

Transgender Across the Curriculum: A Psychology for Inclusion

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Neumann (2005) called for an analysis of marginalization and inclusion of lesbian, gay, and bisexual students in psychology. As psychology instructors begin to infuse such content, the curriculum still overwhelmingly neglects the transgender community. This invisibility of transgender people within psychology courses allows for perpetuation of myths, stereotypes, and oppression of this particular population. Transgender inclusion requires efforts to eliminate bias in the classroom, such as derogatory comments and jokes, as well as faculty self-education with regard to the appropriate terminology for transgender subgroups. By infusing relevant transgender content into lectures and reading materials, instructors contribute to normalizing transgender issues for an inclusive curriculum.

Recent suggestions for transforming the psychology curriculum called for inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) issues (Goldfried, 2001; B. Greene & Croom, 2000; Neumann, 2005; Simoni, 2000; Weinstock, 2003). During the last decade, psychology textbooks have increased coverage of sexual orientation issues when addressing human sexuality (Hock, 2007; Hyde & DeLamater, 2006), the psychology of gender and prejudice (Crawford & Unger, 2004; Jones, 2002), and adolescent development (Kail, 2007). However, with the exception of many psychology of women and gender textbooks, the transgender community remains marginalized in psychology. In fact, the literature emphasizing affirmative campus environments for LGBT students commonly focuses on sexual orientation and the needs of lesbian, gay, and bisexual students (Biaggio, Orchard, Larson, Petrino, & Mihara, 2003; Browning & Kain, 2000; Connolly, 2000; Goldfried, 2001; B. Greene,

2000; Lark & Croteau, 1998) but neglects transgender students. This article offers psychology instructors relevant terms and definitions, as well as avenues for eliminating bias in the classroom. In addition, this article provides resources and ideas for infusing transgender content across the curriculum within courses focused on gender as well as traditional core psychology courses.

Elimination of Classroom Bias

To create an accepting classroom environment for transgender students and educate nontransgender students, instructors might choose to pursue self-education to learn current terminology (Carter, 2000; Lovaas, Baroudi, & Collins, 2002; Sausa, 2002). Although distinctions between biological “sex” and socially constructed “gender” might seem obvious to some, many psychology students and even instructors remain unaware of the distinction and use the two terms interchangeably. In the wider culture and also many classrooms, the two terms regularly become confused. The term *sex* refers to biological and physiological distinctions between males and females with emphasis on differences in genital anatomy. However, *gender* refers specifically to social expectations about behaviors and roles for women and men that are “constantly created and recreated out of human interaction [and] out of social life” (Lorber, 2007). For example, a 6-year-old boy might directly experience gender when told by adults that boys should not play with dolls. Although intertwined with gender, *gender identity* refers to

an individual's self-identification as male or female. For most individuals, gender identity presents as a match with physiological sex. On the other hand, if one's gender identity conflicts with physiological sex, he or she falls into the transgender category.

According to Carter (2000), the term *transgender* covers a wide range of categories including cross-dressers, intersexuals, and transsexuals. The transgender umbrella term includes several categories of individuals who violate culturally dictated gender norms in various ways independent of sexual orientation. Carter suggested that the term *cross-dresser* (and the less accepted *transvestite*) applies to anyone who wears the clothing of the opposite sex and warned that the term does not imply specific reasons for the behavior. Previously referred to as *intersexual*, people with disorders of sex development are born with atypical genitalia that can complicate immediate identification with the "girl" or "boy" dichotomous paradigm (Consortium on the Management of Disorders of Sex Development, 2006). Sausa (2002), Lovaas et al. (2002), and Carter (2000) provided extensive reviews of appropriate terminology including transsexual, cross-dresser, gender dysphoria, intersexual, female-to-male, and male-to-female. In addition, Davidson (2007) offered an anthropological approach to the nuances of the "transgender" umbrella. These resources also explain the distinctions among commonly confused terms, such as sexual orientation versus gender identity and sex versus gender. As psychology faculty incorporate the proper terms into classroom lectures and discussions, the classroom becomes more inviting for transgender students and also raises awareness among nontransgender students.

Identifying and addressing concerns for transgender students also calls for the elimination of biased language, such as inappropriate pronoun usage (Lovaas et al., 2002; Sausa, 2002). As a male-to-female transsexual student, the third author experienced discrimination perpetrated by professors that could be avoided. One faculty member consistently required her to play the male actor during classroom role plays, and professors often used masculine pronouns when referring to her in class. If classroom activities involve dividing into groups by sex, deferring to student preference rather than insisting a transsexual student join a certain group could reduce feelings of marginalization. Although transgender students often share their pronoun preferences with faculty, a syllabus statement inviting students to discuss pronoun and naming preferences with the professor might encourage the needed clarification. Using a student's acquired

female name, for example, rather than the male birth name listed on the class roster, sends a message of acceptance of transgender individuals and of attentiveness to their needs. Ultimately, effective communication about a particular transgender student's specific needs requires effort on the part of both student and instructor.

Faculty can help reduce bias in the classroom by allowing transgender students to determine whether they will disclose their status to the class as a whole. In reference to gay and lesbian students, Messinger (2002) recommended that instructors leave classroom sexual orientation disclosure decisions to each individual student. LGBT students sometimes encounter faculty that share their gender identity with other students or the class as a whole without their permission. Given the potential bias from others once gender identity is revealed, transgender students might choose to share this aspect of their identities when they feel comfortable and others might avoid disclosure altogether. In addition, Messinger warned that instructors should never expect lesbian or gay students to speak for the entire community. Singling a transgender student out to educate the class on the transgender experience or provide views of the entire transgender community serves to further isolate and tokenize the student.

Transgender and transsexual students also face campus and classroom bias that students generate in a variety of forms. Commonly in classroom settings, the third author perceived that other students avoided seats in close proximity to her. Group work frequently presented a challenge, as several students openly proclaimed they refused to work with her on class projects. When these types of events occur, instructor intervention, perhaps in the form of assigning groups, might diffuse acts of discrimination and promote fairness in the classroom. Syllabus statements promoting inclusion and collegiality in the classroom, along with verbal emphasis on these values, might also discourage such student-to-student discrimination.

Along with inclusive statements, the syllabus can offer additional ways to convey a climate of transgender inclusion for a particular course. If an instructor typically provides examples of appropriate paper topics, that topic list could refer to gender identity and transgender concerns as they relate to the course. Syllabi providing additional resource lists beyond the assigned readings could easily include articles and books about and by intersexual, cross-dressing, or transsexual individuals, for example.

Transgender Course Content

Within psychology programs, gender-focused and social psychology courses readily lend themselves to transgender content, for example, when distinguishing between biological sex and socially constructed gender. In addition, gender courses could easily incorporate transgender analysis of gender socialization when covering childhood, identity, media images, motherhood, work and achievement, health, body image, relationships, and the underlying sources of gender expectations. For example, including recent findings with regard to transsexual body image both before and after surgery (Kraemer, Delsignore, Schnyder, & Hepp, 2008) provides another perspective on body image while exposing students to transsexual issues. Within social psychology courses, instructors can expose students to cultural influences on gender socialization and explain distinctions among sex, gender, sexual orientation, and gender identity (Carter, 2000; Davidson, 2007; Lovaas et al., 2002; Sausa, 2002). Lecture materials and discussions of prejudice, stereotypes, and in-group versus out-group attitudes that include transgender examples will also help raise awareness among students. Given the violence that transgender people often experience, instructors might cover hate crimes against transsexuals in lectures on prejudice or aggression. For example, these particular lectures could include coverage of the murder of Gwen Araujo, a male-to-female transsexual (Juang, 2006) and Stotzer's (2008) findings on gender identity and hate crimes.

Developmental and abnormal courses also provide many avenues for infusing transgender materials into the curriculum. Developmental courses could incorporate topics such as current medical models for surgery on intersexual infants, gender identity development in children, the transgender coming out process, and comparisons of the transitioning process for teens versus middle-aged adults seeking corrective surgery. Within abnormal courses, instructors could discuss the criteria for gender identity disorder and to encourage students' critical analysis of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV-TR)* (American Psychiatric Association, 2000) classifications. Using various critiques of gender identity disorder classifications (Bartlett, Vasey, & Bukowski, 2000; Carter, 2000; Gainor, 2000), instructors could incorporate a class debate about the impact of labeling, connections between classification and insurance coverage, and the potential career costs associated with being diagnosed with a mental illness. In addition, inclusion

in abnormal psychology courses of Grossman and D'Augelli's (2007) study of suicidal thoughts and behaviors among transgender youth can provide students with more information about this group.

At first glance, transgender issues might appear less relevant in learning, biological, and industrial/organizational courses. However, these courses also include opportunities for transgender content. During presentations on operant conditioning, instructors of learning courses can lead discussions of possible psychological consequences of punishing transgender children for exhibiting behaviors appropriate for the opposite gender. Biopsychology and neuropsychology instructors can cover research on transsexual brain structures, such as the discovery of female limbic nucleus neuron counts for male-to-female transsexuals (Kruijver et al., 2000). An industrial/organizational psychology lecture might review a recent investigation of experiences with workplace dynamics as transsexuals undergo the transition from one sex to another (Schilt & Connell, 2007).

Transgender Reading Materials

In addition to infusing transgender issues and research into specific psychology courses, selection of textbooks and supplemental readings inclusive of transgender content helps to establish an affirming classroom environment. An essential source of information, *The Transgender Studies Reader* (Stryker & Whittle, 2006), offers historical and current perspectives on transgender and transsexual issues from medical, psychological, sociological, and feminist perspectives. Although not focused exclusively on transgender psychology, B. Greene and Croom (2000) provided excellent resources for making the psychology courses more inclusive of LGBT issues. In her reflective piece about life with her cross-dressing husband, Boyd (2007) dispelled myths and stereotypes. Colapinto's (2001) book, *As Nature Made Him*, reviews the story of a boy raised as a girl, including his struggles with gender identity, and explores the nature versus nurture gender debate. Autobiographical accounts by transsexual individuals (Bornstein, 2004; Boylan, 2003; Diamond, 2004; Feinberg, 1997; J. Greene, 2004; Kailey, 2006) and qualitative studies (Cromwell, 1999; Devor, 1999; Rubin, 2003) offer students access to personal voices and experiences. Readings addressing intersexual concerns (Harper, 2007; Preves, 2003) provide students new ways of thinking about the male-female

sex dichotomy. Incorporation of supplemental readings specifically devoted to cross-dressing, intersexual, and transsexual individuals might also diffuse stereotypes and decrease prejudice against transgender people.

Conclusions

As psychology programs and individual faculty strive to incorporate gay, lesbian, and bisexual issues into the curriculum, content addressing gender identity and transgender issues deserves consideration and inclusion as concepts distinct from sexual orientation. Conscious efforts to eliminate instructor bias in the form of derogatory comments, perpetuating stereotypes, and marginalizing transgender students are critical aspects of creating a classroom climate of inclusion. By infusing relevant transgender content into lectures and reading materials, instructors contribute to normalizing transgender issues for an inclusive curriculum.

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Notes

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