

Exercise Science TAs Guide to Creating Inclusive Spaces

1. Addressing Homophobia in the Classroom

A. IDENTIFYING HOMOPHOBIA

I know I'm experiencing homophobia when I hear...

Outright Denial	"There is no such thing as homophobia" "That's so gay' doesn't mean anything, it's just an expression."
Denial of Difference	"I don't notice these things." "As a straight woman, I personally think it would be easier dating women." "I treat everyone the same"
Equal Opportunity	"We're all the same; we've all been given the same chances."
Blame the Victim	"Why flaunt it? Why do you have to walk, talk, act, look like that?"
Heterosexual Victimization	"The Family/Marriage are under siege." "I don't want you to think I'm gay but..."
"Reverse" Homophobia	"What about gay people who hate straight people?"
Binary Polarization	"You have to choose one, gay or straight?" "Us (heterosexuals) vs. Them (homosexual)"
Economic Ghettoization	"Queers are a threat to society/children." "This is all because people don't go to Church anymore."
Moral Panic	"Lesbian sex...gay sex" (righteous vengeance or exerting collective moral control)
Sex Negativity	"Anal sex is disgusting." Whatever "they" is weird"

(Excerpted from FPEH Sexual Diversity Facilitators' Manual/T.E.A.C.H.)

B. ANTI-HOMOPHOBIA IN PRACTICE: WHAT CAN YOU DO?

When to intervene? What to say? What actions to take?

What Can You Do?

1. Be inclusive in the classroom. Remember, at least 10% of the population is a member of the LGBTQ community. Avoid heterosexual assumption.

2. Address stereotypical comments by:
 - Express your own discomfort with the comment and explain your position.
 - Encourage discussion about stereotypes in general and how they can be harmful.
 - Supply the class with information to dispel inaccurate information about homosexuality.
 - Asking other students to respond to the comment (climate of tolerance/acceptance)
 - Avoid angry, confrontational statements to the students who made the comments.
3. Discourage offensive humour directed at lesbians or gays.
4. In pointing out a student's error, you do not humiliate the student. If the behaviours persists, you may address these remarks during office hours to reduce embarrassment and maximize effectiveness.
5. Encourage the discussion of lesbian and gay topics which can add depth and diversity to your discussions.

(Excerpted from TA's Guide for Overcoming Homophobia in the Classroom by Alicia Abramson, University of California, Berkeley; 1986)

Reducing Homophobia in Your Environment

1. Recognize and Address homophobia. As a TA, an employee of the University and a role model for your students, respond to homophobia immediately and sincerely.
2. Reduce heterosexism in your classroom. Include visibly lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer role models, athletes, academics, activists, history, politics and culture in your classroom discussion and curriculum.
3. Make no assumption about sexuality or gender
If a student has not used a pronoun when discussing a relationship, don't assume one. Use neutral language such as "Are you seeing anyone?" instead of "Do you have a boyfriend?"
4. Demonstrate support visibly in your office, in your lab, work space. A sticker, a poster, a flyer, a brochure, a book, a button will work. This will identify you as a safe person to talk to and will hopefully allow a gay, lesbian, bisexual or questioning youth to break his/her silence. Also useful for heterosexual students to know you as an ally or member of the LGBTQ communities.
5. Stress confidentiality with students. Students need to know their privacy will be respected or they will not be honest about this important issue. If you cannot maintain confidentiality for legal reasons, let students know this in advance.
(Adapted from Creating Safe Schools for Lesbian and Gay Students by Jude Tate 2006)

A word about "That's so gay!"

- A very commonly used phrase – that is offensive and a slur and has strong links to homophobia and homophobic behaviours.
- As a TA you should make this clear to the individual and to the class. You can make links between homophobic slurs and other forms of discrimination. Use analogies between racism, sexism, ableism, ethnocentrism, etc.
- The term Gay is used to refer to an individual and a group of people who are discriminated against based on their sexual orientation. "That's so gay" is the same as saying "Gay people are stupid/weird" which is offensive.
- You should state that the use of this phrase is hurtful and derogatory.
- Use this opportunity to discuss the language of discrimination and oppression.

C. PRINCIPLES OF INCLUSIVE CLASSROOMS

Guidelines for Fostering an Inclusive Classroom

1. Establish ground rules for class discussion, highlighting the needs for mutual respect and tolerance
2. Ensure a safe environment for students to speak their opinions
3. Help students understand the value of disagreement and ways to express conflict without personalizing the response
4. Encourage all students to participate in discussion, and look for ways to include students who seem quiet without singling them out
5. Do not ask students to speak from a characteristic point of view, and discourage them from universalizing their personal experience
6. Make yourself available during office hours, by email and after class to discuss issues with students one-on-one
7. Demonstrate respect for student's opinions and cultural norms and require that they do the same
8. Be conscious about the tendency for one group's experience to emerge as the norm against which others' are judged – and encourage students to reflect on this
9. Be responsive to comments and behaviours that are disrespectful to others
10. Never assume anything about an individual student's experience
11. Help the classroom develop as a community

(Adapted from Teaching and Learning for Diversity at UTSC, University of Toronto, p. 23)

Discrimination in the Classroom

(adapted from UCLA LGBT Center <http://www.lgbt.ucla.edu> by Jude Tate 2006)

What is sexual orientation discrimination in the classroom?

A Resource for TAs

Sexual orientation/gender identity discrimination in the classroom may involve the professor making comments or actions or allow unchallenged comments or actions by students that single out or ignore lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBTQ) issues or people. This kind of often in-advertent behavior may discourage LGBTQ students from feeling safe in the classroom or reaching their full academic potential.

Ideally, the college or university classroom is a place where information and knowledge are dispensed equitably. Unfortunately, both male and female instructors may behave in ways that demean LGBTQ people or exclude them from full participation in the classroom.

Much discriminatory behavior is not deliberate since most faculty consciously wish to treat all students fairly. Yet faculty have the power to control many events and interactions in their classrooms, and in doing so they transmit not only objective information but also attitudes and emotions. In this process, faculty who tacitly or overtly devalue LGBTQ students diminish students' confidence and enthusiasm for learning and create long-lasting impediments to academic, professional, and personal growth.

The damage is the same when the discrimination is based on race, gender, religion, age, or other physical or cultural characteristics. Thus, a useful test for determining whether behavior is homophobic or heterosexist is to imagine addressing similar kinds of behavior to members of a racial or other minority group. Conversely, professors have noted that an awareness of sexual orientation discrimination in the classroom has also made them more conscious of ways they may discriminate against other kinds of students as well.

Examples of discrimination in the classroom

Sexual orientation discrimination in the classroom takes two basic forms: discrimination against LGBTQ people in general terms and discrimination against individuals or a classroom group.

Examples of discrimination against LGBTQ people in general terms include the following:

- * explicit use of derogatory terms or stereotypic generalizations; use of perceived "humorous" images or statements that demean or trivialize LGBTQ people;
- * reinforcement of stereotypes through subtle, often unintentional means, such as by using
- * classroom examples in which LGBTQ people are portrayed in certain occupations;
- * refusal to allow LGBTQ issues or people to be discussed;
- * continuous use of heterosexist terms such as making the assumption that all people are heterosexual.

Such assumptions evoke images in students' minds and effectively eliminate LGBTQ people as subjects of discourse even though the elimination may be unintentional, but it nonetheless renders LGBTQ people peripheral or invisible.

Examples of what might one do when experiencing anti-LGBTQ issues in the classroom:

- * challenge anti-LGBTQ statements or comments made by others in the classroom;
- * address the class as if LGBTQ students were there, whether or not they are out;
- * treat LGBTQ students who continue to raise LGBTQ-related issues as contributors;
- * speak out as an ally of LGBTQ people.

The fact that much discrimination against LGBTQ people is intangible or unconscious permits some well-meaning people to dismiss or ignore it. However, there is little doubt that this behavior not only puts LGBTQ students at a distinct educational disadvantage but also reinforces the feeling that the campus is unsafe. I may also have other lasting

effects. In particular, such actions may discourage both classroom participation and the seeking of help outside of class, may cause LGBTQ students to avoid or drop classes or to change majors, and may undermine their scholarly and career aspirations.

Certainly it would be a mistake to believe that all or most sexual orientation discrimination is intentional. Faculty, like other people, reflect and transmit unexamined cultural aspirations which may include the belief that LGBTQ people are less intellectually committed than others or that their work is less competent or important. These assumptions are not confined to male faculty; female faculty also may discriminate against LGBTQ people in the classroom.

How to eliminate discrimination in the classroom

Even small acts of discrimination are significant because they are part of a pervasive and cumulative pattern of societal inequality. Faculty may begin to challenge that pattern first by carefully examining their own feelings and preconceptions about sexual orientation and gender identity and then by becoming alert to overt and subtle interactions in the classroom. A number of specific techniques are available for helping to eliminate sexual orientation discrimination in the classroom. These include:

- when making general statements about LGBTQ people or issues (or any other subject), be sure they are accurately based on reliable information. Universal generalizations about any social group are likely, at best, to represent uncritical oversimplifications of selected norms;
- avoid "humor" or gratuitous remarks that demean or belittle LGBTQ people just as you would avoid remarks that demean or belittle people because of their race, gender, religion, or other physical characteristics.
- Respect the dignity of all students;
- when using illustrative examples, avoid using stereotypes;
- encourage your department to add a question concerning discriminatory behavior in the classroom for teaching evaluations;
- choose course material that does not ignore nor deprecate LGBTQ people. Be sure it's inclusive;
- become better informed about discrimination in the classroom;
- do not sexually harass anyone of the same or other sex.

Terminology & Definitions

Terminology & Definitions

Several terms and definitions are provided below. They are instructive as starting points to understanding basic tenets of sexual orientation and gender identity. We wish to acknowledge there are limitations to any definition or terminology.

Climate and Environment

The perception of social and cultural conditions affecting an individual and/or community. For example, indicators can include people's responses, visibility, awareness, inclusion or omission in curriculum.

Sexual Orientation

Lesbian/Gay

A person whose primary sexual, and/or emotional, spiritual and intellectual attraction is to a person of the same sex and who defines themselves as lesbian/gay.

Bisexual

A person who is sexually, and/or emotionally, spiritually and intellectually attracted to both men and women though not necessarily at the same time or in the same way.

Straight

A person whose primary sexual, and/or emotional, spiritual, and intellectual attraction is to a person of the opposite sex and who defines themselves as straight.

Queer

An umbrella term that may include lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender people and others who challenge the heterosexist boundaries of sexual orientation, sex and gender. The term was historically used as an insult, but is now frequently used as an affirmative political and/or identity statement.

Gender Identity

Sex

A biological distinction referring to whether a person is female, male or intersexed (historically referred to as hermaphrodite).

Gender

Behavior, personality, dress, choice of work, etc. that the dominant society traditionally attributes to, or associates with, biological sex.

Gender Identity

A person's sense of being masculine, feminine, or other gendered.

Transgender

A person whose gender identity or self-expression differs from conventional expectations of masculinity or femininity. Transgender or trans-identified is often used as a umbrella term for gender variant people.

Transsexual

A person assigned by the anatomical structure of the body to one sex, but who feels and wishes to function as a member of the opposite sex. Some transsexuals

choose to undergo sex reassignment surgery to change their bodies to match the sex that they feel they really are.

Transsexual men and women traverse the boundary of the SEX they were assigned at birth. There are heterosexual, gay, lesbian, and bisexual transsexuals.

Cross-Dresser (Transvestite)

A person who on occasion deliberately dresses in clothes traditionally associated with the opposite sex. A person who cross-dresses does not desire to be the opposite sex, but is fulfilling other needs or desires.

Terminology Related to Discriminatory Practices

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (LGBTQ) Discrimination

Takes many forms; it exists between and within individuals, and across institutions and cultures. It is most commonly referred to as homophobia and heterosexism. It is manifested through the denial of human rights, through the violence and verbal abuse experienced on a daily basis.

Heterosexism

The assumption by individuals, institutions, and societal customs that everyone is heterosexual. It is the belief that the normal, natural, healthy, mature way for humans to bond sexually, affectionally, and emotionally is with a partner of the opposite sex. Heterosexism is the systemic and social promotion of heterosexuality, and the simultaneous stigmatization of all other sexual orientations (lesbian, gay, bisexuality)

Lesbophobia/Homophobia

The conscious or unconscious hatred and irrational fear of lesbians and gay men. Based in a belief system and set of priorities that asserts heterosexuality is “normal” and superior, and that lesbianism and homosexuality is deviant, abnormal, criminal or sinful. Lesbophobic/homophobic feelings can be described as fear, hatred, and disgust.

Biphobia

The conscious or unconscious hatred or irrational fear of bisexual men and women, which is experienced in the heterosexual and lesbian and gay communities.

Transphobia

The fear and hatred of cross-dressers, transsexuals, transgender people and other forms of gender benders. Typically demonstrated through disrespect, denial of rights and needs, sometimes involves harassment and violence.

Two Spirited People

People who are Aboriginal, First Nations who may have attributes of both genders, may have distinct gender and social roles. The term “two spirit” is usually considered specific to First Nations people.