

Homophobia, Biphobia, Transphobia & Heterosexism

Questions RCAs have asked in the past:

How should we address homophobia/biphobia/transphobia and bias with advisees when it happens?

How should we address things like, "You are so gay!" when we hear it?

What is the best way to address less overt comments that assume everyone is straight or ignorant comments/comments made innocently that really are hurtful to others?

How do we help advisees address their own homophobia or transphobia?

As RCAs, you set the tone for your community. If you hear or see homophobia, biphobia, or transphobia and do nothing about it, then you are perpetuating it. There will most likely be someone in your community who is LGBTQA. They may not be out and may not come out until after they leave Princeton or they may be stealth. Regardless of the situation, they will be affected now by the negative comments around them.

The residential hall is the advisee's home, and for students who have to come home to hurtful comments or an uncomfortable environment makes college life unbearable. When you hear comments that are intentionally offensive or subtler statements, such as, "that's so gay," see this as both an educational opportunity and a chance to make your residential community a safer and more open place to live.

As for heterosexist comments, those that assume everyone is straight, or comments that assume everyone fits neatly into the gender binary, you can address them in the same way. By challenging your advisees' assumptions, you are creating a more open community and educating them in the process.

A large part of this is also about role modeling. By using inclusive language and by putting yourself out there as an ally, you are setting the tone of what is okay and what is not. In addition, people often appreciate the opportunity to learn what the meaning is of what they are saying. In saying, "That's so gay!" and "That's so queer!" people often are not thinking about the meaning of their words.

Enclosed is information about homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, and heterosexism, and how to address issues when they occur. Outside of following protocol, there is often a need for mending of feelings and community. It is important that we recognize the emotional pain that occurs when a hurtful statement is made or a hateful act happens against another person. If an incident happens in the hall, it is important the community addresses the issue and the person who experiences the incident knows they are supported.

Holding People Accountable: Often, people who engage in homophobic or transphobic acts have a fear or lack of understanding for the group they are targeting. After an incident happens, there is a real opportunity for learning and growth. Debbie Bazarsky, the LGBT Center Director, offers to work with any student (on a voluntary or judicial basis) to help them learn more about LGBTQA issues. Often times these students have very little knowledge about LGBTQA issues and have had very little interaction with "out" LGBTQA people. If desired, the LGBT Center will create opportunities for students to learn new information, challenge their beliefs about LGBTQA people, and create a safe space to reflect on their actions.

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Who To Turn To When A Student Experiences
Homophobia, Biphobia, or Transphobia on Campus

Wokie Nwabueze, ombuds@princeton.edu, 258-1775

University Ombuds Officer

The Ombuds Office and CPS are the two truly confidential places one may go talk through options.

Jackie Deitch-Stackhouse, share@princeton.edu, 258-3310

SHARE Director

The Sexual Harassment/Assault Advising, Resources, and Education Office addresses harassment based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

Debbie Bazarsky, bazarsky@princeton.edu, 258-1353

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Center Director

Alison Boden, praushen@princeton.edu, 258-6244

Office of Religious Life, Reverend and Associate Dean

Cheri Lawson, clawson@princeton.edu, 258-8504

Director for Equal Opportunity Programs in the Office of the Provost

The Dean of Undergraduate Students and Directors of Student Life

They provide support and are able to begin a case through the judicial process.

Public Safety

They can begin an investigation and help pursue the incident judicially as well.

Online Homophobia Reporting Form

This form is on the top of the main LGBT Center web page,
www.princeton.edu/lgbt.

Recognizing and responding to homophobia/transphobia/heterosexism

Keep in mind: It is your responsibility to provide a safe and comfortable environment for all of your advisees. Students will not always speak up when they feel uncomfortable or intimidated.

Responses: Challenge jokes when you hear them in conversations. Ask, "What is funny about that?" Let residents know how painful their comments can be to others. Be sure to provide a range of programming that includes the LGBTQA experience. Use gender-neutral language when planning events where students are asked to bring a date.

Resources: The LGBT Peer Educators and the LGBT Center will be glad to talk with you about programming options.

Verbal/sexual harassment, intimidation and physical abuse

Keep in mind: Sexual harassment occurs between members of the same gender just as it does between members of different genders.

Responses: Recognize harassment, intimidation and abuse and respond to it without regard to the sexuality or gender of the individuals. Report and document the incident with SHARE, the LGBT Center, or Public Safety. Solicit help for the individuals involved.

Resources: Contact the SHARE office, the LGBT Center, and the residential college staff.

Vandalism/property damage/graffiti

Keep in mind: Each of these may be categorized as an incident of hate. Homophobic or transphobic graffiti and property destruction will make both the targeted individual and the community feel unsafe.

Responses: Discuss the occurrence with the resident's community. Document it and report it to SHARE or the LGBT Center Director.

Resources: Public Safety will gladly write a report, conduct an investigation, and/or work through concerns regarding safety if desired.

Being an Ally to Transgender Students

Everyone has a gender identity and a gender experience. Most people experience their gender identity as conforming to their physical sex. That is, most people who are born with female bodies also have a feminine gender identity (e.g., “I identify as a woman” or “I like to dress in a feminine manner”), and most people who are born with male bodies have a masculine gender identity (e.g., “I identify as a man” or “I like to dress in a masculine manner”). Some individuals experience their gender identity as not conforming to their sex assigned at birth (e.g., a person who is assigned female at birth but does not have the internal sense that they are a girl/woman or a person who is assigned male at birth who does not have the internal sense that they are a boy/man). These individuals may be described as “transgender.” Broadly speaking, transgender people are individuals whose gender experience, expression, and/or identity differs from conventional expectations based on their birth sex. The word “transgender,” or “trans,” is an umbrella term, which is often used to describe a wide range of identities and experiences.

Don’t assume you can tell if someone is transgender.

Transgender and genderqueer people do not all look a certain way or come from the same background, and many may not appear “visibly trans.” Indeed, many trans people live most of their lives with very few people knowing their trans status.

Don’t make assumptions about a trans person’s sexual orientation.

Gender identity is different than sexual orientation. Sexual orientation is about to whom we are attracted. Gender identity is about how we know our own gender. Trans people can identify as gay, lesbian, straight, bisexual, asexual, queer, etc.

Be careful about confidentiality, disclosure, and “outing.”

Some trans people feel comfortable disclosing their trans status to others, and some do not. Knowing a trans person’s status is personal information and it is up to them to share it with others. Do not casually share this information, or “gossip” about a person you know or think is trans. Not only is this an invasion of privacy, it also can have negative consequences in a world that is very intolerant of gender difference—trans people can lose jobs, housing, friends, and sadly have even been killed upon revelation of their trans status.

Understand the differences between “coming out” as lesbian, bisexual, or gay (LBG) and “coming out” as trans.

Unlike “coming out” in a LBG context, where the act of disclosing one’s sexuality reveals a “truth” about that person’s sexual orientation, disclosing one’s trans status often has the opposite effect. That is, when a person “comes out” as trans, the listener often assumes the “truth” about the trans person is they are somehow more fundamentally a member of their sex assigned at birth, rather than the gender with which they are currently identifying/living. In other words, sometimes “coming out” makes it *more difficult* for a trans person’s gender to be fully recognized.

Do not tolerate anti-trans remarks or humor in public spaces.

Consider strategies to best confront anti-trans remarks or jokes in your classroom, lab, office, residential group, or organization. Seek out other allies who will support you in this effort.

If you don’t know what pronouns to use, ask.

Be polite and respectful when you ask a person which pronoun they prefer. Then use that pronoun and encourage others to do so as well.

Be patient with a person who is questioning their gender identity.

A person who is questioning their gender identity might shift back and forth as they find out what identity and/or gender presentation is best for them. They might, for example, choose a new name or pronoun, and then decide at a later time to change the name or pronoun again. Do your best to be respectful and use the name and/or pronoun requested.

Don't try to tell a person what "category" or "identity" they fit into.

Do not apply labels or identities to a person that they have not chosen for themselves. If a person is not sure of which identity or path fits them best, give them the time and space to decide for themselves.

Don't assume what path a trans person is on regarding surgery or hormones, and don't privilege one path or another.

Affirm the many ways all of us can and do transcend gender boundaries, including the choices some of us make to use medical technology to change our bodies. Some trans people wish to be recognized as their gender of choice without surgery or hormones; some need support and advocacy to get respectful medical care, hormones, and/or surgery.

Don't ask a trans person what their "real name" is.

For some trans people, being associated with their birth name is a tremendous source of anxiety, or it is simply a part of their life they wish to leave behind. Respect the name a trans person is currently using.

Don't ask about a trans person's genitals or surgical status.

Think about it—it would not be considered appropriate to ask a non-trans person about the appearance or status of their genitalia, and it is not appropriate to ask a trans person that question either. Likewise, don't ask if a trans person has had "the surgery." If a trans person wants to talk to you about such matters, let them bring it up with you. Many people choose to not have surgery and others prefer not to speak about the surgery they have had. No one is more or less trans, nor more or less the gender they are presenting as, based on surgery.

Don't ask a trans person how they have sex.

Similar to the questions above about genitalia and surgery—it wouldn't be considered appropriate to ask a non-trans person about how they have sex, so the same courtesy should be extended to trans people.

Don't police public restrooms.

Recognize that gender variant people may not match the little signs on the restroom door—or your expectations! Encourage schools, businesses and agencies to have unisex bathroom options, and offer to accompany a trans person to the bathroom, in a "buddy system," so they are less vulnerable.

Don't just add the "T" without doing work.

"LGBT" is now a commonplace acronym that joins lesbian, bisexual, gay, and transgender under the same umbrella. To be an ally to trans people, gays, lesbians and bisexuals need to examine their own gender stereotypes, their own prejudices and fears about trans people, and be willing to defend and celebrate trans lives.

Know your own limits as an ally.

Don't be afraid to admit you don't know everything! When dealing with a trans person who may have sought you out for support or guidance, be sure to point that person to appropriate resources when you've reached the limit of your knowledge or ability to handle the situation. It is better to admit you don't know something than to provide information that may be incorrect or hurtful.

Listen to trans voices.

The best way to be an ally is to listen with an open mind to trans people themselves. They are the experts on their own lives! Talk to trans people in your community. Consult the LGBT Center to find out where to learn more about trans lives.

Characteristics of an ALLY

- ✓ Listen openly.
- ✓ Actively pursue a process of self-education. Learn about the history and culture of target groups.
- ✓ Acknowledge and take responsibility for your own socialization, prejudice and privilege.
- ✓ Be willing to examine and relinquish privileges.
- ✓ Learn about and take pride in your own identities.
- ✓ Identify your own self-interest in acting as an ally.
- ✓ Make friends with people who are different.
- ✓ Know resources about and for target groups.
- ✓ Educate others.
- ✓ Take a public stand against discrimination and prejudice.
- ✓ Interrupt prejudice and take action against oppression even when people from the target group are not present.
- ✓ Risk discomfort.
- ✓ Do not be self-righteous with others (especially other dominant group members).
- ✓ Challenge the internalized oppression of people in target groups.
- ✓ Support the value of separate meetings/events/activities for members of target and agent groups.
- ✓ Have a vision of a healthy multicultural society.

Resource: *Responding to Heterosexism on Campus*, Diversity Works Training Manual, 1991. Source: University Health Center Sexuality Education eXchange, 472-7447 or email: ptetreault1@unl.edu