

Broadening Understanding: Students' Perspectives on Respecting all Sexual Orientations and Gender Identities in University Classrooms



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Oppression and marginalization of people who identify as LGBTQ+ persist on university campuses despite their right to be free of discrimination under the Ontario Human Rights Code. In an attempt to highlight the real and detrimental impacts of normative heterosexual and cisgender ideologies on Ontarian students the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (OUSA) has committed itself to elevating student voices on this issue. OUSA conducted a mixed-methods, primary research project to provide understanding of the opinions and experiences of LGBTQ+ identifying students. Student responses were collected using an online survey, which yielded 311 valid responses from university students across Ontario. While most results were positive, findings that a fifth of respondents felt uncomfortable in campus life, accompanied by responses implicating instructors as a source of this discomfort, suggest there is an on-going need for educators to work harder to incorporate diverse perspectives about both gender and sexual orientation into university curricula. Content analysis of open-ended survey responses was used to describe the barriers students experienced. Diversity orientation and course content were referenced most often among open-ended responses. Diversity orientation was also most often cited as a barrier and problematic assumptions were identified as barriers more often than course content. Training was most often identified as a solution, suggesting this is a strategy that faculty can adopt to increase their diversity orientation and decrease problematic assumptions. Educators must recognize their responsibility for facilitating safe, empowering classrooms; this research offers seven strategies for accomplishing this goal.

Oppression and marginalization of people who identify as LGBTQ+ persist on university campuses despite their right to be free of discrimination under the Ontario Human Rights Code. Specifically, LGBTQ+ students continue to face significant barriers to visibility and acceptance throughout their university careers. All members of the university community have a role to play in ensuring this trend does not continue. In an attempt to highlight the real and detrimental impacts of normative heterosexual and cisgender ideologies on

students the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance has committed itself to elevating student voices on this issue.

Rose (2015) conducted a mixed methods, primary research project to provide understanding of the opinions and experiences of students who do not conform to heterosexual and cisgender paradigms—this includes those who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Two-spirit, Queer, or Questioning. Individuals outside of cisgender paradigms may identify as trans, gender non-binary, genderqueer,

genderfluid, agender, or any other descriptor that indicates that their gender identity does not correspond with their birth-assigned sex (Egale Canada Human Rights Trust [Egale], 2013). Student responses were collected using an online survey, which yielded 311 valid responses from university students across Ontario. The survey asked about LGBTQ+ individuals' feelings of comfort and inclusion on campus; access to dedicated clubs, events, and safe spaces; classroom experiences; experiences with health services and counselling; and academic and extra-curricular engagement.

While most results were positive, findings that one in five respondents still felt uncomfortable in campus life, accompanied by responses implicating instructors as a source of this discomfort, suggest there is an on-going need for educators to work harder to incorporate diverse perspectives about both gender and sexual orientation into university curricula. Content analysis of select open-ended survey responses was used to systematically identify the barriers sexual and gender minority students experienced. The survey also solicited solutions for overcoming these barriers. In doing so, the instrument and resultant data offer constructive contributions to academic literature and the public policy domain.

A general lack of knowledge, awareness, and acceptance of queer identities among faculty and other students was identified as a significant barrier for respondents. They found their identities were seldom visible among course content, university faculty, or the student body. Heterosexist and cissexist assumptions, and the use of non-inclusive language only aggravated the feelings of isolation that developed from diminished visibility on campus. Respondents suggest that proactive education and training may alleviate some of their concerns. Educators have considerable influence over, and opportunity to create diverse, safe, and empowering classrooms; this research offers seven strategies for accomplishing this goal.

Literature Review

Research indicates that negative climates persist on postsecondary campuses. An American survey conducted in 2003 showed large majorities of lesbian, gay, and bisexual undergraduate and graduate students rate their campuses as homophobic and say that they hid their sexual orientations in order to avoid discrimination (Longerbeam, Johnson, Inkelas, & Lee, 2007). Similarly, in 2013, students at the University of Alberta also reported discomfort with being open about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity on campus (Kinkartz, Wells, & Hillyard, 2013). In the same survey, students who identified with racial, ethnic, cultural, or religious minorities showed even more discomfort being open about their LGBTQ+ identities. As University of Alberta respondents reported prevalent use of homophobic and transphobic language on campus, minority students' desire to keep aspects of their identities private may be due to fear of assumptions, stereotyping, and falling victim to derogatory comments, sexual harassment, or hate crimes.

Other research has found that transgender students may feel especially marginalized or invisible when little to no effort is made to acknowledge their presence (Beemyn, Curtis, Davis, & Tubbs, 2005). Trans high school students in Ontario report high levels of harassment and violence, as well as feeling unsafe in gender-segregated facilities (Schein, Bauer, & Pyne, 2014). Left unaddressed, fear of harassment or violence may result in trans people avoiding public spaces; in fact, 19% of respondents to the Trans PULSE survey reported avoiding schools due to fear of being harassed, being read as trans, or being outed (Schein et al., 2014).

In their campus climate survey, Yost and Gilmore (2011) found that heterosexual and cisgender individuals felt more positively about their campus climate, suggesting that these individuals were less likely to notice and interrogate the ways in which their institution benefitted them at the expense of others. While unintentional these attitudes perpetuate heterosexism and genderism among institutional communities.

Negative perceptions of LGBTQ+ individuals limit the experience of those whose interests and realities do not conform to mainstream cultural norms, a rule that applies inside and outside of university classrooms (DeSurra & Church, 1994; Kinkartz et al., 2013). As such, without basic dedication to, and acknowledgement of equal rights of all, many students will continue to exist within the margins of the classroom (DeSurra & Church, 1994). This is troubling when it is known that sexual minority students are more likely than heterosexual students to experience mental health problems (Bauer, Scheim, Pyne, Travers, & Hammond, 2015; Oswalt & Wyatt, 2011; Przedworski et al., 2015). These problems go beyond often-documented disparities between experiences of depression and anxiety extending to additional disorders including attention deficit, bipolar, bulimia, panic attacks, and obsessive compulsive disorders (Przedworski et al., 2015). Determinants of suicide risk are elevated among trans people and consistently attributed to social exclusion and victimization (Bauer et al., 2015). These are also key contributors to suicide disparities across marginalized populations—namely, gender non-conforming, sexual minority youth (Bauer et al., 2015).

Psychological stresses prevent students from fully engaging in campus events, organizations, and clubs, and impede their overall academic potential (Oswalt & Wyatt, 2011). Recalling findings that trans people report avoiding certain public spaces, one must wonder if trans students avoid specific places on campus. Scheim et al. (2014) found high proportions of Trans PULSE respondents reported avoiding public washrooms (57%), gyms (44%), and social clubs or groups (23%). When LGBTQ+ identifying students experience discrimination, they limit their academic choices and consider leaving their institutions more often than their heterosexual and cisgender counterparts (Oswalt & Wyatt, 2011; Yost & Gilmore, 2011).

Educators have long been found to play an important role in students' university experience such that students wish for their instructors to take responsibility for fostering nurturing and respectful classroom environments (Lopez & Chism, 1993). Educators can set the tone for their classes by

displaying, what students perceive to be, either welcoming attitudes (open discussion and affirmation of gay and lesbian issues or people) or taking negative stances (engagement with homophobic humour and belittling those who raise gay and lesbian issues) (Lopez & Chism, 1993). Avoidant tactics and heterosexist assumptions are problematic when instructors discuss marriage, poverty, power, and other issues in ways that deny the experiences of all but heterosexual individuals (Lopez & Chism, 1993). Kinkartz et al. (2013) note that the more frequently negative language is used in everyday conversation, the less it is considered hurtful. This breeds fear among sexual and gender minorities and allows discriminatory, non-supportive, and unsafe climates to develop on campuses and in classrooms.

Students judge faculty members' attitudes by the language they use, their responses to dissonant situations, the inclusiveness of their curriculum, and by the ways they respond to students' work on LGBTQ+ topics (Lopez & Chism, 1993). In this way, marginalization can be explicit or implicit—explicitly marginalizing situations are overt, intentional, and highly threatening for targets, while implicitly marginalizing situations are often unintended (DeSurra & Church, 1994). For those who are discriminated against in the classroom, opportunities to develop a sense of belonging and self-esteem are stifled and ultimately their growth is limited (DeSurra & Church, 1994).

Methodology

In November 2014, OUSA conducted a survey of 311 LGBTQ+ identifying students. The questionnaire was developed following a series of informal interviews and focus groups with students and service providers at Queen's University, McMaster University, Wilfrid Laurier University, the University of Waterloo, and Brock University. While invitations to participate in these interviews and focus groups were extended to all of OUSA's member student associations, recruitment was only successful at the five institutions listed above. The resultant

survey instrument consisted of 25 questions and was administered online using SurveyGizmo.

Any Ontario university student identifying under the LGBTQ+ umbrella was eligible to participate in the survey. Respondents were recruited using a snowball sampling method and social media, namely Twitter and Facebook, whereby eligible OUSA members were encouraged to bring the survey to the attention of others in their networks. Respondents were limited to one submission using a cookie-based anti-duplication mechanism. This approach was selected both for its convenience and for its ability to reach individuals from marginalized communities who are otherwise difficult to identify. This also meant that universities themselves were not involved in the recruitment or research. In this scenario, there were no institutional research ethics boards to consult. Regardless, all researchers involved—Rose (2015) and myself—completed the TCPS 2 CORE Tutorial to ensure the project was conducted ethically. All respondents participated voluntarily and anonymously.

Eligible participants were screened using a two-step process. First, inclusion criteria were explained in the opening letter of information and potential respondents were asked to indicate whether or not they qualified. Second, respondents who indicated they were both heterosexual and cisgender were disqualified (these records were removed from the dataset prior to data analysis). A mixed-methods approach was taken to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. The survey covered a variety of topics—comfort and inclusion on campus; access to dedicated club, event, and safe spaces; classroom experiences; experiences with health services and counselling; and academic and extra-curricular engagement—most of which will not be discussed here. The open-ended responses provided the most directive information for improving the inclusivity of university classrooms. As such, additional content analysis was conducted specifically for the *Empowering Learners, Effecting Change* conference.

Data Analysis

Content analysis was used to identify common themes among open-ended survey responses. In total, 76 responses were loaded into NVivo as individual cases. A directed approach was used to count both manifest and latent themes among these cases. I began this process by immersing myself in the data and attempting to organize responses according to a predetermined set of coding categories. These coding categories were determined using grounded theory, that is, the categories were developed and informed by existing research, but also respondents' own submissions. After the first pass over the raw data, they were re-read and reorganized to further refine the coding categories, ensuring they reflected the latent themes among responses. Some cases were organized under multiple coding categories. Once the text was appropriately organized, the resulting organizational structure was counted and described in numerical (quantitative) and contextual (qualitative) terms. This technique does not test causal relationships between variables, rather it is used because it is the most effective way to identify and present the information present in raw qualitative data and can indicate the proportional weight to place upon the themes and concepts that are revealed (Berg & Lune, 2012).

Coding Theory

As is required to successfully apply grounded theory, existing research was used to determine an early set of coding categories. I consulted sources that specifically outlined challenges to, and benefits of establishing inclusive and diverse classrooms.

Incorrect assumptions about learning behaviours and capacities have been found to contribute to the maintenance of exclusionary classrooms (Garibay, 2015). These assumptions contribute to, and build upon, the daily discrimination LGBTQ+ students experience, particularly, the accumulation of microaggressions. Microaggressions “are the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate

hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership” (Sue et al., 2007 as cited in Garibay, 2015, p. 13). In addition to the experience of routine discrimination, LGBTQ+ identifying students may also feel underrepresented on their campuses due to a lack of visibility among the professoriate and administration (Linely et al., 2016).

Relatedly, representation through visibility extends to curriculum—course content has been identified as potentially exclusionary for non-mainstream students. The consideration to be made is whether the perspectives and scholarship of diverse groups are represented (Garibay, 2015). Pryor’s (2015) student interviewees provide additional context claiming that, in their experience, language courses are inherently gendered thus students are subject to being misgendered and that science, technology, engineering, and math programs are less adept at accommodating transgender people. These interviewees also made enrolment decisions (switching majors and choosing courses) based on assumptions about the open-minded nature of certain course topics (Pryor, 2015).

Faculty members could better support their LGBTQ+ students by confronting normative discourses within their curriculum (Linely et al., 2016; Pryor, 2015). However, to do this faculty must engage in training and educate themselves on the issues and concerns facing LGBTQ+ communities. Educators have a responsibility as scholars to educate themselves on these issues and include pertinent LGBTQ+ material in their courses (Lopez & Chism, 1993). Mohr and Sedlacek (2000) define diversity orientation as “one’s level of interaction with and interest in people from groups (e.g., racial, ethnic, religious, class) other than one’s own,” (p. 71). Working to increase their diversity orientation could help improve instructors’ natural tendencies to include diverse perspectives in their course content, while more readily demonstrating their allyship to marginalized students (Garibay, 2015; Linely et al., 2016). Purposefully using inclusive language has also been identified as a means of establishing more inclusive classrooms (Pryor, 2015). This would manifest in the use of students’ preferred pronouns and names as well as in confronting the use of

homophobic (transphobic, sexist, etc.) language (Linely et al., 2016).

Results: Closed-Ended Survey Responses

The original survey analysis included 311 valid responses; 92 % were studying full-time, 91% were undergraduate students, and 9% were graduate students (Rose, 2015). As Table 1 and Table 2 demonstrate, there was considerable diversity among respondents’ sexual orientations and gender identities, but greater representation of a multitude of sexual orientations.

Table 1

Demographic breakdown of survey respondents’ sexual orientations, n = 309

Sexual Orientation	Proportion of Respondents (%)
Homosexual/Gay/Lesbian	51
Queer	28
Bisexual	26
Pansexual	14
Asexual/Gray Asexual	8
Demisexual	5
Bi-curious	4
Polysexual	2
Other	2

While most respondents expressed that they felt welcome and comfortable in campus life, a sizeable minority indicated that they did not: roughly 20% of respondents felt excluded and uncomfortable on their campuses (Rose, 2015). Most respondents (38%) reported that they were sometimes made uncomfortable in class regarding their sexual orientation or gender identity by their professors’ comments or assumptions; 25% indicated often or always feeling this way (Rose, 2015). When asked

how often their professor used gender neutral language 15% said never and 35% said rarely (Rose, 2015). Among this half of respondents, 27% identified as non-cisgender and 12% identified as cisgender (Rose, 2015). A mere 1% of respondents reported their learning materials and curricula (outside of gender studies) always included LGBTQ+ figures while just 6% reported learning material and curricula often included these figures (Rose, 2015).

Table 2

Demographic breakdown of survey respondents' gender identities, n = 306

Gender Identity	Proportion of Respondents (%)
Cisgender	78
Genderqueer	9
Non-binary	8
Gender fluid	7
Trans	6
Agender	3
Other	2

Rose's (2015) initial findings suggested that campus communities could be particularly unwelcoming and exclusionary for students who did not identify as cisgender. Students who did not feel comfortable and included on campus were statistically more likely than those who did feel comfortable to have had professors whose comments made them uncomfortable (Rose, 2015). Compared to cisgender respondents, non-cisgender respondents were less likely to have high feelings of comfort and inclusion, less likely to feel welcome at large university events and activities, and more likely to feel uncomfortable with professors' comments in class (Rose, 2015). These associations between non-cisgender identity and negative interactions with faculty indicate a need to incorporate diverse perspectives about gender in addition to sexual orientation into university curricula. All students, regardless of sex, sexuality, gender identity, or gender

expression are entitled to feel safe, included, and respected inside of the classroom. This post hoc content analysis was conducted in an effort to determine the best ways to apply this principle in practice.

Results: Open-Ended Survey Responses

The framework developed for the content analysis process included six categories: diversity orientation, course content, problematic assumptions, language, training, and representation. Before discussing the relationships between these categories, a summary of the coding frame is required.

Deconstructing Negativity & Acknowledging LGBTQ+ Identities

The problematic assumptions category included any reference to stereotypical, hetero- or cis-normative, hetero- or cis-sexist, or homophobic microaggression. These aggressions were perceived in assumptions, comments, and interactions with instructors or peers. The most common problematic assumption, by far, was the dominance of heterosexuality or cisgender orientations as the default identity. Other forms of casual discrimination included experiences of transphobia, gendering of classrooms and curriculum, adherence to gender stereotypes, and general stigmatization. Referenced only once each in this category: interacting with homophobic staff and students, and the assumption of disadvantage. Respondents wanted faculty members to deconstruct these harmful assumptions. There was a distinct call for instructors to minimize heteronormativity in their classrooms. One respondent described the consequences, saying that they have remained "in the closet" in order to maintain support with applications and project supervision from their professors.

In order to be included in the diversity orientation category, cases must have referred to professors' and other students' knowledge and

recognition of LGBTQ+ issues and identities. A general lack of knowledge, awareness, or acceptance of queer identities among faculty and other students was discussed as a barrier, which was exhibited in the use of incorrect gender pronouns, allowance of negative attitudes within the classroom, and perceptions of limited knowledge about the fluidity of sexuality and gender. Respondents wanted their professors and teaching assistants to proactively educate themselves about queer identities, experiences, and appropriate language. The perceived role of instructors was to facilitate safe and informative spaces for class discussion and also act as leaders on these issues, inside and outside of the classroom. One respondent explained:

If the learning starts in the classroom, hopefully it will extend to the greater university community. It's of utmost importance that professors guide conversations surrounding LGBTQ+ issues in positive, informative, and most importantly, accurate manners. It is also important that students feel comfortable expressing their confusion so that the classroom can become an effective learning space for all students, regardless of identity(s).

Planning Inclusive Course Content

The most infrequently referenced coding category was representation. There were just 17 references to the numerical representation and general visibility of LGBTQ+ identities among faculty and students. The consequences of limited representation were described as feelings of invisibility, isolation, and loneliness. In respondents' own words, it was problematic having few out faculty members, not seeing themselves in course content, and feeling underrepresented in certain disciplines. Indicative of the references in this category, one student explained that seeing queer and trans people in their everyday life would make them feel more welcome on campus. There were also singular references to the desire to see

more safe space indicators and queer guest speakers outside of gender studies.

Cases coded to course content included any mentions of curricular components, such as lecture and unit topics, learning materials, other resources, or syllabi. Lack of representation and references to the accomplishments of queer individuals in course content was described as a barrier almost as frequently as this was described as a positive strategy for increasing inclusivity. Respondents wanted to see more examples and research about queer individuals used in class. While the lack of inclusion was sometimes discipline specific, the potential for increasing representation was not. Two different students explained:

If you're not in women's studies, it can feel like queerness is a novel concept. It's as if we don't have accomplishments or a history. For example, if we're talking about WW2 and the concentration camps, I expect a mention of queer folks! In English classes I want to see classic novels (like *The Well of Loneliness*) used amongst the many pieces of literature that portray heterosexual relationships.

Often in classes profs use only research from hetero couples - last week in class we were discussing risky sex behaviours and condom use. When asked if the studies included gay people, the prof said that all of it was on hetero couples because there is very little research on gay couples. In 5 seconds I did a search and found at least 20 different sources on lesbians and risky sex behaviours alone - which just makes me think she didn't even look or care to.

Using Inclusive Language, Pronouns, & Names

Explicit references to the use of both problematic and inclusive language were coded under a single category. Commonly referenced was a lack of inclusive language, which led to feelings of exclusion.

Also exclusionary was the misuse of (or no use of) preferred pronouns and names. There was a desire for faculty to educate themselves on appropriate language to reverse this behaviour. The use of inclusive language and gender-neutral language were each explicitly mentioned once. Flippant use of language placed significant personal burden on respondents to repeatedly come out to new instructors, since there was no way to do this administratively.

Training & Independent Learning

The training category contained references to education on non-binary gender identities, sexual orientations, and anti-oppression strategies. Training was very rarely referenced as a barrier; if it was, respondents tended to implicate a lack of training as a barrier for them. Specific topics for trainings were: queer and trans identities, inclusivity, diversity, and anti-oppression. Ultimately, respondents wished to avoid the burden of being their own advocates and the only educational resource on these topics. There was a sense that, as expressed by one respondent, “The administration and faculty should be educating themselves on these things, not having individual queer students educating the university staff one by one, face to face.”

Content Analysis

The above analysis of open-ended survey responses included 76 cases, or records, from the original survey dataset. Cases were selected only if references to classrooms or education manifested in the text. Among these cases, 56 were submitted by self-identified cisgender individuals and 20 were submitted by non-cisgender individuals (i.e. those identifying as trans, gender non-binary, genderqueer, genderfluid, or agender). Table 3 summarizes the results of the coding process showing the total coded references among all cases (a single case could be referenced in multiple categories). Diversity orientation and course content were referenced most often, with 31 and 30 references respectively.

Table 3

Total coded references among all coding categories

Code	Barriers	Solutions	Total
Diversity Orientation	23	8	31
Course Content	14	16	30
Problematic Assumptions	16	5	21
Language	9	11	20
Training	1	19	20
Representation	9	8	17
Total References	72	67	139

Although diversity orientation is also most often referred to as a barrier, problematic assumptions were referred to as a barrier more often than course content. Training was most often referred to as a solution, suggesting this is a strategy that faculty can adopt to increase their diversity orientation and decrease problematic assumptions.

Overall there were relatively few uses of the words sexual orientation (3) and sexuality (13), but many uses of the word gender (29). This is interesting given that most respondents indicated that their gender corresponded with their birth-assigned sex. Looking at word frequencies in this way revealed considerable (31) uses of stemmed words beginning with “hetero,” suggesting that this dominant sexual identity also has influence regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.

Further analyses revealed interesting patterns in the text and illustrative relationships between coding categories. Examination of related coding categories revealed that course content and problematic assumptions, and diversity orientation and language were most often coded together. This could suggest that problematic assumptions manifest most frequently in course content, and that a poor diversity orientation manifests in instructors’ language. Cases referring to problematic assumptions were never double-coded under the training category,

Table 4
Coded references proportional to gender identity

Code	Cisgender	Proportion of References (%)	Non-cisgender	Proportion of References (%)
Barriers	37	47	15	75
Solutions	41	53	5	25
Total References	78		20	
Course Content	24	26	6	15
Diversity Orientation	19	20	9	23
Language	12	13	7	18
Problematic Assumptions	13	14	8	21
Representation	12	13	4	10
Training	14	15	5	13
Total References	94		39	

further disassociating training from the barriers experienced and emphasizing it as a desirable strategy for better integrating diversity in the classroom.

Table 4 shows the number of coded references proportional to respondents' gender identities. Non-cisgender individuals (whose birth-assigned sex is different from their gender) referred to barriers more often than cisgender individuals and also more frequently referenced problematic assumptions and language. Cisgender individuals referred to course content more often. When discussing problematic assumptions non-cisgender respondents referred to exclusionary assumptions of both heterosexuality and cisgender identity. They also mentioned experiencing casual transphobic and cissexist discrimination from their professors. In addition to discussing the problematic assumption of their heterosexuality, cisgender respondents referred to feeling excluded from course content by non-inclusive language and stigmatized by homophobia within this coding category. These differences suggest that cisgender individuals have more issues with the representation of their sexuality in the classroom and thus experience DeSurra and Church's (1994) version of implicit marginalization. There is also the alarming

suggestion that non-cisgender individuals experience more overt discrimination as their responses were coded under categories less associated with visibility and more associated with explicit marginalization, a finding that would agree with existing literature (Beemyn et al., 2005; Pryor, 2015; Yost & Gilmore, 2011).

These results support earlier research that calls upon faculty members to take more responsibility for setting a welcoming and inclusive tone for LGBTQ+ students (DeSurra & Church, 1994; Kinkartz et al., 2013; Lopez & Chism, 1993). At the same time, this research elevates students' voices and shares their perspectives on the state of their classroom environments. As an instructive tool, these findings summarize students' preferred solutions for increasing their confidence and comfort in class. The potential strategies for incorporating diverse perspectives about sexual orientation and gender identity in the classroom can be summarized as such:

- Use inclusive and gender neutral language—for example avoid using unnecessarily gendered job titles in anecdotes,
- Use students' preferred pronouns and names,

- Represent queer identities in course content by using examples and research about queer issues and people,
- Deconstruct problematic assumptions and minimize heteronormativity in the classroom,
- Learn about queer identities, experiences, and appropriate language independently,
- Engage in training on: queer and trans identities, inclusivity, diversity, and anti-oppression strategies, and
- Recognize and acknowledge queer identities and experiences openly and without judgement.

Limitations

The most important limitation is that the sample is not representative as a result of using a non-random recruitment method. The target population was difficult to identify and organizational resources were limited; it was not feasible for this study to isolate eligible participants from the broader student population nor was it possible to determine a representative response rate (Rose, 2015). The survey instrument did not ask respondents to report their demographic characteristics beyond sexual orientation, gender identity, and academic status (for example identification of racial, ethnic, cultural, or religious identities was not reported). As a result, I am not able to investigate the intersections between minority statuses along such lines as sexual or gender minority status.

These results are limited by selection bias: it is possible that individuals with the most extreme perspectives (perhaps those most involved with advocacy and activism or those that have had particularly difficult experiences) were more likely to take the survey than those with more neutral, or average, perspectives (Blair, Czaja & Blair, 2014). Additionally, it is likely that most responses come from students within the organization's membership, thus restricting the sampling frame by geography (Rose, 2015). All of OUSA's members are located outside of the Toronto area and, at the time the

survey was administered, in Southern Ontario. However, while anonymity and security measures make it impossible to verify which institutions respondents attended, some responses indicate that the snowball sampling method was successful in recruiting respondents from non-member schools.

Two more limitations relate to the internal validity of the instrument. Firstly, as with any self-reported data, the quality of responses collected in the survey relies upon the honesty of respondents. Due to the care taken to respond to the survey's open-ended question, it is reasonable to assume most respondents were truthful and forthcoming in their responses. However, steps were taken to remove duplicated or ineligible records from the dataset prior to analysis (Rose, 2015). Lastly, it could be argued that some survey questions were leading. The open-ended question, upon which this content analysis is based, asked specifically for solutions to problems presupposing that problems existed (Rose, 2015). Despite best efforts to design a neutral and objective survey instrument, the policy-oriented nature of OUSA's research potentially undermines these efforts, as the intention is to specifically seek improvements on existing conditions (Rose, 2015). To minimize the effects of any priming or leading questions, less neutrally phrased questions were placed at the end of the questionnaire, as can be seen in the appended questionnaire (Rose, 2015). The inclusion of the questionnaire demonstrates the types of questions respondents were asked as well as the full limits of demographic data collection. Any trends derived from this data require additional research to determine their veracity.

Conclusions

This research is intended to share LGBTQ+ identifying students' solutions for increasing their confidence and comfort in university classrooms. The solutions offered were derived from a 2014 survey of 311 LGBTQ+ identifying students attending university in Ontario. While most respondents felt welcome and included in campus life, a substantial minority did not. Respondents reported being made

uncomfortable about their sexual orientation or gender identity because of professors' comments or assumptions. A directed content analysis of 76 open-ended survey responses was used to investigate what assumptions, interactions, and situations were making these respondents uncomfortable as well as their preferred solutions.

This research offers a strong foundation for future research on LGBTQ+ student experiences. The results explain students' perceptions of faculty members' roles in facilitating welcoming and inclusive learning environments and the relationships between student-faculty interactions and students' overall feelings of inclusion. The specific impacts of heteronormativity and cisnormativity on students' academic experience offer a useful contribution to literature in both academic and public spheres. The strategies that students identified for incorporating diverse perspectives about sexual orientation and gender identity into their classrooms can be applied by public policy analysts, university administrators, and independent faculty members. This research is merely a basis for beginning discussions about combatting heterosexism and cissexism in university classrooms, but puts the voices of those who are most affected at the centre.

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Biographies

Danielle has been working with the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance since October 2014. As Research & Policy Analyst, Danielle has authored policy papers about student health and wellness, the needs of mature students, reforms to the tuition framework and student financial assistance system, and sexual violence prevention. She advocates on behalf of OUSA's members to government and university stakeholders through representation on working groups, committees, and at conferences.

Appendix A - Definitions

Agender: A term used by individuals who have no gender (Richards et al., 2016); this term provides a neutral way of describing one's gender identity.

Asexual/Gray Asexual: A term used to describe the sexual orientation of individuals “who may not experience sexual attraction or who [have] little or no interest in sexual activity” (Egale, 2013, p. 6).

Bi-curious: Within the context of the gender binary (male-identifying/female-identifying), an individual may choose to use this term to describe their sexual orientation if they tend to be emotionally and sexually attracted to either male-identifying or female-identifying individuals, but have a desire to experiment with those identifying with the opposite (Callis, 2014).

Bisexual: A term used to describe the sexual orientation of individuals who are “attracted emotionally and sexually to both male-identified and female-identified people” (Egale, 2013, p. 6).

Cisgender: “Refers to a person whose gender identity corresponds with their birth-assigned sex (e.g., a cisgender male is someone whose gender identity is man and was assigned male sex at birth)” (Egale, 2013, p. 6).

Cisnormativity: Similar to heteronormativity, this term refers to the biases and ideologies that perceive all individuals as cisgender, privileging their identities and experiences over other variant identities and experiences (Egale, 2013, p. 7).

Demisexual: A term that “refers to an identity on the asexual spectrum in which a person does not typically experience sexual attraction unless accompanied by romantic attraction” (Rubinsky & Cooke-Jackson, 2016, p. 4).

Gay: A term used to describe the sexual orientation of individuals who are “emotionally and sexually attracted to someone of the same sex and/or gender—

gay can include both male-identified individuals and female-identified individuals” (Egale, 2013, p. 6).

Gender non-conforming: An alternate term “used for individuals whose gender expression is different from societal expectations related to gender” (Mottet & Tanis, 2008, p. 6).

Genderfluid: A term used to describe the gender identity of those “who move between genders in a fluid way” (Richards et al., 2016, p. 96).

Genderqueer: A term used by some individuals who do not identify singularly as male or female and by others who may identify with both male and female genders as well as those who reject the gender binary or gender altogether (Egale, 2013, p. 6-7; Mottet & Tanis, 2008, p. 6). Another umbrella term with similar connotations is *gender non-binary* (Richards et al., 2016).

Heteronormativity: Refers to cultural or societal bias or ideology that perceives all individuals as being straight (heterosexual) and so privileges their worldview above those in same sex/gender relationships (Egale, 2013).

Lesbian: A term describing the sexual orientation of female-identified individuals who are “emotionally and sexually attracted to female-identified people” (Egale, 2013, p. 6).

Pansexual: A term describing the sexual orientation of those who are emotionally and sexually attracted to more than two genders (Callis, 2014; Egale, 2013).

Queer: A term associated both sexual orientation and gender identity; historically this has been a derogatory term used to insult LGBTQ+ individuals, but has been reclaimed to refer to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans people (Egale, 2013; Mottet & Tanis, 2008). “Some use queer as an alternative to gay in an effort to be more inclusive, since the term does not convey a sense of gender” (Mottet & Tanis, 2008).

Questioning: A term that describes an individual “who is unsure of their sexual orientation or gender identity” (Egale, 2013, p. 7).

Transgender: Shorthand, “Trans.” An umbrella term for individuals whose gender identity, expression, or behaviour does not match their birth-assigned sex, commonly used to refer to transsexual, cross-dressing, androgynous, genderqueer, and/or gender non-conforming identities and experiences (Egale, 2013; Mottet & Tanis, 2008; Pryor, 2015).

Two-spirit: An English term used in place of the many Indigenous words for Two-spirit; some Indigenous individuals may identify with this term instead of, or in addition to other terms describing their sexual orientation or gender identity (Egale, 2013). Historically, Two-spirit individuals were respected community members given special status for their ability to understand male and female perspectives and worked as visionaries, healers, and medicine people (Egale, 2013).

Appendix B – Broadening Understanding: LGBTQ+ Student Experience Survey Instrument

Eligibility

Eligible participants for this survey are Ontario university students who:

- identify as something other than the gender they were assigned at birth, or
- identify as something other than heterosexual, or
- both

1) Based on this, are you an eligible participant?*

- I am eligible
 I am not eligible (I identify as both cis-gender and heterosexual, or I am not an Ontario university student)

Basic Information

2) Are you a currently a part-time or full-time student?

Part-time

Full-time

3) What is your current year of study?

First Year

Second Year

Third Year

Fourth Year

Fifth or more

Graduate Student

4) What is your age?

Please feel free to skip these questions if you wish.

Any information you offer is helpful to our analysis.

5) Please write-in or select the sexual orientation(s) that you identify with most.

or please write in:

Asexual

Androgynosexual

Bisexual

Bi-curious

Demisexual

Heterosexual/Straight

Homosexual/Gay/Lesbian

Queer

Pansexual

Polysexual

6) Please write-in or select the gender identity(ies) that you identify with most.

Agender

Cisgender (you identify with the gender assigned to you at birth)

Gender-fluid

Genderqueer

Non-binary

Trans

or please write in:

7) I feel comfortable and included on campus.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

8) I feel welcome at large university events or activities.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

9) I find it hard to meet and connect with like minded students on my campus.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

10) I wish there were more student areas on campus (such as student lounges or club rooms) that were permanently designated as safe spaces for LGBTQ+ students.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

11) I would prefer to use gender neutral washrooms on campus.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

12) I wish the university employed more full-time staff to run LGBTQ+ groups, events, and spaces.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

13) Professors say or assume things in class that make me feel excluded or uncomfortable regarding my sexual orientation or gender identity.

Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always

14) Materials and curricula (outside of gender studies courses) include LGBTQ+ people/characters.

Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always

15) My professors use gender neutral and inclusive language.

Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always

16) In my experience, medical providers on campus (e.g. physicians or nurses) have been professional and respectful.

True
 False

I have never used these services.

[IF FALSE] 17) If you wish, please elaborate:

18) In my experience, medical providers on campus have had the knowledge necessary to provide me with good care.

True

False

I have never used these services.

[IF FALSE] 19) If you wish, please elaborate:

20) In my experience, mental health workers on campus (i.e. counsellors, therapists) have had the knowledge necessary to provide me with good care.

True

False

I have never used these services.

[IF FALSE] 21) If you wish, please elaborate:

22) Does your campus has a pride centre, pride group, or similar group that provides services, resources, or peer support for LGBTQ+ students?

Yes

No

I don't know

23) Are you involved with it as either a member/user or staff/volunteer?

Yes

No

24) What do you think is the biggest barrier, disadvantage, or issue facing LGBT or Queer university students in particular? Feel free to give examples from your own experiences.

25) What actions can university administrators or faculty take to improve the university experience for LGBT or Queer students in particular?