GUIDELINES FOR GENDER AND SEXUALITY INCLUSIVITY IN TEACHING

Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health

The purpose of these guidelines is to provide information and resources to teaching teams at Harvard Chan (including instructors, TAs, and other teaching staff) to increase gender and sexuality inclusivity in their courses.

WHY Should You Be Inclusive in Your Teaching?

You will have students of all genders and sexualities in your classes, and this diversity is also present among faculty, TAs, staff who may work with you on aspects of your class (e.g., IT or Canvas assistance), and guest speakers who may come to your class.

- 7.1% of US adults identify as LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender): 20.8% among Generation Z (born 1997-2003; ages 20-26 in 2023) and 10.5% among Millennials (born 1981-1996; ages 27-42). The most common identity among all LGBTQ+ adults was bisexual.¹
- 5.1% of US young adults (ages 18-29) are TNB; the majority are nonbinary.²

The learning environment and the content of what they learn affects the mental health and learning of all students,³⁻⁵ particularly those who are LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer).⁶⁻⁹

- Minority stress¹⁰ and stereotype threat⁵ are two relevant processes that may be related to negative learning and mental health outcomes of LGBTQ+ students.
- The teaching team plays an important role in creating an inclusive and affirming learning experience for all students, particularly those who are TNB.⁷

Fostering an inclusive learning environment, involving both interpersonal interactions and the public health content of the course, will benefit all students, TAs, and faculty, and will promote the development of professional skills and expertise.

Public health science that is inclusive is good science! Teaching public health students about gender and sexuality inclusivity will set them up for success in their future efforts to address public health problems and inequities.

Key Concepts Related to Gender and Sexuality

Gender-related and sexuality-related terminology is constantly evolving. You are not expected to know every term or concept related to genders and sexualities, but you should be familiar with the key concepts below. If you don’t know a specific term or concept that comes up in the classroom, other students might also be unfamiliar.

If you don’t know a term or concept, say:

- “Thank you for sharing this term with us. Do you mind explaining what it means for you?”
- “Would you mind defining that term for us?”
- “I’d love any resources you might be able to share with me to learn more about this term.”

LGBTQ+ = lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and all sexual and gender minorities

TNB = transgender and/or nonbinary

Quote from a TNB student at Harvard Chan: “I can remember multiple instances where a lack of inclusivity took me completely out of the lecture for 5-10 minutes, and by the time I was ready to return the concept, I was too lost to get much out of the rest of the class.”
SEXES, GENDERS, AND SEXUALITIES

Sexes are categories primarily associated with physical and physiological features relevant to sexual reproduction, including chromosomes, gene expression, hormone levels and function, and reproductive/sexual anatomy. Sexes are usually categorized and assigned as female or male but there is variation in the biological attributes that comprise sex and how those attributes are expressed within each sex and across the lifecourse.  

Gender (or genders) refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviors, expressions (gender expression) and identities (gender identity) of girls, women, boys, men, and gender diverse people. It influences how people perceive themselves and each other, how they act and interact, and the distribution of power and resources in society. Gender is usually conceptualized as a binary (girl/woman and boy/man), but there is considerable diversity in how individuals and groups understand, experience, and express it. Gender expressions and identities can change or remain stable across the lifecourse, and their prevalence can vary by birth cohort, locale, and social group.

CISGENDER VS. TRANSGENDER AND/OR NONBINARY

Cisgender means someone has a gender identity that matches what would be expected based on their sex assigned at birth (e.g., assigned female, identifies as a woman). Transgender and/or nonbinary (TNB) means someone has a gender identity that does not match what would be expected based on their sex assigned at birth; sometimes referred to as gender minority in research. Some TNB people will fall on the gender binary and identify exclusively as a women/transgender women or a man/transgender men, and others identify as nonbinary.

PRONOUNS AND HONORIFICS

The pronouns or honorifics that someone uses may not match what you might expect from their gender identity or gender expression. Nonbinary people often use gender neutral pronouns or honorifics. Some people may be comfortable with multiple sets of pronouns (e.g., “she/they” or “they/he”). You can ask if they prefer one pronoun over the other, or you can alternate using both pronouns. Some people do not use any pronouns and use their name instead.
MISGENDERING

Misgendering means using a gendered word or term that does not affirm someone’s gender identity. This can include using incorrect pronouns, names, or gender labels (e.g., calling a nonbinary person who uses they/them pronouns a woman or using “she” pronouns for them).

CISNORMATIVITY AND HETERONORMATIVITY

Cisnormativity is the assumption that all people are cisgender. Heteronormativity is the assumption that all people have a heterosexual sexual orientation, that they desire and have heterosexual romantic and/or sexual relationships and family structures (e.g., expecting a cisgender woman to be partnered with a cisgender man).

INTERSECTIONALITY

Intersectionality represents the framework developed by Black feminists that each person has intersecting identities (e.g., gender, racialized group) based on related underlying systems of power and privilege (e.g., cisnormativity, racism) that produce socially patterned life experiences (e.g., in the US context, a white cisgender man will have a different life experience, and likely more economic resources, than a Black transgender woman due to each person’s intersecting identities and related privileges/oppressions).

HOW Can You Be Inclusive in Your Teaching?

INCLUSIVITY IN THE SYLLABUS AND OTHER TEACHING DOCUMENTS

Include a diversity statement in your syllabus, such as “people with diverse gender expressions, gender identities, and sexual orientations are welcome”.

List pronouns and honorifics for the teaching team in the syllabus, on the course website, and in email signatures. This is a signal to students that the teaching team is aware of pronouns/honorifics and that they will make space for people to self-identify and use the terms that are most affirming to them. Listing honorifics also helps students know how to address the teaching team.

Avoid gendered assumptions and terms; instead use gender neutral terms that are more inclusive (see Table for examples).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gendered Term</th>
<th>Gender Neutral Term</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pregnant women</td>
<td>Pregnant people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothers and fathers</td>
<td>Parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Layman’s terms</td>
<td>Lay terms, layperson’s terms</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

INCLUSIVITY IN CURRICULAR CONTENT

Inclusivity in curricular content should consider both what is taught and whose work is taught.

Be attentive to sexes, genders, sexualities, and intersectionality in relation to public health. Utilize course syllabi and teaching examples from the Women, Gender and Health (WGH) Interdisciplinary Concentration to integrate examples of sexes, genders, sexualities, and intersectionality in curricular content (see Resources below).

Consider the examples used in class lectures and materials.

Consider whose work is taught in class lectures and materials, including assigned readings, recognizing that it might not always be possible to know the gender expression, gender identity, or sexual orientation of the authors or their membership in other relevant social groups (e.g., racialized group, economic group, nationality).
INCLUSIVITY IN THE CLASSROOM

Welcome everyone (students, faculty, TAs, guest speakers) to share pronouns and the names they want to be called during introductions without making it mandatory. Make space for introductions both in larger lecture-based classes and in smaller discussion-based and/or interactive classes (e.g., labs).

Create name tents with name and pronouns and include pronouns in Zoom names when online. Provide an opportunity for students to update their name tents if their name or pronouns changes during the course term.

Use gender neutral terms when possible and encourage students to do the same.

Be aware that you may make mistakes and know how to handle them when they happen. It can be helpful to collect information from students before the first day of class, including their pronouns as well as how they would prefer that corrections be made if someone misgenders them (e.g., never, in private, publicly in front of the class).

If you accidentally misgender someone, apologize briefly, correct yourself, and use the correct terms next time.

In the moment: “I’m sorry, I meant to say them”.

After the fact: “I’m sorry I used the incorrect pronoun to refer to you. I’ll be sure to use the correct one next time.”

If you hear someone else misgendering someone, gently correct them.

In the moment: “Just a reminder that Aidan uses they/them pronouns”.

After the fact: “Earlier I noticed that you used ‘he’ to refer to Aidan. I just wanted to let you know that Aidan uses ‘they/them’
Resources on Gender and Sexuality Inclusivity

Gender and Sexuality Key Concepts:

HMS LGBTQ+ key concepts and terminology handout:

Sexes, Genders, and Sexualities:

WGH courses and syllabi: https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/women-gender-and-health/core/

WGH teaching examples: https://caseresources.hsph.harvard.edu/publications/teaching-examples-women-gender-and-health-course-wgh-207

Pronouns and Gender Inclusive Language:

Overview of pronouns, why they matter, and how to use pronouns and gender inclusive language:
https://pronouns.org/

Blog post about misgendering and why it matters: https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/misgendering-what-it-is-and-why-it-matters-202107232553

Intersectionality:

Kimberlé Crenshaw’s TED Talk on the Urgency of Intersectionality:

Madina Agénor’s article on incorporating intersectionality into quantitative population health research:
https://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/abs/10.2105/AJPH.2020.305610

Lisa Bowleg’s articles on intersectionality in public health:
https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7750585/

Intersectionality Training Institute: https://www.intersectionalitytraining.org/

Gender and Sexuality Inclusivity in Research:

HMS SOGI data collection guidelines: https://dicp.hms.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/2022-10/SOGI%20Data%20Collection.pdf

Other Resources on Gender Inclusivity in Teaching:

HMS SGM teaching module series: https://www.lgbtqiahealtheducation.org/collection/hms-sgm-health-teaching-module-series/

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References


