time.

The way(s) that you bring these pieces of information, along with your other content goals and objectives, will depend on a wide range of factors. However, the initial stages of the introduction process are useful. Here are two (of many, many possible!) examples of ways to introduce The Sexualitree:

1. Invite students to brainstorm about the ways that their culture tells them sexuality should be, and then a second brainstorm about the ways that their friends, family, and peers talk about and engage in sexuality. Finally, ask students to work individually or in small groups to come up with all of the different aspects of sexuality that influence or are influenced by individual sexual or romantic relationships. After this brainstorming process, introduce The Sexualitree and discuss the global and specific ideas from above.
2. Write out some of the Elements of Sexuality from The Sexualitree poster on notecards. Project the minimal Tree and have a discussion about each of the three different levels represented in the Tree (cultural, relational, and intimate). Distribute the notecards to students individually or in small groups. Invite students to decide at which level they think their aspects are most important/relevant to someone's sexuality, and to tape them in that area. Invite a discussion from the larger group about whether they agree that the aspect is where it should be. Hopefully the discussion will address that many of these aspects belong in more than one place on the Tree, and that each person's tree is likely to look different, and -- most importantly -- there is no "right" answer.
3. Describe the three aspects of the tree as in the above example. Label four areas of the room with signs that say Cultural, Relational, Intimate, and Not Present. Briefly define each area, then read elements of sexuality that you think are most relevant or

useful to your students to discuss and invite them to move to the area of the room where they think that element is most influential to them. Invite discussion within and between groups about why students moved to that area.

After an introduction to The Sexualitree, there are many places you might decide to go next. The metaphor of a tree can work in many contexts.

If you are working with older adults who are considering their own histories and how they inform their aging evolution and changes, you might discuss the full lifecycle of the tree, inviting students to consider how their longstanding roots (culture) and slow growing base (social) histories are informing their current intimate relationships.

If you are working with teenagers, you may use the tree as an opportunity to discuss long term goals and how their root systems and social structures are still forming and can be influenced by their choices, and how those things are evolving to support their intimate relationships, both current and future.

If you are working with parents, you may talk about how there are setting the cultural soil from which their children will take nourishment, the social systems in which their children will develop strength, and the environment in which their children will develop their own intimacies.

If you are working in a college classroom, you might use the tree as a framework for discussing all aspects of the curriculum. For example, students who may be confused or unclear on how or why sexual attraction varies dramatically from person to person, a look at the realities of cultural and social frameworks as supportive of (but not, ultimately, defining of) the intimate relationships that each person grows and develops.

If you want to discuss, for example, the implications of a song or a music video with students, ask them what messages in the song came from the artist's cultural, social, or intimate relationships and why they might be expressing those experiences in those specific lyrics or visual expressions.

The Different Versions

On a more practical level, if you are unclear on which of the three different graphics to use (the poster, the minimal, or the worksheet), it depends on many factors: the level of knowledge of your students and how you want them to come to understand the ideas in

The Sexualitree on their own, versus having you either draw it out of them or teach it to them.

If what you want is for the students to spend time thinking about or talking about sexuality by themselves or in small groups without any initial input from you, then they will probably need to have the poster image on hand. However, if you start with explanation or discussion, and then want to move on to them working alone or in small groups, the worksheet is probably best. Your introductory explanation/discussion may use the minimal page to point to. If you are maintaining a large group dynamic, the minimal page may be sufficient for your needs because you will verbally fill in the other aspects of the diagram.

The Sexualitree is highly versatile model that can be used for a wide variety of sexuality conversation topics. After introducing a model like this, it is often useful to turn the dialogue over to the students. Ask questions like: What might this mean to them, to consider sexuality in this way? What can they learn from this as it applies to their personal lives? How might this framework help them in dialogue with their families, friends, and partners?

The ultimate goal is to dig in, have fun, and engage.