

College of Liberal Arts

Finding Common Ground: What Queer Politics Teaches about Bridging Ideological Divides
A Diversity Resource Module

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Introduction

The United States is a nation of divided opinion. Arguably, in a society predicated on pluralism, this was one of the goals of the American founders. According to pluralism, the free exchange of ideas and intellectual competition prevent any one way of thinking from monopolizing society and politics. Despite this ideal, systemic inequalities mean certain ideologies will become predominant, even hegemonic, and perpetuate through social and political institutions, while minority viewpoints are policed. Ironically, the proliferation of information and access to it that has occurred in the past half-century has contributed to information “siloeing” (seeking information that reinforces pre-existing positions rather than critically analyzing new information) and the solidification of ideological divisions rather than their dissolution. In the realm of politics, American partisanship has coalesced around conservative and liberal ideologies with little overlap or incentive to compromise. Evidence of this phenomenon is clear from public opinion polling on issues as diverse as climate change, reproductive rights, community development policies, LGBTQ rights, criminal justice, and healthcare policy. Candidate preferences, media reliability, and trust in government, too, are filtered through ideological lenses. Even personal relationships are not immune from the effects of polarization.

What does this mean for the lived experiences of people who do not conform to hegemonic standards within their community? LGBTQ people are often in this position. They have generally been perceived as “out of step” with the dominant construction of politics or family, “deviants” who should be subject to political and social sanction rather than affirmation. Despite a long history of discrimination, attitudes toward LGBTQ people and LGBTQ-affirming public policies have dramatically improved since the 1970s. There are several theories that attempt to explain this development in the aggregate; however, experimental LGBTQ politics research has recently focused on individual-level attitude change. It is precisely because of the long history of discrimination that LGBTQ political activists and researchers have developed theories and practices that attempt to find common ground with their opponents and eventually change their minds to be supportive of marginalized people.

Specifically, two theories – Dissonant Identity Priming and Identity Reassurance Theory – have been shown to produce significant attitude change toward LGBTQ people and policy. Identity reassurance theory has proven most successful in attitude change toward transgender people and policy. This theory operates on four key tenants which provide a framework for the proposed module: 1) acknowledging discomfort and reassuring people they are not ‘bad’ or ‘under threat’ for thinking a certain way; 2) appealing to a sense of moral elevation to allow individuals to adopt attitudes and behaviors they might otherwise resist; 3) making appeals that trigger positive emotions and/or disarm defensive response; and, 4) incremental attitude change. Adapting these practices help mitigate confirmation bias and genuinely allow people to consider the merits of alternate viewpoints. Not only will this help instructors analyze their own perspectives, but will improve campus dialogue and foster more diverse and empathetic attitudes among Cal Poly students.

Outline

1. LGBTQ Identity & Sources of Entrenched Identity-Based Conflict
 - a. The LGBTQ Coalition
 - i. Key Terms
 1. Understanding Identity Coloring Page
 - b. Sources of Identity-Based Conflict in American Politics & Society, Why So Entrenched?
 - i. Social Construction of Difference – Creating the ‘Other’
 1. Sources of anti-LGBTQ bias and reification in systems of power (heteronormativity, cisnormativity)
 - ii. How Do you Know what You Know? – Socialization
 1. Think, Pair, Share – Socialization/Hetero and Cis-normativity
 2. Lived Experience of LGBTQ People in the United States (MAP)
 - iii. Attitude Polarization & Entrenchment
 1. Defining Polarization of Attitudes toward LGBTQ People
 - a. Attitudes toward “homosexuality” i.e. gays & lesbians
 - b. Attitudes toward Transgender and Gender non-conforming people
 2. Defining Information ‘Siloing’
 3. Video Discussion – Media & Reinforcing Information Silos w/ MediOcracy video
2. Historical Efforts of the LGBTQ Movement to Overcome Hetero/Cisnormativity
 - a. ‘Gay’ Identity Coalescence in the Mid-20th Century
 - b. What was Stonewall?
 - c. Intersectionality & Internal Policing of Identity: BIPOC & Transgender People
 - d. Multiple Marginalization of Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming People
 - i. Sylvia Rivera “Y’all Better Quiet Down” and/or *The Death and Life of Marsha P. Johnson*
3. Lessons from the LGBTQ Civil Rights Movement for Overcoming Ideological Divides
 - a. Social Movement Strategies for Overcoming Ideological Divides
 - i. Visibility: Assimilation or Liberation? (Insider vs. Outsider)
 1. Links to other civil rights movements – Yoruba Richen TED Talk
 - b. Applying Social Science: What Queer Politics Teaches Us
 - i. Contact Theory
 - ii. Dissonant Identity Priming Theory
 - iii. Identity Reassurance Theory
 1. Acknowledge, Appeal, Disarm, Set Expectations
 - a. Think, Pair, Share – Applying Identity Reassurance Theory

Annotated Bibliography (Instructor)

Canaday, Margot. 2009. *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Analysis of American public policy formation during the 20th Century. The work follows a case-study methodology and an excellent historiography to examine policy formulation and implementation in the areas of immigration, the military, and welfare policy. Canaday demonstrates how federal enforcement of sexual norms emerged and grew in tandem with the rise of the modern bureaucratic state. Importantly, it demonstrates how regulation of sexuality transformed the regulated (sexual minorities) and helped reify heterosexuality as the 'norm' in American law and society.

Faderman, Lilian. 2015. *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle*. New York. Simon & Schuster.

Historiography of the LGBTQ Rights Movement beginning with mid-20th Century identity formation. The narrative centers struggles with the 'four horsemen' of society, the law, religion, and science that contribute(d) to the perpetuation of heteronormativity. Multiple individuals, organizations, and events are discussed in detail as the early Gay Rights Movement of the 1950s and 60s transformed into the Gay Liberation Movement of the 1970s. Faderman pays special attention the ways the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the 1980s and 90s has shaped contemporary LGBTQ Movement policy priorities and activism. The entire work may be considered for a history course, however, individual chapters or sections – such as 'Jousts with the Four Horsemen' (chapters 7) or 'Less Talk and More Action: The Gay Activists Alliance' (Chapter 13) – provide useful information for defining heteronormativity and confrontational social movement activity that had the dual effect of sensationalizing struggles against heteronormativity and provoking conflict with and intransigence among religious detractors of LGBTQ rights.

Garretson, Jeremiah J. 2018. *The Path to Gay Rights: How Activism and Coming Out Changed Public Opinion*. New York: NYU Press.

Quantitative analysis of trends in public opinion toward sexual minorities in the United States from the 1970s to the present. Garretson's work explores how and why public opinion towards gays and lesbians shifted from mostly negative to mostly positive in a relatively short amount of time. Garretson offers evidence to support a theory of 'affective liberalization' which suggests strategically targeted political and media responses by gay and lesbian organizations helped to normalize news coverage of 'gay rights' and AIDS, signaling to gays and lesbians across the U.S. that their lives were valued. Garretson argues the combination of gays/lesbians coming out in increasing numbers and the continued positive media coverage accounts for the rapid positive change in attitudes toward gays and lesbians. Notably, the work suggests the same process has not worked for transgender people as public opinion toward trans people and trans identity has dramatically lagged behind views toward gays and lesbians.

Harrison, Brian F. and Melissa R. Michelson. 2017. *Listen, We Need to Talk: How to Change Attitudes about LGBT Rights*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Examination of the process of public opinion change about a 'controversial topic' – in this case, same-sex marriage – at the individual level. The authors conduct a series of randomized experiments priming survey participants with messages about same-sex marriage from in-group and out-group members including shared identities as sports fans, members of an ethnoracial group, someone who is religious, or someone who identifies with a particular political party. The authors find support for their theory of dissonant identity priming in that respondents will often change their attitudes toward same-sex marriage when a member of a shared in-group communicates their opinion on the topic, even if that shared in-group identity is unrelated to the issue of same-sex marriage (such as a sports fan).

Michelson, Melissa R. and Brian F. Harrison. 2020. *Transforming Prejudice: Identity, Fear, and Transgender Rights*. New York: Oxford University Press.

The authors examine what tactics are effective in changing public opinion regarding transgender people. The result is a new approach that they call Identity Reassurance Theory. The idea is that individuals need to feel confident in their own identity before they can embrace a stigmatized group like transgender people, and that support of members of an outgroup can be encouraged by affirming the self-esteem of those targeted for attitude change. Through survey experiments, the authors show that the most effective messaging on transgender issues meets people where they are, acknowledges their discomfort without judgment or criticism, and helps them to think about transgender people and rights in a way that aligns with their view of themselves as moral human beings.

Miller, Patrick R., Andrew R. Flores, Donald P. Haider-Markel, Daniel C. Lewis, Barry L. Tadlock, and Jami K. Taylor. 2017. "Transgender Politics as Body Politics: Effects of Disgust Sensitivity and Authoritarianism on Transgender Rights Attitudes." *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 5(1):4-24.

Quantitative examination of psychological predictors of attitudes toward transgender people and transgender rights. The authors assert transgender and gender non-conforming bodies – physical appearance that transgresses socially constructed gender norms – inherently informs attitudes about transgender people and transgender rights. Using data from a unique online probability sample, the authors measure attitudes toward transgender people and policy and find, first, that attitudes among the sample exist on two dimensions: attitudes toward civil rights for transgender people and attitudes that are 'body centric,' or focus on the ways transgender people present and/or alter their bodies. Second, the authors find a negative relationship between attitudes toward transgender people/rights and indicators for both propensity toward authoritarian attitudes and emotional disgust/repulsion for transgressing socially constructed gender norms and roles. In combination, these attitudes and propensities greatly reduce the likelihood that an individual will support transgender people or rights.

Ore, Tracy E. (Ed.). 2018. *The Social Construction of Difference and Inequality*. New York: Oxford University Press.

This edited volume surveys how and why the categories of race, class, gender, and sexuality are constructed, maintained, experienced, and transformed. The volume examines various forms of stratification and the impact on members of marginalized groups by providing a thorough discussion of how such systems of stratification are formed, perpetuated, and interconnected. Each reading ends with critical-thinking questions to help students relate content to their own lives and understand how their attitudes, actions, and perspectives may serve to perpetuate a stratified system. Chapters 7 – 12 in Part I, “Constructing Differences,” and Chapter 16 in Part II, “Maintaining Inequalities: Systems of Oppression and Privilege” will be especially helpful to discussions of sexuality and gender and socialization.

Fox, Erica Ariel. October 2017. "How to Escape the Echo Chamber." *Forbes*. Retrieved from: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/ericaarielfox/2017/10/26/how-to-escape-the-echo-chamber/#1298eb344d10>.

An accessible article for students that briefly defines the concept of an online 'echo chamber' and how our social networks reinforce pre-existing opinions and attitudes. The article also discusses how students can assess and mitigate personal biases and/or political polarization that stems from homogenous social (and social media) networks.

Harrison, Brian F. 2020. *A Change is Gonna Come: How to Have Effective Political Conversations in a Divided America*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Examination of the causes of rapid public opinion change on the issue of same-sex marriage in the United States. Harrison argues that one of the most powerful reasons for rapid change on this 'divisive' issue is that a broad range of marriage equality advocates were willing to engage in contentious and sometimes uncomfortable discussion about their opinions on the matter. They started everyday conversations that got people out of their echo chambers and encouraged them to start listening and thinking.

Michelson, Melissa R. and Brian F. Harrison. 2020. *Transforming Prejudice: Identity, Fear, and Transgender Rights*. New York: Oxford University Press.

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Activities

1. Understanding Identity Coloring Page

Prior to class, obtain coloring pencils or crayons and print an appropriate number of coloring pages from the Trans Student Education Resources (TSER) [Gender Unicorn](#) website. The definitions at the site also provide a useful resource to instructors.

In conjunction with a facilitated discussion of key terms (slide 2), allow time for students to color and/or draw/sketch their own version of the gender unicorn. If they choose, students may also use the time to 'locate' their identity based on their understanding of the definitions.

Notes: this assignment should not be collected or graded. Students should be given sufficient time to read and contemplate the definitions of key terms. With identity terms, trust the person who is using the term and their definition of it, above any dictionary!

2. Think, Pair, Share – Socialization/Hetero and Cis-normativity¹

Note: Think, Pair, Share activities are timed. Students will spend 5 minutes 'thinking' and/or writing their responses to the questions provided. Then, student will work together in pairs for 8 – 10 minutes to compare and contrast their answers. Finally, students will share what they discussed with the entire class.

Identities are social constructs! People aren't born prejudiced, so where does it come from? From the moment we are born (and arguably before), we are inundated with messages, *spoken* and *unspoken*, about different types of people. Often, we learn stereotypes and prejudices without even realizing it. Some of these messages may have been about ourselves and what we are "*supposed to*" or "*not supposed to*" be. Understanding the messages we have received can help us identify our own beliefs and biases. All of us, LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+, have learned messages about LGBTQ+ people.

Think, Pair, and Share the following questions:

1. What are your first memories of someone being lesbian, gay, or bisexual?
2. How did you learn that not everyone is cisgender?
3. What are the messages that you have received about LGBTQ+ people (e.g. from family, friends, church, media)?
4. Have you ever had to name your sexual orientation for others or has it always been assumed?
5. Can you think of three historical figures who were lesbian, gay, or bisexual?
6. Can you think of three historical figures who were transgender?

Additional Questions:

Think, Pair, and Share the following questions:

7. Do you think that you have internalized some of the LGBTQ+ messages pervasive in the world?

8. Have you ever laughed at or made a joke at the expense of LGBTQ+ people?
9. If someone were to come out to you as LGBTQ+, what would your first thought be?
10. When you find out someone is pregnant or a baby is born, what is one of the first questions you ask?
11. Have you ever thought about your sex assigned at birth, your gender, your sexual orientation, and your romantic attraction as separate constructs?

¹From: CFE Safe Zone Workshop Packet. Bowling Green State University.
<https://www.bgsu.edu/equity-diversity-and-inclusion/lgbt-resource-center/bgsu-s-lgbt-safe-zone-program.html>.

3. Video Discussion – Media & Information Silos²

Film Viewing: Have students view the We The Voters film “MediaOcracy.” Discuss how their responses during the warm-up discussion may have aligned with the idea of “incestuous amplification” (selecting news sources to reinforce our own views) as defined in the film.

Media Website Examination: Have students examine media websites and complete the [Decoding Media Bias handout](#). Students will go to three cable news outlets and examine the top three home page and politics page news stories, including original and aggregated pieces, focusing on headlines. Next, students will choose a topic addressed on all three networks and read a story from each network to examine for point of view. Have students look for a top-of-the-page topic that addresses politics or public policy. Discuss students’ findings when finished. What facts were included in all three stories? Was there one news source that contained facts the other two did not? Why might that be? What did you notice about the language/word choice? Was there leading or subjective language to favor one point of view over another?

Extension Activity Have students go to the website All Sides at <http://allsides.com> to introduce them to news topics written in three distinct viewpoints: left, center, right. Discuss this as a tool to recognize bias. The site also serves as a resource that people can go to read something that may challenge their assumptions, and with which they may disagree, as suggested in the We The Voters film “MediaOcracy.”

² From: PBS Learning Media. <https://ca.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/mediaocracy-video/we-the-voters/support-materials/>.

4. Think, Pair, Share – Applying Identity Reassurance Theory

The following activities are based on Chapters 4 – 6 in Michelson and Harrison (2020). Depending upon the situation, the instructor can choose to emphasize one (or all) of the major components of Identity Reassurance Theory: Affirming self-esteem (or gender identity), appealing to moral elevation, and disarming threatening preconceptions (Chapters 4 & 5) and acknowledging discomfort or prejudice & setting expectations about trans rights (chapter 6).

Before class: The instructor should be sure the students have access to or copies of the relevant portion of the Script Appendix.

For each of the topics you intend to discuss, be sure students have reviewed the Script Appendix, especially beginning on page 184 with the Gender Identity Threat Experiment. Allow the students time to think about what the experiments were designed to do and what the authors ultimately found. Pair the students and ask them to discuss important sections, imagery (if used), strengths, weaknesses, or changes they would make to the script/experiment. Ask one student from each group to share highlights from their discussion.

Media Resources

1. Videos

We the Voters. PBS Learning Media/KQED. [MediOcracy](#)

David Healey, Ph.D. Director of Marching and Symphonic Bands, Boston College. Ted Talk [Silos into Sousaphones](#)

Sylvia Rivera. Trans Rights Activist. 1973 Gay Pride Rally New York City. [“Y’all Better Quiet Down.”](#)

Yoruba Richen. Documentary Film Maker. Ted Talk. [What the Gay Rights Movement Learned from the Civil Rights Movement](#)

Michelson, Melissa and Brian Harrison. “Transforming Prejudice” Queer Politics Webinar, Princeton University. October 1, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dw8X6Syighs&feature=youtu.be>.

2. Films

After Stonewall. 1999. Dan Hunt, Janet Baus, and John Scagliotti. First Run Features (Request Access through Kanopy)

Before Stonewall. 1984. First Run Features. (Request access through Kanopy)

The Death and Life of Marsha P. Johnson. David France. Public Square Films. (Available on Netflix)

Stonewall Uprising. 2010. David Heilbroner & Kate Davis. PBS (Available through Kanopy)

3. Web Resources

Movement Advancement Project. Equality Maps. [LGBT Equality State by State](#).

Human Rights Campaign. [Glossary of Terms](#).

Trans Student Educational Resources. [Gender Unicorn](#)

Tips & Pitfalls

1. Do not *require* students to disclose pronouns. Pronouns are important, however, inadvertently outing students or requiring them to publicly deny their identity from fear outweigh the performative value of cis students beginning the class by disclosing their pronouns.
2. Never correct a student's personal use of identity terms. With identity terms, trust the person who is using the term and their definition of it, above any dictionary!
3. Operate on the assumption that being heterosexual is **not a choice**; neither is being gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or queer.
4. Recognize neither this module nor any single LGBTQ+ person speaks for all LGBTQ+ people. How could they? There are diverse and varied communities of individuals who are L, G, B, T, and/or Q. This module and views expressed in it are intended to give you a better understanding of issues that LGBTQ+ people may face and potential common trends. Ultimately, to best understand LGBTQ+ people you need to understand them as individuals.
5. Begin by applying some of the lessons from Michelson and Harrison (2000) text. Namely, affirm students' and your own interest in learning about and supporting diversity on campus. We have all been socialized in homophobic and transphobic ways. We did not ask to be taught them, but we now have the opportunity to take responsibility for them. Change hinges on our ability to separate fault/guilt from responsibility. Acknowledge that prejudices exist and this is a learning environment where misconceptions can be corrected without animus.
6. To make the classroom a safe place for all and build community, invite additional ground rules (expectations, etc.) from participants.