APAGS Training Video

Navigating Possible Discrimination as an LGBTQ Student in College

Transcript

Slide 1

Welcome to the webinar titled "Navigating Possible Discrimination as an LGBTQ Student in College." This webinar is organized by the APAGS Committee on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Concerns. The APAGS Committee on LGBT Concerns works on behalf of LGBTQ graduate students in psychology and their allies nationwide. The committee provides education, advocacy, and personal and professional development opportunities to ensure the successful graduate experience of LGBTQ and allied students in psychology. We aspire to build, strengthen and empower our members through the use of innovative technologies, collaborative advocacy, and inclusive practice.

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This webinar will discuss stigmatization and discrimination that LGBTQ students might face on their campuses and different ways to address it.

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Despite all the possibilities for support, many students who identify as LGBTQ still, unfortunately, face discrimination on their campus. Discrimination is defined as the prejudicial treatment people face based on a group they identify with. We will now look at some statistics and consequences of discrimination.

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In the 2010 National Campus Climate Survey conducted by the Q Research Institute for Higher Education, 23% of students who identified as LGBQ and 30-40% of those who identified as gender queer or transgender reported having experienced harassment on campus in the past year based on their sexual orientation or gender expression. Also, 20% of LGBTQ students of color reported experiencing race-based harassment in addition to sexual orientation or gender-based harassment. In another study of 14 campuses, approximately 75% of students, faculty, and staff described their college climate as intolerant of LGBTQ individuals.

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Research has linked discrimination against LGBTQ individuals with higher levels of substance use, risky sexual practices, depression, and suicidality.

LGBTQ students consider dropping out of college more frequently than their heterosexual and cisgender peers as a result of the stressors associated with being a sexual or gender minority. One study has suggested that up to 1/3 of LGBTQ undergraduate students will drop out of school during some point of their undergraduate careers, often due to issues around coming out and discrimination.

The consequences described here may be particularly true for young people from racial or ethnic minority groups who face the added stress of navigating multiple marginalized identities and who frequently report higher rates of family and community rejection as a result of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

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When deciding whether or not to confront discrimination in general, it's important to ask yourself three questions: Did the discrimination really occur? Should I respond to the discrimination? And if so, how should I respond to the discrimination?

The first question encourages you to ask yourself if what happened was in fact motivated by discrimination. This includes a consideration of whether the action occurred because of sexual orientation or gender identity, or perhaps because of another factor like race or ability status. Trust your own personal judgment about what you believe motivated the discriminatory act against you. If you're not sure, you can find confirmation by surveying your surroundings, to see if another person witnessed the same thing.

The second question addresses potential consequences of confronting discrimination. It is important to consider what the nature of your relationship is to the person who committed the discriminatory act. For example, is the person your advisor? A friend? A student? A client? A stranger? In each case, you might choose to handle the situation differently. Often our relationships with others include a power hierarchy, such as between you and your advisor, or you and one of your students. In these cases it is important to assess the importance of providing feedback about the behavior and how such feedback might be received within the context of your role with that individual. Some advisors and supervisors may be open to feedback while others might not be. Use your best judgment and consult with other students to gauge how best to handle the situation in a way that will not jeopardize your relationship with that individual or standing within the program. Also, it is important to consider what you hope the result of the interaction will be. Are you trying to educate the person while maintaining a relationship with them? Are you just hoping to stand up for yourself regardless of how the individual receives your feedback? Depending on what your objective is, there are different ways to confront the discrimination.

This brings us to the third question about which mode of confrontation might be most appropriate and effective in a given situation. For example, you may choose to respond assertively and directly, or perhaps more passively. If the incident occurred with someone in your department, in choosing which way to respond, it might be a good idea to talk with other people in your program who have worked with or possibly even confronted that person to get their advice about what manner would work best. Discussing this issue with trusted faculty and staff members will also be helpful.

Determining how and when to confront discrimination that appears in an academic setting can have a lot to do with understanding the power dynamics of your particular program as well as any relationships that you may have already formed with other students or faculty. Also, be

mindful of your physical surroundings and the other people present to assess if confronting the individual might further jeopardize your own safety. Context is critical.

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Graduate students in practice-oriented areas of psychology will gain clinical experience during their training working with clients. In these situations, they may encounter discriminatory attitudes from clients. In this context, it is important to remember that unless it is therapeutically indicated, we as clinicians should not attempt to alter or influence the beliefs of clients that differ from our own.

If you are wondering whether or not to address discriminatory attitudes your client has expressed, consult with your supervisor. It can also be important to confide your concerns to your supervisor even if they advise you not to address them with your client, so that you can express your feelings and receive your own emotional support. Additionally, your supervisor may be able to provide suggestions regarding how to maintain rapport and empathy in the face of such discrimination. If your supervisor is not a safe person for you to discuss personal reactions with, you might want to find an additional practitioner, faculty member, or student who you can talk to about client concerns, while keeping all specific client information confidential.

Also, consider how addressing negative perceptions of marginalized populations would fit within your own personal theoretical orientation. In some orientations, notably feminist, exploring beliefs about societal roles is an essential part of therapy. In other orientations, like interpersonal process therapy, discussing your own in-the-moment reactions to the client is part of what creates therapeutic change. Thus, depending on how you identify as a therapist, it may be therapeutically indicated to talk with your client about their discriminatory attitude. Even if your theory does include consideration of social roles or therapist disclosure, be sure that you are applying those techniques in a way that is intended to address your client's presenting concerns. If you do choose to address a client's discriminatory remarks, do so in a way that is clinically appropriate and theory-driven.

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Advocating against discrimination can have positive consequences, including reducing harmful dialogue, creating safer environments, and advancing awareness of cultural differences in your immediate and larger circles. However, it is important that you engage as an advocate by being fully aware of potential professional and personal risks that could occur. Becoming an advocate for LGBTQ issues will increase your visibility as a minority within both your program and university.

Once you begin to advocate for these issues, members of the faculty, staff, and student body may assume or perceive you to be a member of a sexual or gender minority group, regardless of how you personally identify.

Advocating might lead to your identity being disclosed without your permission to faculty and staff, research participants, students that you teach, clients, campus administrators, and others.

Often, you will have little control over when or how individuals label you, and you may be unable to fully assess the potential reactions of others. You may also risk losing the social support of those who hold biases and stereotypes about LGBTQ individuals. If you are involved with LGBTQ advocacy in your community, it's possible that you may run into your LGBTQ clients at advocacy events, which opens the door to potential dual role relationships that will need to be addressed.

Based on the existing climate towards and visibility of LGBTQ people within your program and institution, you may be seen as a token minority. For example, some people may assume that your admission to your program was the result of your program needing to meet a quota of LGBTQ students. If your program does not already include significant numbers of faculty, staff, and students who are LGBTQ-identified or culturally competent in LGBTQ issues, you may be seen as the authority on aspects of the LGBTQ experience. You may be treated as an in-house expert on all sexual or gender minority issues, or even all diversity-related issues. Others may expect that you will be able to fully understand and articulate the needs of all LGBTQ individuals. These demands could create a substantial amount of stress for students.

When any of these things happen, it's good to turn to your sources of support for guidance. Faculty and staff members who are aware of the internal politics and structure of the department might be able to give you good advice about how to proceed. Other supports that we reviewed in earlier slides may also have some advice or suggestions to help you push back on tokenizing, being the authority, and so forth. In the end, it will be up to you to determine how much, how frequently, and how intensely you are willing to advocate for LGBTQ concerns and fight against discrimination.

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If you wish to explore issues of discrimination on your campus with a little more depth, we have provided several questions for you to consider by yourself or in a class or peer group:

1. How have you confronted discrimination and stigmatization on your campus?

2. How would you encourage others to confront discrimination and stigmatization on their campus?

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Here is a listing of references for the content of this webinar.

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Feel free to pause this webinar as needed to view specific references.

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Thank you for listening to this webinar from the American Psychological Association of Graduate Students' Committee on LGBT Concerns. Please visit our website at www.apa.org/apags. There you can get our social media and email information to leave us feedback and suggestions. You can also view additional training resources and learn about ways to get involved in APAGS.