



Sexual Diversity at UWA

SEXUAL DIVERSITY AT UWA

The University of Western Australia is committed to providing an inclusive environment of equal opportunity and access in both employment and education for staff and students with diverse backgrounds and experiences. Sexual orientation is an important aspect of this diversity and is often ignored within organisations.

This guide aims to raise awareness and promote a developed understanding of sexual diversity. It provides information in relation to appropriate terminology and definitions, the legislative framework in the area of sexual orientation and gender history, UWA policies and initiatives and some important tips when working with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) staff and students.

Definitions

Bisexual

A valid and independent sexual identity describing a person who is emotionally and/or sexually oriented towards both genders

Gay

A common and acceptable term for men who are emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted or committed to members of the same sex. This term is often used generically for both the male and female gender as well as for the homosexual community in general

Straight

A common term used colloquially to describe persons who are emotionally, physically and/or sexually attracted or committed to members of the opposite sex

Homophobia

This is not a phobia per se but a commonly used term to describe a learnt prejudice around gay people or any behaviour, belief or attitude in self or others which doesn't conform to rigid sex-role stereotypes. It is a fear of homosexuality, homosexual people and of all things associated with homosexuality. It is expressed in a variety of ways including avoidance, overt or subtle negativity and, in extreme cases, physical violence against people who identify as gay

Homosexual

A (now dated) term to label people who are emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted or committed to members of the same sex

Intersex

Those people born with reproductive organs, genitalia and / or sex chromosomes that are not exclusively male or female

Lesbian

The most common and acceptable term to describe women who are emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted or committed to members of the same sex

Queer

A term, often used politically and within GLBT circles, inclusive of people who are not heterosexual – includes lesbians, gay men, bisexual, transgendered and intersex people

Sexual orientation

An enduring emotional, romantic, sexual, affectional and relational attraction to another person of the same and / or opposite sex e.g. heterosexual orientation

Sexual preference

What a person likes or prefers to do sexually; a conscious recognition or choice not to be confused with sexual orientation

Transgender (including Transsexual)

A person, often with heterosexual identity, whose gender identity is different from his/her biological sex. He/She may (or may not) elect to undergo chemical and/or surgical alteration aligned with their assumed gender identity

Transvestite

An individual who dresses in the clothing of the opposite gender for a variety of reasons

Legislative context – Sexual Orientation

In 2001 and 2002 the WA Parliament passed legislation to enhance the protection of LGBT persons in many areas of public life including employment and education. It is now unlawful to discriminate on the grounds of sexual orientation or gender history

Sexual orientation, gender history and discrimination

Sexual orientation means actual or assumed ('imputed') homosexuality, lesbianism, bisexuality or heterosexuality. It is important to note that it includes your actual sexual orientation as well as perceived or imputed characteristics of a person of that sexual orientation

Direct discrimination occurs where a person treats you less favourably than they would treat someone with a different sexual orientation or particular gender history, in the same or similar circumstances e.g. given a less favourable academic assessment as a result of homophobia

Indirect discrimination occurs if a person is required to comply with a requirement or condition with which a substantially higher number of people of a different sexual orientation or particular gender history comply or are able to comply, you can't or don't comply with it, and the condition is not reasonable in the circumstances e.g. an employment condition that adopts a heterosexual definition of 'families'

UWA Policy and Programs – Sexual Diversity

Sexuality has been part of UWA equal opportunity policy for over a decade and LGBTI issues have often been incorporated within aspects of University life e.g. employment conditions, teaching and research, grievance procedures.

UWA has implemented two ground breaking sexuality initiatives aimed at creating a more diverse and inclusive culture. The **Rainbow Project**, conducted in 2001, aimed to determine the campus 'climate' with respect to sexuality, among both staff and students, to identify the key attitudes and behaviours which give rise to discrimination and to identify key issues faced by LGBTI staff on campus.

The **Allies Project** established a network of staff and students, representative of the entire UWA community, who take on a support, education and advocacy role and develop further awareness and visibility in the area of sexuality on campus. The Allies, in educating themselves and others, assist in making the

UWA community safer and more affirming for LGBTI staff and students. Since the inception of the program in 2002, more than 120 staff and students from across all Faculties and Administrative units have been trained and now identify as Allies.

The **Queer Department of the Guild of Undergraduates** provides information, support and referral services for LGBTI students.

The **Equity and Diversity Office** is available to provide information, support and assistance with issues of harassment and discrimination. There is also a network of Equity and Diversity Advisers, some of whom have specific expertise in this area, who are available to offer assistance.

Issues identified by LGBTI staff and students (Rainbow Project)

While the campus climate at UWA was identified as being generally supportive, the following specific issues were identified by LGBTI staff and students:

Incidences of both overt and subtle homophobia have been reported.

Sexuality was not negative or positive but rather a neutral or invisible issue in the workplace and there was an 'unwritten rule' that sexuality was not to be touched upon or alluded to.

Heteronormativity exists in the workplace. This issue focuses on assumptions that staff make about one's sexuality, eg. 'talk' about 'partners' and domestic arrangements that can make the work environment unsafe and uncomfortable for those who feel unable to participate in the conversation without disclosing their sexual orientation.

There are many opportunities available for the teaching and learning environment to incorporate sexuality considerations.

The perception that discrimination in employment and opportunities for career progression may occur because of sexual orientation or perceived sexual orientation.

Points to consider when working with LGBTI staff and students

Be aware that there is a continuum of attraction/affiliation and not everyone is either 'heterosexual' or 'homosexual'.

Understand that sexuality is but one facet of LGBTI and heterosexual relationships.

Be aware that words and language commonly used (lesbian, queer, gay, dyke, queen) within the LGBTI community mean different things to different people and can often make important political or social statements.

Be aware of the diversity of relationships and family structures within the community – not all families consist of a heterosexual couple with children.

A homophobic minority can make for an unsafe climate, particularly when this behaviour goes unchallenged.

Be aware of any stereotypic attitudes or beliefs you may hold in relation to LGBTI persons and/or their issues. Do not let these beliefs influence your professional judgements and decisions in the workplace.

Don't assume that a LGBTI person is making an advance or wanting to discuss their sexual orientation with you if they express an interest in developing a friendship.

Reflect on the ways that being LGBTI in a predominantly 'straight' society could adversely affect how a person comes to understand themselves and experience the world.

While issues such as HIV/AIDS/safe sex have special significance in the LGBTI community, recognise that these issues also impact the wider community.

Focus on the verbal and nonverbal messages you are communicating about your level of acceptance and affirmation of LGBTI persons and their issues.

Look around your work and study environment. Does it reflect heterosexuality exclusively?

Be aware that more inclusive language can make a big difference, for example asking do you have a partner, rather than do you have a husband or wife.

FURTHER INFORMATION

The Equity and Diversity Office home page (www.equity.uwa.edu.au) contains details of:

- UWA equal opportunity and diversity policies
- Procedure for the management of harassment and discrimination issues
- An up to date listing of the UWA Equity and Diversity Advisers
- Rainbow Report, Ally Project and other sexuality-based information and resources

Information about how to contact an **Ally** and how to become an **Ally**, as well as additional resources, are available at www.uwa.edu.au/ally or email ally@admin.uwa.edu.au

The **UWA Guild Queer Department** is located on the second floor of the Student Guild building and may be contacted on 6488 3902, or by fax to 6488 1041 (mark fax to the Queer Department). The elected female and male Guild Queer Officers for 2005 are Beth Cole (kyanwings@lycos.com) and Giri Parameswaran (giri@primus.com.au)