

Diversity Development Workshop

Abstract

This workshop is designed to increase the participant's awareness and knowledge about lesbian and transgender identity. Three interactive activities are presented to: to affirm the belief that people from different backgrounds and cultures hold similar values and beliefs, recognize the widespread use of stereotypes, and to learn to reflect on how our cultural upbringing affects our acceptance of new information. A short film on a Latina's lesbian identity journey and a documentary on female to male transgender identity are shown and discussed. Expanding our awareness and knowledge of people different from ourselves opens us to learning skills to affirm, serve and support our richly diverse student populations.

I stumbled onto the topic for my Diversity Development Workshop after attending a "La Vita Jota" at the Multicultural Center at U.C. Santa Barbara (UCSB). The Chicano Studies Department, the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Student Alliance and the Women's Center jointly presented both a short film about a Latina lesbian's coming of age and a documentary about the gender identity development of Latina butch dykes and how Latino transgender females are creating their own definition of masculinity. The event concluded with a round table discussion with the producer of "Do You Mind If I Call You Sir", Karla Rosales, and Mary Guzman, who directed both films and wrote the screenplay for "Desi Is Looking For A New Girl." In my exuberance to share this experience with some coworkers, I recognized that some of my contemporaries were uncomfortable with the film topics. I realized that I had found the focus for my diversity development workshop because of the variance in comfort level among my colleagues about gender identity. I identified a need for us to increase our knowledge and skills to better understand our own values, and to better serve our diverse college population.

Initially, I was attracted to this event as part of my multicultural action plan. While watching 'Desi', I realized that I was just enjoying it as a movie, as well as using the film as a mechanism to increase my awareness about homosexuality in the Latina community. "Desi Is Looking For A New Girl" was the typical love found, love lost movie, except that it chronicled Desi's young adult love life and subsequent social and gender identity formation as a Latina lesbian. 'Desi' is set in an openly gay community in San Francisco and touches on the experiences of various homosexuals in a multicultural social set. "Do You Mind If I Call You Sir?" was a fascinating documentary that discussed the female to male transgender journey of several Latinos, from various cultures from Mexico and South America. The stories included examples of women who through medical transformations became transgendered into men, as well as women who identified as male in all aspects of their lives despite retaining biologically female. Terminology plays an important part in distinguishing between gender identities, but falls short in describing the unique individuals and personal stories shared in these films.

Raechelle Pope stresses the triad of awareness, knowledge, and skills, as the means to attaining multicultural competency in many of her publications. The foundation for this workshop includes a belief in the concepts: that understanding others different from ourselves enriches our view of the world, that it is important to honestly review and reflect on our own values and biases, that we need to acknowledge that the differences among us do not need to interfere effective communication or keep us from having meaningful relationships, and that we must overcome the barriers to cross cultural understanding in order to work toward building communities that value equality for all people. Thirteen percent of the undergraduate students at UCSB identify themselves as Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual or Transgender (Snapshot 2005). The purpose of this workshop is to further staff awareness and knowledge about homosexual,

bisexual and transgender identities as tools with which we can build skills to affirm, serve and support this rich segment of our student population.

In an effort to assess the needs of the ‘topic’ population, I met with a mixture of young adults (primarily female) in the greater Santa Barbara community, discussing perceptions and misperceptions they wished the ‘straight’ population understood about them. After watching these films, I attended regular course discussion sections for the two classes that attended the event. One course was a Chicano Studies class and the other a Women’s Studies class. Because of strict human subject regulations at my campus, I was told by the Office of Research that I could verbally poll students about my topic but that I could not use any formal survey instrument to collect data for this project (without going through their long screening and approval process). These lively class discussions, and the casual conversations I had with students at the LGBT Center further guided my understanding of both heterosexual and homosexual student perspectives on the topic of gender identity and gender labels. The sentiment of these discussions ranged from ‘I wish everyone was as okay with my gender identity as I am’ to ‘my personal identity is nobody’s business but my own’, and infinite iterations in between. These student interactions reinforced my belief that the local and vocal Lesbian population agreed that the campus and community should be better informed about our ‘sisters’, knowing that our similarities far outweigh our differences.

I invited 10 campus colleagues to participate in a pilot study for my workshop. Two declined because they were too busy, two failed to respond to even my second request and six became my pilot group. I created a simple questionnaire to test my pilot group’s comfort using some of the gender related terms that were used in the class discussions groups reviewing the

films and words that came up in conversations with students and friends while researching this project (Appendix 1).

The results of my rudimentary pilot quiz are summarized in Appendix 2. These results indicate that most of my sample population would benefit from awareness exercises about gender identity. Only when we are aware of our own perceptions and limited knowledge on a topic can we identify the skills we need to acquire to become more competent student affairs practitioners. 'Desi' and 'Call You Sir' both focus on non-mainstream female gender identity development. This workshop is designed to increase staff awareness and knowledge about this beautiful part of our student population. Although both films were about Chicana and Latina gender identity development, the rocky journey in finding one's sexual, personal, cultural and societal identity is both an intensely personal, and communal adventure in joy, sorrow, confusion, understanding and acceptance that all people travel, throughout time and across cultures. My personal belief is that we are born with a genetic predisposition that guides us toward our total (including gender) identity, despite the social norm and cultural taboos of the prevailing society. Of course, environment plays an important role in the process, but I believe that identity formation is rooted in genetics and beyond an individual's personal control. Mores of gender identity vary greatly among societies and those pre-assumptions govern both prevailing attitudes, and personal identity formation. I am willing to try to break down barriers that create prejudice, one person at a time, starting with myself.

Workshop: To help student personnel staff better understand lesbian and transgender identity.

1. Learning Goal – It is important to know that understanding others who are different from ourselves enrich our world view and allow us to see our similarities as well as our differences.

This activity provides an opportunity for participants to see that, in many ways, people from different backgrounds and cultures hold similar values and beliefs.

Activity One – Find your partner with the matching proverb card.

Time: 15-20 minutes.

Materials: A set of paired "Proverb Cards." (Appendix 3)

Procedure: In advance, print the proverbs from appendix 3 on index cards so that each proverb appears on a separate card. Count the number of participants in the group and select enough cards to equal the number of participants. If there an odd number of participants, the leader must participate in this activity. Make sure that the cards are selected in matching pairs (one card with a proverb from the United States and one card with a similar proverb from another country).

Mix up the cards and pass out one card to each participant. When all cards have been distributed, ask participants to move around and find the person who has a card with a similar proverb. Ask partners to stand together when they have found each other. For each set of partners, one person should have a proverb from the United States and the other person should have a proverb from another country. After most people have found their partner, ask those who have not found their partner to raise their hands. Ask those with raised hands to search among themselves for partners. When everyone has found their partner, ask each pair to read their proverbs out loud to the group. Ask the person with the proverb from the other country to read first, followed by the person with the proverb from the United States.

Discussion: This activity shows that although we have many differences when we compare ourselves to other kinds of people, we also have many similarities. We may have different ways of talking and different behavior patterns, but many of our most basic needs and interests are similar. This activity is from a Diversity Activities handout from the Penn State College of

Agricultural Sciences Coop Extension.

2. Learning Goal – We can not fully understand others different from ourselves until we explore our own feelings, and the biases and stereotypes related to our differences. We need to then open ourselves to accepting and learning about others. This activity allows participants to recognize the widespread use of stereotypes.

Activity Two – What Do You Know? or What Have You Heard?

Time: 20-30 minutes.

Materials: Large sheets of newsprint, tape, markers, and wall space or other surfaces to which newsprint may be taped. (I used the whiteboards in a conference room when I tested this some friends, I regretted that I did not have ‘hard copy’ to keep as personal learning tools. I recommend newsprint pads.)

Procedure: Before the presentation, label the top of each sheet of newsprint with the name a different type of person or group or term. Try to include a variety of dimensions of diversity. For this audience and workshop I selected: Women, Lesbians, Men, Fags, Teenagers, Mommies Boy, Valley Girls, Tomboys, Dykes, Femmes, Transgendered. Fold each sheet and tape the sheets on the walls or other surfaces in a manner that does not reveal the label. Leave enough space between them so that small groups can form around each sheet. I would introduce the activity with a brief discussion about various gender identities. I would stress that our cultural influences shape our perceptions of gender identity, both in ourselves and how we see others. It is something we begin learning as very young children; that the rules of our culture are learned from those around us; and that as children we generally accept these rules without question. Tell participants you want to engage them in an activity called "What Do You Know or What Have You Heard?"

Begin unfolding the posted newsprint sheets so that the labels are revealed. Tell each participant to circulate around the room to each sheet of newsprint and, with a marker, write one thing that they either know or that they have heard about the people or group identified by the label. Emphasize that what they write can be something that they know or something they have heard. Allow enough time for each participant to add a thought to each list. Then invite participants to take a few minutes to observe the completed lists.

Discussion: Can these comments be grouped in some way? What do many of the comments we have written on the lists represent? Are they all true? Where did they come from? (Responses might include parents, friends, teachers, books, the media, and others.) Guide the ensuing conversation back to the topic of stereotypes. Remind the group that we become conditioned to think about stereotypes on an almost automatic basis when we see or hear about someone whose background is different from our own. We all use stereotypes at one point or another. The important thing is that we begin to become more conscious of the fact that we often assimilate information without really thinking. We must filter all incoming information and discard or refute what we find unacceptable. This activity was adapted from a Diversity Activities handout from the Penn State College of Agricultural Sciences Coop Extension.

3. Learning Goal – Embracing that the differences between us do not need to interfere with effective communication or keep us from having meaningful relationships. We need to filter the information we receive, test its reality and investigate how we relate to it. We must reflect on how our cultural upbringing affects our acceptance of new information.

Activity Three – Web search.

Time: 1 hour

Materials: Computers with internet connections and a printer.

Procedure: The participants will search the internet for information on any of the terms: women, lesbians, men, fags, teenagers, mommy's boy, valley girls, tomboys, dykes, femmes, transgendered. Using Google, search on any of the above terms, when the first screen appears, note the number of 'results' indicated in the upper right quadrant of the screen before clicking on any one site. This activity will expose the participants to the volumes of internet postings related to our topic. Discuss that one must not blindly believe what they read on the internet without verifying sources, but that interesting and valuable information is readily available.

Give everyone time to browse around, encouraging them to visit various sites. Then have the participants locate and print a brief excerpt from a website that exhibits little to no credibility but offers an opinion or information or just personal views about the term being researched, have them include the web address on the printed sheet. Then have them locate a brief excerpt from a website that demonstrates credibility and informs their understanding of the term being researched, have them include the web address on the printed sheet.

Have the participants log into an educational journal data base and search on one of the above terms. Have them select a relevant article from a recognized journal and print it. The journal article is like a door prize. It is something to take home, a souvenir to remind them about the workshop. This is an example that one form increasing awareness is just fingertips away, the power is ours when we chose to use it.

Discussion – Lead a round table discussion reviewing what the group encountered in their searches. I was astonished when I googled the term 'fag' and my query yielded 1,660,000 results in 0.07 seconds. Although I grew up in a home where homosexuality was accepted and know that it is theorized that about 10 – 15 percent of the population have gender identities other than 'straight male or female', I was pleased and surprised at the information available on this

topic. However important research and reading are in the process of learning, there is no substitute for face to face dialogue as a tool for growth. We need to get out of our offices and into the dining commons, into the student union, and into our student's lives, to understand them as individuals. We have traits in common, and traits that distinguish between us, and we need to remember to celebrate both.

Recap of Learning Goals: Everyone needs to become aware that diversity is a beautiful thing. We need to see ourselves honestly and clearly before we can see others as they hope to be seen. Individual differences should not interfere with our relationships or our ability to communicate with others. We must work together to create communities where all people are valued.

Break – get up and stretch, go to the bathroom, have some light snacks or lunch.

Show the films. 90 minutes. I decided to do my activities prior to the movie, preparing my audience to see the films while the workshop's contents were dancing in their heads.

Close with an open discussion about inclusion and breaking down barriers. Let the participant's discussion flow freely. Hopefully the themes from the activities and films will have caused discord within the participants, because discomfort leads to a search for harmony. I believe that these activities will enhance the participant's multicultural awareness and trigger them to actively seek the knowledge needed to develop the skills. Reiterate that everyone loses when bias and prejudice cloud our understanding or guide actions.

Follow up: Set up a chat room for the participants to continue their dialogues about gender identity and provide an electronic bulletin board for the group to post diversity resources.

Appendix 1: A pilot study assessing the needs of my ‘learning’ audience.

1. Put an X in the cell that best describes your feelings about each term on the left.

	Neutral	Positive	Offensive	Unsure of meaning
Femme				
Butch				
Dyke				
Top				
Bottom				
Queer				

2. Would you use any of these terms everyday conversation with:

	Spouse	Co-worker	Student	Faculty
Femme				
Butch				
Dyke				
Top				
Bottom				
Queer				

3. Would you like to learn more about gender identity formation and how the Lesbian community feels about these terms as descriptors and labels?

4. Have you felt uncomfortable in serving a student with a gender identity different than your own?

5. What kinds of activities or events do you think would inform you about this segment of our student population and therefore help you to better meet the needs of a diverse student body?

6. Have you ever told a joke that made fun of someone with a different gender identity than your own?

Appendix 2: Distribution of responses to pilot study

	Neutral	Positive	Offensive	Unsure of meaning
Femme	BE	A	C	DF
Butch	E		ABCDF	
Dyke	E		ABCDF	
Top	E		F	ACD
Bottom	E		F	ACD
Queer	B		ACDF	

Respondent B thought that ‘top’ and ‘bottom’ were private terms and did not rate them. Respondent E thought that all the terms were descriptive and had their place in conversation if they were used correctly and NOT as labels.

2. Would you use any of these terms everyday conversation with:

	Spouse or partner	Co-worker	Student	Faculty
Femme	ABE	ABC		
Butch	ABE	C		
Dyke	ABE	C		
Top	E			
Bottom	E			
Queer	ABDE	BC		

Respondent E would use the terms with faculty if they were friends, not just acquaintances. Respondents D and F were unlikely to use these words in any conversation.

3. Would you like to learn more about gender identity formation and how the Lesbian community feels about these terms as descriptors and labels?

All responded ‘yes’ and respondent E suggested some resources to compliment my workshop.

4. Have you felt uncomfortable in serving a student with a gender identity different than your own?

Five answered 'yes', respondent E answered 'no'.

5. What kinds of activities or events do you think would inform you about this segment of our student population and therefore help you to better meet the needs of a diverse student body?

The answers included: films, books, discussion groups, testimonials (stories about individuals actual journeys in gender identity formation) and interactive activities to help identify unknown prejudices.

6. Have you ever told a joke that made fun of someone with a different gender identity than your own?

3 yes, 3 no

Appendix 3 – Proverbs to print on 3” x 5” cards for Activity 1.

Proverbs

He makes a wine cellar from one raisin. (Lebanon)
 He makes a mountain out of a molehill. (United States)

Even a tiger will appear if you talk about him. (Korea)
 Speak of the devil and he will appear. (United States)

God is a good worker, but he loves to be helped. (Spain)
 God helps those who help themselves. (United States)

You can force a man to shut his eyes, but you can't make him sleep. (Denmark)
 You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink. (United States)

A little in your own pocket is better than much in another's purse. (Spain)
 One bird in the hand is better than two in the bush. (United States)

If you climb up a tree, you must climb down that same tree. (Ghana)
 What goes up, must come down. (United States)

From the rain into the gutter. (Germany)
 From the frying pan into the fire. (United States)

My house burned down, but it was a relief the bedbugs died. (Korea)
 Every cloud has a silver lining. (United States)

He who is not in sight, is not in the heart. (Tanzania)
 Out of sight, out of mind. (United States)

Two captains sink the ship. (Japan)
 Too many cooks spoil the soup. (United States)

By trying often, the monkey learns to jump from tree to tree. (Zaire)
 Practice makes perfect (or, if at first you don't succeed, try, try again). (United States)

A person that arrives early to the spring never gets dirty drinking water. (Zaire)
 The early bird gets the worm. (United States)

I will not cry over a mishap and injure my eyes. (Tanzania)
 It is no use to cry over spilt milk. (United States)

Trust in God but tie your camel. (Iran)
 God helps those who help themselves. (United States)

A sparrow in the hand is better than a cock on the roof. (Russia)
One bird in the hand is better than two in the bush. (United States)

Where something is thin, that's where it tears. (Russia)
A chain is only as strong as its weakest link. (United States)

Not everyone who has a cowl on is a monk. (Russia)
Don't judge a book by its cover. (United States)

As you cooked the porridge, so must you eat it. (Russia)
As you sow, so shall you reap. (United States)

Every seed knows its time. (Russia)
All in good time. (United States)

Appendix 4. -- Workshop Evaluation Form:

What were your expectations for the workshop?

Were some, most, all of your expectations met?

Which activity helped most in making you think in a new way?

Did any of the activities make you feel uncomfortable?

Do you plan to read the article you are taking home with you?

Do you plan to log into the chat room or use the electronic bulletin board to further your awareness on this topic?

Do you have suggestions on how these activities could be improved?

What do you wish this workshop had addressed, but did not?

Did the activities increase your understanding or enjoyment the films?

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World Wide Web:

www.butch-femme.com

www.butch-femme.net

www.chronicle.com (The Chronicle of Higher Education)

www.diversityweb.org

www.femmenoair.net

www.gallup.com (How many LGBTQ People are OUT there?)

www.gayhealthchannel.com

www.hrc.org/worknet/ (Domestic partner links)

www.lgbtcampus.org (The National Consortium of Directors of LGBT Resources in Higher Education)

www.ngltf.org (The national Gay and Lesbian Task Force)

www.ntac.org (National Transgender Advocacy Coalition)

www.popecenter.org (The John William Pope Center for Higher Education Policy)

www.tgguide.com (Transgender Guide – information/directory site)

www.transgenderlaw.org