

Gender Inclusivity in Psychology

The Psychology EDI committee developed this document following a forum that was held in April 2022. The forum brought together undergraduate students, graduate students, and instructors to discuss inclusivity when teaching and learning about gender. The forum was arranged in response to requests from students in the department to better prepare instructors in this area. The material in this document summarizes the discussions that took place during the forum. Additional resources are presented at the end.

Prior to the start of class

Educate yourself – prior to designing the course, while teaching the course, and throughout your career. For example,

- Become comfortable with major concepts e.g., sex and gender both exist on a spectrum; psychology doesn't address intersex (acknowledge the erasure and question why it happens)
- Understand that discourse around these topics is needed for pushing back against transphobia



Set the stage for gender inclusivity via your course outline and Brightspace page; some examples include:

- Consider adding pronouns next to instructor and/or TA names on the course outline and Brightspace page
- Consider adding an inclusivity statement on the course outline expecting respectful discussion



Fostering Inclusivity while Teaching the Course

- Set shared intentions: Instructors should communicate their intention to create a classroom environment that encourages respectful discussion of different perspectives. When there is disagreement, the focus should be on understanding different viewpoints, rather than agreeing or disagreeing with them. At all times, however, student safety comes first, and it should be clear that harmful attitudes will not be tolerated
- Clarify for yourself, and students, what you are studying and why. Include definitions of terms that are being discussed: Sex and Gender; Gender Roles; Socialization etc. and how they are distinct. Some identities might be defined differently depending on the community (e.g., Two-spirit); some can be applied to sex, gender, sexuality, etc. (e.g., genderfluid)
- Use course materials that include gender diversity
- Use different gender pronouns in your exam questions and assignments
- Advertise various events on campus that relate to gender inclusivity. For example, the first slide of each class could welcome people to the day, let them know what's happening on campus (e.g., trans day of visibility)
- Be mindful of who is taking up most of the conversational space in the classroom; Encourage students to leave space for others to speak; As an instructor, be proactive in making sure there is room for everyone to talk



How should instructors address exclusionary course materials (e.g., textbooks, journal articles, etc.)?



DO

Encourage critical engagement with course materials

- Clarify that assigning a textbook doesn't imply your complete endorsement
- Share your critiques of course materials with the class early on (such as excessive focus on understanding gender differences vs similarities; the harm of gender dysphoria research)
- Remind students throughout the course if parts of course materials do not match our current understanding
- Question the accuracy of research findings that only rely on measurement of gender that includes two options
- Augment the textbook (e.g., as questions about what the topic might mean for folks with other identities); see resources at the end of this document

DON'T

Over-emphasize gender differences (e.g., many gender differences are small effects and ignore substantial overlapping variance).

Address gender differences if they are not relevant to the learning objectives, or to the conversation the class is having (e.g., does not clarify or move the conversation forward). Instead:

- be thoughtful about when and why you address gender differences; explicitly discuss the value (or lack thereof) of addressing gender differences
- include more focus on gender similarities and within-group variability

How should instructors respond to corrective feedback from students?

DO

Show gratitude and appreciation that the person took a risk to share feedback

Think of this as a teaching moment

- Model humility, learning, and being open to correction
- If you do know something about the topic, teach the class about it

Let the class know what you're going to do next to correct the issue – now and in the future

DON'T

Be overly apologetic, backpedal, or make it about yourself

Don't be dismissive or spend too much time on it

Don't ask the student to teach you more or send you resources; find them yourself



How should instructors respond to exclusionary comments made by other students in the classroom?

DO

Depending on the situation and class size, give the student an opportunity to reflect back on what they said, rather than being reactive right away, in order to understand where the student is coming from (but be careful, this could end up with more harmful talk that you must be prepared to shut down)

Link the topic to critical thinking – encourage students to sit with discomfort and think about views of the world that are different from the ones they were raised with

Share research articles regarding the spectrum of Gender and Sex. See resources at the end of this document.

Consider if the comment violates classroom inclusivity agreements; talk with the student afterwards

In cases where you feel uncomfortable responding in the moment, rather than feeling pressured to react immediately in the classroom, say you are going to move on from that conversation for now. Consult with others (e.g., colleagues, the Chair, the EDI committee, EQHR) about where the line is between differing viewpoints versus hate speech in that situation. Follow up with the class as appropriate.



How should instructors respond if a student brings to your attention an exclusionary comment made by a student outside of class time?

DO

Validate their reporting (e.g., thank you for upholding the values of inclusivity); it takes a lot of courage to bring things like this forward.

Consult with the reporting student about what they would like to see happen.

If you are bringing the topic to the attention of the class:

- Clarify the reporting student's preference to be included in a response or not; consider whether it would be preferable to present the issue to the class as something you (the instructor) thought of versus something a student reported to you
- Tell the students via Brightspace or in the next class what you are going to do to address the issue;
- Remember that not all issues need to be addressed live in the classroom



Where should I start in terms of self-study?

Here are some ideas and concepts that would be helpful to know, shared by students in psychology classes. This is just a sampling of the many things there are to learn!

Familiarize yourself with a diverse range of gender identities and why individuals find it important to distinguish/ align themselves. What identities are under a wider umbrella of transgender? (agender, genderqueer... the list is expansive!)

Familiarize yourself with transition, and different choices that many gender non-conforming people take to affirm their identity (i.e., some choose medical intervention and others don't)

Familiarize yourself with examples of cultures that have more than two ways of describing gender and gender roles

Familiarize yourself with the historical fight for trans-rights but also understand that currently trans rights and bodies are actively being legislated against globally.

Connect and contextualize trans rights with other equity seeking groups and acknowledge the impacts of oppression on people and connect adversity to variability in life experience, self-actualization, development, access to resources (development, identity, mental health and well being, belonging).



Resources

This is a living document... here are some places to start. The EDI committee welcomes any additions to this list of resources!

Ainsworth, C. (2015). Sex redefined. *Nature*, 518(7539), 288.

CIHR training on sex and gender: <https://www.cihr-irsc-igh-isfh.ca/>

Fiani, C. N., & Han, H. J., (2019). Navigating identity: Experiences of binary and non-binary transgender and gender non-conforming (TGNC) adults, *International Journal of Transgenderism*, 20(2-3), 181-194, DOI: 10.1080/15532739.2018.1426074

Instagram account: ALOK (@alokvmenon) is a great source for resources

Stinson, D. A., & Cameron, J. J. (2020). Teaching and learning guide for: Guidelines for respecting gender diversity in psychological research. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 14(7), e12535. <https://doi.org/10.1111/spc3.12535>

Strang, J. F., Wallace, G. L., Michaelson, J. J., Fischbach, A. L., Thomas, T. R., . . . Yang, J. S. (2023). The Gender Self-Report: A multidimensional gender characterization tool for gender-diverse and cisgender youth and adults. *American Psychologist*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0001117>

Štrkalj, G., & Pather, N. (2021). Beyond the sex binary: Toward the inclusive anatomical sciences education. *Anatomical sciences education*, 14(4), 513-518

Here are some helpful guidelines on how to create an expectation of safety and inclusivity in your class: <https://collegetransitioncollaborative.org/ensuring-id-safety/>