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]

> **LGBTQ+** = lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and all sexual and gender minorities
>
> **TNB** = transgender and/or nonbinary

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 stress[10] and stereotype threat[5] 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]

> **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."

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."

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.[11]

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.[11] Gender expressions and identities can change or remain stable across the lifecourse, and their prevalence can vary by birth cohort, locale, and social group.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Sexual and romantic attraction: who someone is attracted to.

Sexual behavior and/or partners: who someone has sex with.

Sexual orientation identity: how someone identifies their sexual orientation.

The categories of sexes and genders are distinct from **sexual orientation**, which represents who someone is attracted, who they have sex with, and how they identify their sexual orientation. All three aspects of these expressions of sexuality can change or remain stable across the lifecourse, and their prevalence and modes of expression 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.

(Binary) transgender: identifies as a woman/transgender woman or man/transgender man

Nonbinary: identifies as a gender outside of the woman/man binary, including nonbinary as an identity label, as well as other gender identity labels such as genderqueer, agender, or gender expansive.

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

	Gendered Terms	Gender Neutral Terms
Pronouns	she/her, he/him	they/them
Honorifics	Ms, Mrs, Mr	Mx (pronounced "mix")

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[12] (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).

Gendered Term	Gender Neutral Term
Pregnant women	Pregnant people
Mothers and fathers	Parents
Layman's terms	Lay terms, layperson's terms

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).

Ask yourself:

Are most (or all) classroom examples and assigned readings about white cisgender heterosexual economically privileged people and heteronormative family structures?

Are most (or all) authors white cisgender heterosexual men from the Global North?

Do any classroom examples or assigned readings address the intersectional systems and experiences of individuals with multiple marginalized identities (e.g., how racial discrimination and gender are associated with cardiovascular health)?

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.

DO's and DON'Ts	
Do invite students to share their pronouns during introductions. **Do** use a person's name to refer to them if you don't know their pronouns.	**Don't** make assumptions about a student's gender identity or pronouns based on their appearance (gender expression).
Do invite students to share their identities and life experiences if they are comfortable doing so.	**Don't** make assumptions about the identities a student holds or the life experiences a student brings.
Do invite students to share their own experiences if they are comfortable doing so.	**Don't** ask students to speak for their identity group(s).

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:
https://lgbt.hms.harvard.edu/files/lahms/files/terminology_guide_5.15.2020.pdf

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:
https://www.ted.com/talks/kimberle_crenshaw_the_urgency_of_intersectionality?language=en

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://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/full/10.2105/AJPH.2012.300750
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/

These guidelines were developed by Sabra L. Katz-Wise, PhD, Associate Professor in Social and Behavioral Sciences at Harvard Chan, and reviewed by Harvard Chan faculty, current and former Harvard Chan students, and additional community members, including Eli Godwin, EdM, MPH, R. Korkodilos, BA, Nancy Krieger, PhD, Even Paglisotti, MPH, Kieran P. Todd, MPH, and Yu-Chi Wang, PhD.

References

1. Jones JBM. *LGBT Identification in U.S. Ticks Up to 7.1%.*; 2022. Accessed January 17, 2023. https://news.gallup.com/poll/389792/lgbt-identification-ticks-up.aspx
2. Brown A. *About 5% of Young Adults in the U.S. Say Their Gender Is Different from Their Sex Assigned at Birth.*; 2022. Accessed January 17, 2023. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/06/07/about-5-of-young-adults-in-the-u-s-say-their-gender-is-different-from-their-sex-assigned-at-birth/
3. del Toro J, Hughes D. Trajectories of Discrimination across the College Years: Associations with Academic, Psychological, and Physical Adjustment Outcomes. *J Youth Adolesc*. 2020;49(4):772-789. doi:10.1007/s10964-019-01147-3
4. Manzo G, Piña-Watson B, Kim SY. Minority stress and academic outcomes among ethnic minority college students: Anxiety as a mediating mechanism. *Journal of American College Health*. Published online October 4, 2022:1-8. doi:10.1080/07448481.2022.2128683
5. Harrison LA, Stevens CM, Monty AN, Coakley CA. The consequences of stereotype threat on the academic performance of White and non-White lower income college students. *Social Psychology of Education*. 2006;9(3):341-357. doi:10.1007/s11218-005-5456-6
6. Kulick A, Wernick LJ, Woodford MR, Renn K. Heterosexism, Depression, and Campus Engagement Among LGBTQ College Students: Intersectional Differences and Opportunities for Healing. *J Homosex*. 2017;64(8):1125-1141. doi:10.1080/00918369.2016.1242333
7. Knutson D, Matsuno E, Goldbach C, Hashtpari H, Smith NG. Advocating for transgender and nonbinary affirmative spaces in graduate education. *High Educ (Dordr)*. 2022;83(2):461-479. doi:10.1007/s10734-020-00673-5
8. Goldberg AE, Kuvalanka K, dickey lore. Transgender graduate students' experiences in higher education: A mixed-methods exploratory study. *J Divers High Educ*. 2019;12(1):38-51. doi:10.1037/dhe0000074
9. Goldberg AE, Kuvalanka KA, Black K. Trans Students Who Leave College: An Exploratory Study of Their Experiences of Gender Minority Stress. *J Coll Stud Dev*. 2019;60(4):381-400. doi:10.1353/csd.2019.0036
10. Meyer IH. Prejudice, social stress, and mental health in lesbian, gay, and bisexual populations: Conceptual issues and research evidence. *Psychol Bull*. 2003;129(5):674-697. doi:10.1037/0033-2909.129.5.674
11. Canadian Institutes of Health Research. Definitions of Sex and Gender. Published 2015. Accessed February 2, 2023. https://cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/47830.html
12. Crenshaw K. Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Rev*. Published online 1991:1241-1299.