

**ADDRESSING AND ENHANCING DIVERSITY IN ACADEMIC PROGRAMS:
DIVERSITY AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION**

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Thank you for the invitation to address diversity and sexual orientation. Five years ago in Savannah I spoke on this issue but at that meeting it was during a concurrent session and only about 15 people attended. I am very pleased to have the opportunity to address all of you during a plenary session. I am sure that a percentage of you may still question the relationship of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered (GLBT) issues to Communication Sciences and Disorders. If the data collected from a survey distributed at the Savannah meeting are representative, 63% of you have heard a student make insensitive or disparaging remarks about GLBT persons; 67% have heard a university employee make disparaging remarks; but only 29% indicated a more accepting attitude toward GLBT persons since being hired at their present site (McNiece, 1997). These data, along with incidents such as the murder of Matthew Shepard in Wyoming, make me wonder and worry about the climates of our universities today. How can we provide a more sensitive and/or accepting environment for our students, our colleagues, and our patients? In this presentation I will cover basic definitions and/or terminology that we should know and use; I will present information that I hope will dispel some common myths and/or stereotypes about homosexuals; I will also describe what colleagues, students and patients are looking for in terms of behaviors and attitudes displayed in various settings; and I will suggest some ways to provide more sensitive attitudes and behaviors.

In an excellent article in the April 2nd issue of the ASHA Leader, Lee (2002) defines some specific terms when he addresses how to create more sensitive environments for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered clients. He ends his article by saying "The most important steps, however, are recognizing the need to do this and making the commitment to achieving it" (p. 10). Are you ready to commit to achieving a

more sensitive environment? I will assume you are. A brief review of terminology follows:

Sexual Orientation: A person's emotional, physical, and sexual attraction and the expression of that attraction. Although a subject of debate, sexual orientation is probably one of the many characteristics that people are born with. Most people become aware of their sexual orientation during adolescence.

Sexual Preference: Preference implies that a person chooses the gender of the person to whom they are attracted. While some individuals believe this is so, the overwhelming majority believes that sexual orientation is not a choice.

Homosexuality: A sexual orientation in which a person feels physically and emotionally attracted to people of the same gender.

Heterosexuality: A sexual orientation in which a person feels physically and emotionally attracted to people of the opposite gender.

Bisexuality: A sexual orientation in which a person feels physically and emotionally attracted to people of both genders.

Transgender identity: The experience of having a gender identity that is different from one's biological sex. A transgender person may identify with the opposite biological gender and want to be a person of that gender.

Transvestite: An individual who dresses in opposite-sex clothing to derive sexual gratification. Transvestites are frequently married men who identify as heterosexual.

Homophobia: The fear, dislike, and hatred of same-sex relationships or those who love and are sexually attracted to those of the same sex. Homophobia includes prejudice, discrimination, harassment, and acts of violence brought on by fear and hatred. It occurs on personal, institutional, and societal levels.

Heterosexism: The assumption that all people are or should be heterosexual. Heterosexism excludes the needs, concerns, and life experiences of lesbian, gay, and bisexual people while it gives advantages to heterosexual people. It is often a subtle form of oppression that reinforces realities of silence and invisibility for gays and lesbians.

Now let us look at some facts regarding homosexuality and the truth about sexual orientation.

(1) *Gay, lesbian and bisexual people cannot be identified by certain mannerisms or physical characteristics.* One's physical appearance should not be used by others to identify them as being gay or lesbian. There are plenty of effeminate men who are not gay.

(2) *Sexual experiences as a child are not necessarily indicative of one's sexual orientation as an adult.* Just because people may engage in same-sex activity as children or even adolescents does not mean they will be gay as adults. Some cultures will even allow heterosexual men to engage in same-sex behavior but do not categorize them as homosexual.

(3) *No one knows what causes sexual orientation.*

(4) *Many people accuse GLB people of "flaunting" their sexuality when they talk about their partner, hold hands, or kiss one another in public.* This is a common accusation made by less accepting individuals. While it is common for heterosexuals to hold hands and kiss in public, it is considered to be flaunting if homosexuals do the same thing. Putting a partner's picture on one's desk is considered flaunting, while heterosexuals frequently have pictures of their significant other or their spouse at their desk. Some companies have even refused to allow heterosexuals the right to have photos just so that they do not have to allow homosexuals the same privilege. This behavior is heterosexist and punishes everyone instead of supporting everyone.

(5) *People who are GLBT work in all types of jobs and they live in all types of situations.* There really is a large silent majority of GLBT persons who work right along side of you or for you. There is also as much diversity in GLBT persons as there is in heterosexuals. Being gay does not make us all republicans or democrats; we are not all

hairdressers or costume designers; we do not all subscribe to Martha Stewart. The majority of us enjoy life the same way you do.

(6) *Sometimes oppression based on sexual orientation escalates into acts of physical violence.* Rates of victimization of and attitudes towards lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals at a well-known liberal arts college (Oberlin) were reported and compared to other institutions (Norris, 1991). The numbers below refer to the number of persons experiencing victimization, the total number of the group surveyed, and the proportion:

Lesbian and bisexual women	57/73	78.1%
Gay and bisexual men	27/38	71.1%
Questioning women	30/65	46.2%
Questioning men	5/14	35.7%
Heterosexual women	35/384	9.1%
Heterosexual men	30/275	10.9%

The types of incidents and their percentages were compared with three other institutions.

	Oberlin	Yale	Rutgers	Penn St.
Property damaged or destroyed	5%	10%	6%	17%
Verbal insults	40%	65%	55%	76%
Overheard antigay remark	84%	98%	90%	NA
Objects thrown	5%	19%	12%	12%
Followed /chased	14%	25%	18%	27%
Spat upon	5%	3%	1%	5%
Assaulted or				
wounded	1%	1%	2%	1%
Punched/hit/kicked	3%	5%	4%	5%
Sexually harassed	18%	12%	8%	NA
Non-reporting of				
incident	>90%	90%	88%	94%

Please note the percentage of individuals who did not report the incidents. Those numbers may be even more crucial, in that the victims feared being “outed,” feared the responses of the individuals to whom they would have to report, and felt that nothing would be done about it anyway. According to Walters and Hayes (1998),

the emotional, social, and developmental needs of bisexual, lesbian, and gay male youth are often blighted throughout their tenure on campus. In addition, evidence suggests the working environment is less than receptive for many faculty and staff who identify themselves as gay/lesbian/bisexual, or who work toward affirming the experience of gay students and colleagues. There can be serious risks to challenging the barriers that characterize institutionalized heterosexism. Professionals who are willing to confront homophobia and support GLBT people must be willing to absorb these risks. (p.15)

The question is, are you ready to absorb these risks? I will assume you are.

(7) *There are several published studies that have investigated sexual child abuse and have concluded that approximately 90% of the molesters are heterosexual men.* The American Psychological Association, the National Association of Social Workers, the American Academy of Child Psychiatrists and the Child Welfare League of America all have policy statements stating there is no correlation between homosexuality and child abuse. The current scandal within the Catholic church tries to scapegoat the gay priests as the child molesters. The molesters are men who are not attracted to either women or adult men, but children. Gays as a group do not condone child abuse.

(8) *Homosexuality is not a mental illness and cannot be “cured” by psychotherapy.*

(9) *There is no definable gay lifestyle.* What does gay lifestyle mean? The point is that gays live as diverse a life style as straights. Anti-gay organizations try to use stereotypical characteristics, such as promiscuity, alcoholism, and drug abuse to describe all gays. These characteristics are present in a very small percentage of the total gay community (Youth Pride, 1997).

How can you reduce homophobia in general?

- (1) *Make no assumptions about a person's sexuality.* Neutralize your language. Instead of asking "Are you married?" ask "Are you in a relationship?" Remember you cannot tell a person's sexual orientation just by looking at him/her.

- (2) *Show a supportive environment by displaying some type of symbol.* Many college programs have buttons or posters that signify that the person displaying it is "open" to them. At the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, there was an "Ally" button; at LSU, Baton Rouge, there is a "Safe Zone" poster. The Subaru diversity poster that was given away at the 2001 convention of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) made use of the rainbow colors and the pink triangle, both of which are symbols adopted by the gay community. The GLBT interviewee as well as your students and clients will notice these signs and symbols.

- (3) *Challenge homophobia.* Stop behaviors such as name-calling, jokes, refusals to work with certain employees, and exclusion of persons from social events.

- (4) *Combat heterosexism.*

- (5) *Adopt and enforce anti-discrimination policies.* Currently only 12 states have laws banning discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. The Federal Government has been trying to pass the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) for several years. This law would prohibit a company from firing an individual simply because of his/her sexual orientation.

The public supports the principles of ENDA according to a June 2001 Gallup Poll. The poll asked respondents, "In general, do you think homosexuals should or should not have equal rights in terms of job opportunities?" Up from 56% in 1977, 85% of respondents favored equal opportunity in employment for gays and lesbians. Only 11% thought gays and lesbians should be discriminated against, based on sexual orientation,

in the workplace. A nationwide Harris Interactive Poll also taken in June 2001 found that 61% of Americans favored a federal law prohibiting job discrimination based on sexual orientation. Additionally, the survey found that 42% of adults surveyed believed that such a law currently existed (Human Rights Campaign).

What do gay employees want?

(1) *A specific employment policy that prohibits discrimination based upon sexual orientation.* The Human Rights Campaign website currently lists 2,127 employers with non-discrimination policies that include sexual orientation. There are 351 Colleges and Universities that include sexual orientation in their policies, as well as 294 Fortune 500 companies.

(2) *Creation of a safe work environment that is free of heterosexist and homophobic behaviors.* How does being gay affect a faculty member? I quote from an article by Griffin (1991):

The entire education community has something to gain from the empowerment of gay and lesbian educators. Participants in this study all survived the anti-gay climates of their schools and were effective and dedicated teachers. They found that they could be even more productive if they did not have to expend energy hiding and protecting themselves from the prejudice and ignorance of a homophobic community. In a society committed to social justice, gay and lesbian educators would not be required to sacrifice their sense of self-integrity to remain in their chosen profession. Visible lesbian and gay educators provide colleagues, students, and parents with the opportunity to learn that their fears of and stereotypes about gay and lesbian teachers are not rooted in reality. Perhaps most importantly, young people struggling with their sexual orientation would have more realistic and hopeful expectations about what it means to be gay or lesbian. They would learn that there are gay and lesbian adults, some of whom are respected teachers in their schools, who live happy and productive lives. (p.194)

(3) *Company-wide education about gay issues in the workplace.* The workplace should offer sensitivity training classes for all employees. These can be multicultural as long as GLBT issues are included. I quote from an article written by Haarbeck (1991):

I believe that our advances lie in education, not litigation. Several psychological studies have demonstrated that if a heterosexual individual knows a homosexual, then acceptance increases as stereotypical responses decrease. Similarly, my initial research on homosexual educators suggest that if one individual has the courage to reveal his or her sexual orientation to his or her employer in an honest and non-controversial manner, the climate of support and job security extends to the lesbians and gay men who elect to follow that lead. (p. 134)

(4) *An equitable benefits program that recognizes the domestic partners of gay, lesbian and bisexual employees.* There are currently 165 colleges and universities that offer domestic partner benefits. One deterrent for GLBT employees is that health insurance has to be paid for with after tax dollars instead of pre-tax dollars. The costs of offering domestic partner benefits have not risen, as the opposition would have you believe. ASHA has been offering domestic partner benefits since 1995 with only a few persons choosing to use them and without any significant increase in costs.

(5) *Support of a GLBT employee support group.* Support groups help individuals talk about issues without fear of being reprimanded.

Although there are certainly personal risks associated with lesbian, gay, and bi educators' revealing their sexual orientation in class, one benefit of coming out is clear: students may decrease their prejudice toward lesbians and gay men. The burden of reducing negative attitudes, however, should not solely be the responsibility of lesbian, gay, bisexual instructors. LGB educators need the support of their colleges and universities to create a climate that is accepting of diverse sexual orientations. To that end, universities should enhance their campus environments by eliminating discriminatory policies, advancing lesbian, gay, bisexual scholarship and encouraging all instructors - regardless of their sexual orientations - to present affirming perspectives of lesbian, gay, bisexual issues in their classrooms. (Waldo & Kemp, 1997, p.92)

(6) *Freedom for all employees to participate fully in all aspects of corporate life.* Faculty should not be denied travel funds just because the research they are conducting happens to have a GLBT theme. Be inclusive in social gatherings. Single persons should be invited and allowed to bring a guest to social events. Written invitations should not specify you and your "spouse." Should your university be so inconsiderate to

send such an invitation, join your gay and lesbian faculty members as well as single heterosexuals in boycotting the event. Make your reasons known to the offending party, even if it is the President of the institution.

(7) *Public support of gay issues.* Employers should be willing to take a public stand on such issues as ENDA. There is a need to lobby legislators for more protective laws, get gay rights issues in the law books and build stronger coalitions with heterosexual colleagues and other minority educators (McNaught,1993).

How does one attract GLBT employees? Employees can be attracted by your advertising, the interviewing process, and by offering domestic partner benefits. If feasible, place your ad in local GLBT newspapers. In your non-discrimination statement specify that you do not discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation. Choose carefully the person or persons that will conduct initial job interviews. Ellis and Vasseur (1993) state

the results of this study provide some support for Snyder and Swann's hypothesis that, in social settings, people tend to seek confirmation of their pre-interaction beliefs about another person. Snyder and Swann suggested that the employment interview is one context in which this process can be expected to operate. At the marginally significant level we found that individuals with negative attitudes towards homosexuals chose more negative information-seeking questions than did individuals with positive attitudes." (p. 42)

Let the applicant know that your department is interested in increasing its diversity. Be sure the applicant is aware that your institution offers domestic partner benefits. If you want to attract and retain qualified personnel this is one benefit that will do it. There are plenty of gay and lesbian couples, one of which may be a speech-language pathologist or audiologist. They are looking for health benefits for their partners and their children. Yes, contrary to popular belief there are plenty of gays and lesbians, singles and couples who have children of their own or have adopted children.

What do GLBT students want? They want

- (1) a safe living and learning environment,
- (2) enforced anti-discrimination policies,
- (3) accurate and inclusive information,
- (4) support from faculty and peers, and
- (5) freedom to be themselves.

Classrooms and living quarters should be free of harassment. There should be no teasing, taunting, name-calling, and so forth. Faculty should be prepared to stop any harassing behavior by other students and obviously should not participate in such behavior themselves. One lesbian student reported to me that her professor referred to her as “sir” in the classroom. Another student reported that his professor stated that gay men have higher pitched voices. I do not think there is evidence to support that statement. If a faculty member is talking about GLBT persons he/she needs to have the facts and not base statements on stereotypes. Do your voice classes include the needs of transgendered persons? If a student is “out” or comes out to you, be supportive; you may need to refer the individual to a campus organization, the counseling center or local community organizations such as Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG). Maintain the student's confidentiality; placing trust in you is really a compliment. There are several hundred different GLBT student organizations throughout the country. Some of them are support groups, or service related; some are religious oriented such as the Catholic Dignity group. These organizations are good for GLBT students as it gives them an opportunity to learn about themselves, develop organization and leadership skills, whereas some organizations would not give them such an opportunity or perhaps even allow them as members (Evans & Wall, 1991). Some professionals suggest the use of peer panels to foster positive attitude change toward homosexuals. Suggested panels should be peers; delivery should be interactional not didactic; there should be questions and answers; feedback should be gotten after the intervention (Nelson & Krieger, 1997). Be sure clinical policies are fair and non-discriminatory. GLBT students are not asking for special rights but equal rights.

- What do GLBT patients expect? They expect to
- (a) see neutralized case history forms,
 - (b) find reduced stereotypical images in tests and therapy materials,
 - (c) be addressed with appropriate terminology, and
 - (d) be respected.

One of the strategies that Lee (2002) mentions in his recent ASHA Leader article is for clinical personnel to examine clinical forms and similar documents. Instead of having “mother and father,” you can have parent #1, parent #2 or guardian #1 and #2. This will allow for children of same-sex couples as well as for children of divorced and remarried parents, guardians, and so forth. Do not ask children to tell you about their mother and father. Instead, ask them to tell you about who they live with. Even for older people, do not ask for the husband or wife's name, ask about the person's living arrangements or with whom he or she lives. When I recently had to have out patient surgery, the intake person asked me who would be accompanying me and driving me home (a neutral question); but when I responded “my partner,” the next question was “and her name is?” (a heterosexist assumption). In devising and/or presenting therapy materials, do not always use materials that are stereotyped by gender. For example, if there is a doctor in the picture why can't it be a woman? If you are talking about a nurse why can't it be a man? The ballet dancer can be a boy and the soccer player can be a girl. If you are not sure what terminology to use with a person, ask them. Many GLBT persons refer to their significant other as “partner or life partner”; some gay men will actually refer to their husbands and some lesbians use the term wife.

I hope that this information will stimulate your thinking. I also hope that you will try to incorporate some of the suggestions in your own environments. I have presented ways that GLBT persons are different, but I have also emphasized that GLBT persons are more like you than they are different from you. I would like to conclude these remarks with a poem I wrote and read at the MC² meeting during the 1999 ASHA convention. The title is *The Hidden Self*.

The Hidden Self

Look! Look at Us!

No, I mean take a good close look at us.

Is there not one among us who looks like you?

Is there not one among us who has skin like you?

Hair like you? Eyes like you?

Do we not do the same work as you?

Do we not wear the same clothes as you?

Do we not eat the same food as you?

We have fathers and mothers just like you.

We have brothers and sisters just like you.

Yes, we even have sons and daughters just like you.

If you strike us, do we not feel the pain?

If you cut us, our blood leaves the same red stain.

On the outside there is little difference between you and we.

The difference is on the inside where you cannot see.

The difference is I love a man just like me.

And my sister loves a woman just like she.

Yes, We are gays, lesbians, bisexuals, & transgendered; and Proud To Be.

How can you tell the difference between you and me?

Looking at the outside it is an impossibility.

When will I unlock the secret hidden inside of me?

The answer is as simple as the turn of a key.

When you accept me for who I AM, and not who you want me to be.

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