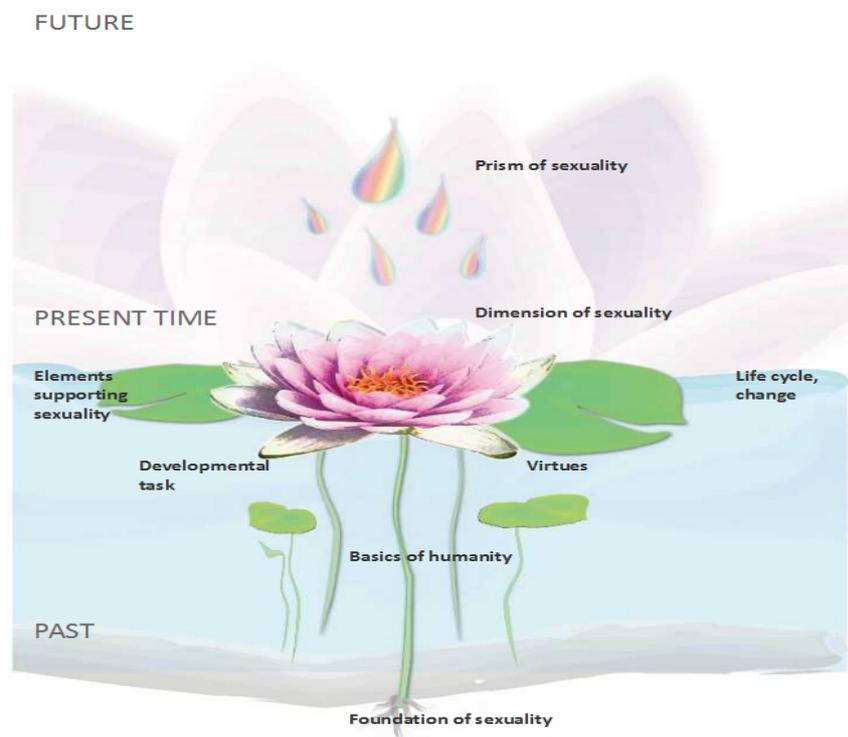




Sexuality is enchanting

A person's experiences and emotions aroused in different situations and by different people affect the person's attitude to sexuality, sex, and relationships with other people. Behaviour models originated in childhood, friends' attitudes, and notions created by the media build ways of thinking, speaking, and seeing the matters related to sexuality. Notions of what is normal and abnormal in sexuality are tied to the culture in which we live but we all can change our notions, correct or stick to our own notions, and thus contribute even to changes in society, when necessary.

We need to take a critical and reflective approach to the matters related to sexuality. We are all individuals with our bodies, experiences, feelings, and thoughts. We are all unique and different, good enough in the way we are. However, it is sometimes useful to take time to reflect on our answers to questions posed by sexuality. When we know who we are and what our own sexuality looks like, there is no need to be afraid of the dissimilarities to others. Often fear and uncertainty about oneself make a person oppose the differences of others, sometimes even by resorting to violence.



Sexuality is a comprehensive and multilayered part of the human. The Water Lily Model reflects all that sexuality and its core, the centre of sexuality, are composed of.

Values

Sexuality encompasses several values. Values can be regarded as matters that are important to us, aims to be striven for. Values support us in our growth to adulthood. Important values could be for example uniqueness, versatility of sexuality, equality, health, and non-violence.

The human concept refers to what we think about humans - what humans are and why humans act in the way they do and what kind of feelings we think humans are allowed to feel and what kind of choices humans are allowed to make. Likewise, we can take time to reflect if the gender gives possibilities of making different choices and if the age affects our thoughts about the human's rights and the choices that are considered good.

Early Interaction

We learn much about ourselves and other humans almost as soon as we are born. Even as children, we gain experiences of how we are appreciated, what the gender means - how we should behave, what kind of matters we like and how we should treat other people. We see models of different couple relationships, ways of quarrelling, and showing tenderness. Interaction builds our experiences of ourselves and our relationship with the world.

Gender

Even very young children may experience their gender strongly. We express our gender often without noticing in many ways - in speech, behaviour, dressing, showing tenderness. The gender is often considered to mean being either a male or a female. In everyday life, the world is versatile. The human can be a male, a female, a bit of both, neither gender, or something quite different outside these definitions.

"The terms and concepts that are used to describe the versatility of the gender vary and the very versatility of gender is a phenomenon that is impacted by historical and cultural factors. The ways of experiencing, expressing, and defining oneself vary during a human's life cycle." (Lehtonen, 2006)



Health

A human's general health, well-being, and falling ill can be significant for sexuality at different stages of life.

In the Nektaria, the notion of health has been adapted from several definitions of health (Perttilä 1999, Ewies & Simmet, 1995, Grory 2006, etc.):

	Dimension of Health	Explanation
	PHYSICAL	functional capacity of the organs of the body, physiological and biological phenomena, genetics, anatomy
	PSYCHOLOGICAL	functional psychological capacity, ability to think clearly and coherently, cognitions, memories
	EMOTIONAL	skills of expressing and reading feelings, ability to express feelings appropriately, ability to interpret and understand one's own and others' emotional states
	SOSIAL	ability to create and maintain human relationships, interaction between the individual and society, and how people's lives and behaviour are regulated and enhanced through legislation and support (e.g. availability of health services, free basic education and school lunch, laws pertaining to working hours, social benefits and allowances)
	SEXUAL	accepting one's own sexuality and experiencing it as a positive part of oneself, ability to achieve an empowering form of sexual expression, realization of sexual rights, sex education and counselling
	SPIRITUAL	understanding the meaningfulness of one's own life, experiencing life meaningful, ethicality, ability to disassociate from oneself, freedom of choice, responsibility, peace of mind, religiousness may be part of the spiritual dimension but not necessarily

Skills

Building blocks of sexuality

Reasonableness - skills of reflecting on matters related to enhancing one's own health. Sticking to a daily rhythm enhances at least social and psychological health. (Study "From a Child to an Adult")

Wisdom - everyday wisdom is found in oneself through reflecting and studying, finding out about matters and reflecting on their meaning to oneself. This protects from external pressures and enables to set the limits of bodily integrity.

Justice - Other people must not be hurt. Justice urges to defend the weak and to insist on respecting one's own limits. Justice includes equality, respect, and reciprocity between people.

Courage - Courage is the ability to stand behind one's own words and choices daring to bring up matters related to sexuality for discussion. Courageous people take other people around them into consideration and make space also for them to express their thoughts and feelings - to be individuals.

Temperament and personality traits

Temperament consists of a number of inborn and fairly permanent tendencies and preparedness that impact on the way of reacting to the environment and both expressing and controlling one's feelings. Although the environmental impact is great, inherited traits also have a meaningful contribution to a person's way of reacting to different situations. One person is enthusiastic about everything while another person needs time to reflect on even small matters. One person is shy and even withdrawing in social situations while it is natural for another person to be the life and soul of the party. Temperaments and personality traits are different and of equal value.

Love

People need love. The experience of being important and meaningful gives an opportunity to see oneself as a valuable person. The experience of love builds connections between people. People are not allowed to pressure or force anyone to anything in the name of love. Love requires ability to feel empathy. Empathy enables people to gain insights into other people's feelings and experiences while still being able to help or to be present.

Developmental task

In their growth process people are faced with different developmental tasks. In the youth, young people are looking for their identity and experimenting with different roles. In early adulthood, the maintenance of human relationships and closeness gain emphasis.

Dimensions of sexuality

People's sexuality is affected by at least the stages of life cycle and moments related to it, place of living and the culture in which the person lives, age, and health. Each person's sexuality is unique, and it is not possible to define or determine the sexuality of other persons for them.

People's sexuality may be directed toward men, women, both men and women, more to men than women or the other way round, or to neither gender. People may also have for example non-heterosexual feelings and heterosexual behaviour simultaneously. The concepts are overlapping and they do not cover everything. (Lehtonen)

Change belongs to life

The living of every stage of life is important, every stage is of equal value, and sexuality manifests itself differently at these different stages. As people make choices in many ways on the spur of the moment, our lives become different, unique also in terms of sexuality. There is no single correct solution or way of doing in expressing our own sexuality.

Centre of the Water Lily



Reflecting on one's own sexuality

- What does sexuality mean to you?
- What kind of values, feelings do you relate to sexuality?
- How do you express your feelings?
- Do you feel safe and loved?
- What does your gender mean to you?
- What feelings are related to love?
- In what part of your body do you feel love?
- How do you express love?
- What is love?
- How do other people see you? What do you think you are like?
- What good and bad experiences do you have of sexuality?
- Have your experiences affected your notions of sexuality? How?
- What is your body like?
- What kind of touching do you like?
- How and where does sexual pleasure feel?
- What must not be touched in your body?
- Is it easy for you to protect your right to bodily integrity?
- Have you reflected on your sexual orientation?
- Do you respect others' bodily integrity?
- How do different feelings and thoughts related to sexuality affect your life and other people's lives?
- What kind of attitudes do different cultures take to sexuality?
- What meanings are given to sexuality in different cultures?
- Are we allowed to laugh at sexuality?

Source – Ruuhilahti, Susanna, Bildjuschkin, Katriina. 2009. Water Lily Model. Empowering Sexual Growth.

Graphics – Juha Kilpiä