



AMERICAN
PSYCHOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION

A Guide for LGBT Students
Navigating Graduate Training

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**A Guide for LGBT Students
Navigating Graduate Training**

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**PROUD AND PREPARED:
A GUIDE FOR LGBT STUDENTS
NAVIGATING GRADUATE TRAINING**

American Psychological Association of Graduate Students
Committee on Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity
(APAGS-CSOGD)

MISSION STATEMENT

The APAGS Committee on Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity (APAGS-CSOGD) works on behalf of the community of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender 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 LGBT and allied students. The committee aspires to build, strengthen, and empower its members through the use of innovative technologies, collaborative advocacy, and inclusive practice.

ON THE USE OF LANGUAGE IN THIS GUIDE

Language often imposes constraints on the ability to communicate about diversity issues clearly and concisely. Throughout *Proud and Prepared: A Guide for LGBT Students Navigating Graduate Training*, we deliberately use a variety of terms to describe the communities with which LGBT people identify. These terms include *LGBT*, *sexual minority*, and *queer*, among others. We believe that in using a variety of terms, we are better able to capture the diversity that exists within sexual minority communities. When we use acronyms, we choose to use LGBT, with the understanding that this acronym is not as inclusive as others (e.g., LGBTQQAI), but is currently the most widely used and understood of the alternatives. When we use the term *LGBT*, we mean to include all individuals who identify as diverse with regard to sexual orientation and gender identity.

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|prīd|
noun



The word “pride” has become associated

with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) communities thanks to countless parades and other community events and celebrations with that title. In 2009, President Obama even officially commemorated the month of June as “Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Pride Month.” What does *pride* actually mean though? According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2015), pride can be both “the consciousness of one’s own dignity” and “a person or thing that is the object or source of a feeling or deep pleasure or satisfaction.” In titling this resource guide “Proud and Prepared,” we hope to not only align ourselves with the history of LGBT empowerment, but also to emphasize both of those aspects of pride in our own identities. We hope that through using this resource guide, you and other students like you will not only be reminded of your own worth as an individual but also of the satisfaction and pleasure you can take in your unique intersecting identities.

It is true that as members of a marginalized population, LGBT-identified individuals may experience frequent discrimination and microaggressions, and navigating the graduate school process can be more complicated and challenging as a result. However, there are also unique opportunities to be had in graduate school as an LGBT-identified individual or ally. This guide is therefore designed to prepare you to take on the challenges and take advantage of the opportunities graduate school may present.

This guide is brought to you by the American Psychological Association of Graduate Students Committee on Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity (APAQS-CSOGD, formerly the Committee on LGBT Concerns). Our committee’s dedication to helping support our student members as they pursue graduate studies has been longstanding. More than 20 years ago, APAQS-CSOGD issued a pamphlet for LGBT students that highlighted concerns students may face in graduate school and provided a

list of resources for them. Then, in 2006, CSOGD published the first edition of this resource guide to provide more comprehensive recommendations and support to students who identify as LGBT. Clearly, the experience of LGBT students has changed dramatically in the last 20 years, both in society and within our profession. Since that time, LGBT individuals have gained significant ground in the struggle for social equality. However, discrimination and microaggressions against LGBT communities are still widespread.

Because of the ongoing negative impact of heterosexism and cisgenderism on LGBT individuals, it continues to be imperative that our committee provide support for graduate students who identify as LGBT. It is our hope that this guide can serve as a helpful initial reference for you as you research graduate school options, begin your graduate school career, or confront new challenges along your academic journey. Thus, the guide is intended for individuals who identify as LGBT or as allies to LGBT communities and who are considering pursuing graduate studies in psychology or who are already enrolled in graduate programs.

Rather than simply providing a list of resources (although such a list is included in the final section), this guide is filled with suggestions, advice, and support written by a variety of LGBT psychology graduate students. *Proud and Prepared* is presented as a series of chapters, each of which addresses a distinct set of issues graduate students may face. These chapters have been intentionally written by students from diverse personal and academic backgrounds to represent a broad range of perspectives. We wish to note that this is not an exhaustive guide, but rather a starting point for spurring additional exploration.

The concerns of LGBT individuals continue to be under-addressed in the field of psychology as a whole, but the unique concerns of other LGBT groups, including individuals who identify as bisexual, transsexual, transgender, or gender variant, are represented even more scarcely. As we compiled each chapter of this guide, we attempted to highlight the unique concerns of these groups, while also including separate chapters on tips for transgender and bisexual students. There is certainly overlap among all sexual minority groups (e.g., lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender), and we believe the information in this guide will apply to many LGBT individuals. Yet we also believe there is much that is unique about each group, and it is important to explore those differences between groups to the extent it is possible to do so.

The APAGS-CSOGD members are excited to provide this guide for you. Please come to us with any comments or unanswered questions. We would love to hear from you, and we welcome your involvement in our committee! APAGS-CSOGD maintains an active Listserv, which you can join through the APAGS homepage (www.apa.org/apags). We also coordinate a national mentoring program and other initiatives to support LGBT students in psychology and their allies (<http://www.apa.org/apags/governance/subcommittees/csogd.aspx>). We hope you find this guide truly helps you to feel both proud and prepared as you undertake your graduate school journey!

CHAPTER

ASSESSING YOUR
PROGRAM'S CLIMATE

Included in the American Psychological Association's Vision Statement (APA, 2009) is the goal "To be an effective champion of the application of psychology to promote human rights, health, well-being, and dignity." This and similar statements have informed a culture within the profession of psychology that seeks to be affirming and inclusive of diverse identities, including LGBT identities. To this end, a large body of psychological literature on LGBT issues has been published in recent years, including the *APA Guidelines for Psychological Practice With Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Clients* (2011), which features attitudes psychological professionals and faculty are encouraged to uphold toward LGBT persons. Though this document is geared specifically toward practicing psychologists, the main tenets apply to behavior toward LGBT students as well.

Specifically, the APA encourages psychologists to not pathologize LGBT identities and to recognize the impact discrimination has on the psychological well-being of LGBT persons (APA, 2011). Furthermore, research has increasingly focused on the importance of a supportive and affirming environment for LGBT individuals in a variety of contexts, including LGBT students on university campuses (Perez, DeBord, & Bieschke, 2000; Sanlo, 1998). Therefore, this chapter explores areas LGBT graduate students can reflect on when assessing graduate school climates toward LGBT individuals and highlights some considerations for students who are thinking about coming out during their graduate training.

DEFINING CLIMATE

We use "climate" to refer to the general sentiment toward LGBT individuals in one's department, lab, clinic, or other social environments. Research has shown that LGBT persons can be impacted by LGBT climates across multiple levels, including regional and institutional settings (Kosciw, Greytak, & Diaz, 2009). A university setting offers a specific set of experiences and engenders a

Interpersonal interactions

Though information gleaned from value statements and coursework can provide some clues as to the overall climate of the program related to LGBT issues, your interpersonal interactions with others may provide you with the best source of information regarding what your individual experience may be like. Within a single program there are often substantial differences regarding attitudes toward LGBT issues. Some faculty members and students may be very supportive and affirming, while others with different life experiences, values, and training may be less committed to these goals. If you have concerns about how affirming faculty members or students may be, casually discussing LGBT figures prominently featured in the media or raising issues or discussions on behalf of LGBT clients or research participants can allow you to observe others' responses and attitudes toward LGBT persons. You may also consider enlisting trustworthy friends in your department to bring up LGBT issues in classes or applied settings so you can gauge the responses of others.

“I usually glean the level of support of a person or group of people based on my interactions with them prior to any mention of my sexuality. At my program I assumed that I would not run into many problems, given that psychology is often embraced by liberal thinkers. I also took a cue from the abundance of “S.A.F.E” stickers on faculty doors, which signifies they have attended LGBTQ+ training at the university.”

—Sarah Adelson,
University of Wisconsin, Oshkosh

“One of the most significant aspects of my program's climate is the realization that there are currently no ‘out’ core faculty. What's worse is that there are ‘whispers’ regarding the sexuality of some faculty members, I imagine making it more difficult to feel safe to be out as a faculty member in our program. This has the direct impact of feeling as though this is not a welcoming place for LGBTQ+ individuals. As an out gay woman, I am often looked at as ‘the only one’ and am often on the receiving end of microaggressions. It would make a world of difference to me to know my faculty felt safe enough to be out in our department.”

—Deanna Cor, MA,
George Washington University

Assessing the availability of program support

For LGBT students who feel able to ask or search for more information more directly, the following questions may be useful to ask as you try to determine the availability of support in your program:

- If you have faculty or students within your department who publicly identify as LGBT, do you perceive that they are treated with the same respect and courtesy as other faculty or students?
- If they have partners, are the partners included and welcomed at social events held by your department to the same degree as partners of cisgender and heterosexual persons?
- What is the quality of interactions between heterosexual/cisgender and LGBT individuals in your program?

Often, out members of your department can be the best source of information on the overall climate and can usually offer their perspectives about which individuals may be most sensitive and respectful of sexual minority concerns.

Research training

Inclusion in research can also provide valuable clues about the climate in research-based graduate programs.

Useful research-related questions to consider

- Are sexual orientation and gender identity addressed within the body of research produced by your department?
- Do the authors discuss potential limitations of broadly applying theories and measures that could pathologize or ignore the experiences of individuals within minority groups?
- Do authors discuss important between-group differences (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation) and acknowledge within-group differences among the variables examined in their work?
- When differences exist between majority and minority groups, do faculty members attribute these differences to pathology or inferiority, or do they demonstrate an understanding of the unique life experiences of individuals from minority groups?
- Did faculty members provide support, resources, and information on LGBT issues in student-directed research?

It may be helpful to ask students if their research includes a focus on diversity issues. A lack of interest or willingness to explore such topics may be an indicator of a lack of support from your program. If you are able to find examples of past student research that addresses LGBT concerns (e.g., previously completed theses, dissertations, presentations, or talks that specifically discuss LGBT issues), you may want to ask the students involved in the project about the support they received from faculty and the

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR LGBT STUDENTS

APA RESOURCES

Amicus brieves related to sexual orientation

<http://www.apa.org/about/offices/ogc/amicus/index-issues.aspx#sexual-orientation>

Division 44 (Society for the Psychological Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Issues)

Division 44 strives to advance the contribution of psychological research in understanding lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender issues; promote the education of psychologists and the general public; and inform psychologists and the general public about relevant research and educational and service activities. Division 44 annually provides multiple graduate student awards for LGBT-related research and conference-related travel.

<http://www.apadivisions.org/division-44/index.aspx>

Division 44 also has committees focused on children, youth, and families; aging; bisexual issues; mentoring; racial and ethnic diversity; transgender people and gender diversity; communications; education and training; fellows; finance; membership; program; public policy; scholarship; and science.

<http://www.apadivisions.org/division-44/leadership/committees/index.aspx>

The American Psychological Association of Graduate Students

APAGS supports a Committee on Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity (CSOGD). CSOGD provides resources (including this resource guide, a mentorship program, an electronic mailing service, LGBT focused grants/scholarships, and convention programming) for graduate students in psychology.

<http://www.apa.org/apags>

<http://www.apa.org/apags/governance/subcommittees/csogd.aspx>

<http://www.apa.org/apags/governance/subcommittees/lgbt-training.aspx>

<http://www.apa.org/apags/governance/subcommittees/clgbtc-mentoring-program.aspx>

Guidelines for working with LGB clients

Guidelines for Psychological Practice With Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Clients was published by APA in 2011.

<http://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/resources/guidelines.aspx>

APA Mentoring Task Force

The task force provides a list of APA-affiliated mentoring programs.

<http://www.apa.org/education/grad/mentor-task-force.aspx>

Safe & Supportive Schools Project

This project works to strengthen the capacity of the nation's schools by promoting safe and supportive environments for all students and staff. The project aims to prevent HIV and other sexually transmitted infections among adolescents through building communities that promote acceptance and respect.

<http://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/programs/safe-supportive/default.aspx>

APA vision statement

<http://www.apa.org/about/apa/strategic-plan>

The Public Interest Directorate

This APA office runs an LGBT Concerns Office. By working closely with other groups within APA, the office works to eliminate the stigma of mental illness long associated with same-sex sexual orientation and to reduce prejudice; discrimination; and violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people. The website contains links to APA's resolutions on current issues related to sexual minority individuals (e.g., marriage, military service) and to the 2009 study on graduate faculty members in psychology with specific interest in LGBT issues.

<http://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/index.aspx>

<http://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/resources/survey/index.aspx>

Division 17 LGBT Issues Section

<http://www.div17.org/sections/lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgender-issues>

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