

Diversity Statement

“All the guys think you’re gay,” the note said. “Here’s a list of things to change about yourself if you want everyone to stop making fun of you.”

- A letter, co-written by several classmates, 2002.

I grew up in a part of Ohio where being gay is heavily stigmatized. Middle school, high school, and early college were filled with moments where the people around me discouraged me from expressing myself authentically. These experiences were painful, to be sure, but they were also impactful—they provided me with an empathic lens for thinking about others’ discrimination experiences. Professionally, these experiences have motivated me to do what I can to make academia as inclusive as possible. For example, experiences with marginalization have motivated me to focus on issues related to diversity in my own research. Likewise, these experiences have motivated me to use academic service to help ameliorate social inequities. Finally, my experiences with marginalization have made giving back to others—for example, by serving as a faculty mentor to LGBTQ+ students—an integral part of my long-term career goals.

One way in which professors can make the academic landscape more inclusive is by ensuring that marginalized groups of people are not rendered invisible by the assumptions of their research programs. For example, for many years, psychologists who studied stereotyping of Black individuals did so by measuring perceivers’ beliefs about Black men. While such endeavors were productive toward the end of understanding racial stereotyping, they left stereotypes about others (e.g., gay Black men, Black women) out of the picture entirely. In this case, leaving other individuals out of the picture caused psychologists to assume (for decades) that the stereotypes they studied about Black men were isomorphic with those of all Black people. A deliberate aim of my research program is to question assumptions such as these—to examine whether racial stereotyping is modulated by whether a person is gay vs. straight, for example. Such an approach to scholarship has the power to diversify scientific understanding of basic phenomena, and it makes for a more inclusive portrait of human psychology.

Another way in which professors can make the academic landscape more inclusive is by engaging in service commitments that counteract social inequities. One inequity, for example, is that leaders of the most powerful organizations in the U.S. are more likely to be men than what would be expected based on men’s representation in the U.S. population. For the past year, I have worked as a Content Coordinator for a website at Duke dedicated to women’s empowerment. The website, which is called WE CAN LEAD®, is in the final stages of development. My role has been to curate programs to feature on the website (e.g., mentoring lunches, women’s retreats), to write content for the website’s section on intersectionality, and to work with the site Director and the site designers to ensure that content is navigable and useful to those who visit it. This website will go live later this year, and it has been a fulfilling reminder that academic service can be used to promote diversity in professional spaces.

Finally, one’s long-term professional goals can include behaviors that make the academic landscape more inclusive. For example, professors have latitude over how they design their courses, and they can choose to emphasize course content related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. I specialize in the science of stereotyping, and a deliberate goal of mine is to fold this specialization into the content of each course that I teach. Professors can likewise engage in mentorship roles that advance the interests of students from marginalized groups. One of my own ambitions, for example, is to serve as a department-appointed faculty mentor to LGBTQ+

students. In short, long-term professional goals present a variety of opportunities for professors to make academic spaces more inclusive than they otherwise would be.

To summarize, there are many ways that professors can promote inclusion in academia. Through research, professors can challenge scientific assumptions that implicate some groups of people in being more important than others. Through academic service, professors can help to ameliorate social inequities—for example, by dedicating their time organizations that advance the interests of women in leadership. And finally, professors can set goals for themselves make contributing to inclusive spaces a long-term fixture in their careers. Such endeavors obviously do not prevent queer kids from Ohio, for example, from encountering set-backs—but they can at least create a future for academia in which setbacks are less severe.