

**THE CSWE COUNCIL ON SEXUAL ORIENTATION  
AND GENDER IDENTITY AND EXPRESSION**

# **Guidelines for Affirmative Social Work Education**

**Enhancing the Climate for LGBTQQ Students, Staff, and  
Faculty in Social Work Education**

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### **THE COUNCIL ON SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY AND EXPRESSION**

The Council on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and Expression (CSOGIE), formerly the Commission on Gay Men and Lesbian Women, is a council of the Commission for Diversity and Social and Economic Justice. CSOGIE promotes the development of social work curriculum materials and faculty growth opportunities relevant to sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and the experiences of individuals who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or two-spirit. CSOGIE also works for the full participation of individuals who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or two-spirit in social work education, facilitating mentorship of students and junior faculty and offering assistance and consultation to educators and students concerning issues of sexual orientation and gender identity and expression.

### **COUNCIL ON SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION (CSWE)**

CSWE aims to promote and strengthen the quality of social work education through preparation of competent social work professionals by providing national leadership and a forum for collective action. CSWE pursues this mission through setting and maintaining policy and program standards, accrediting bachelor's and master's degree programs in social work, promoting research and faculty development, and advocating for social work education.



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This report is intended to provide guidelines for the creation of social work educational environments that are affirmative of lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, and questioning (LGBQQ) students, faculty, administrators, and staff. Creating affirmative social work educational environments for transgender and gender nonconforming populations is addressed in a companion document, *Guidelines for Transgender and Gender Nonconforming (TGNC) Inclusive Social Work Education*.

These guidelines emerged from the work of the Council on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and Expression (CSOGIE), which is one of diversity councils of the Council of Social Work Education (CSWE). CSOGIE councilors expressed concern about the lack of comprehensive guidelines to ensure that social work programs foster and promote environments that affirm diverse sexual identities. This concern was expressed in light of evidence revealing that (a) LGBQQ social work students report a number of unsatisfactory experiences within their social work programs (Dentato, Craig, Lloyd, Kelly, Wright, & Austin, 2016; Dentato, Craig, Messinger, Lloyd, & McInroy, 2014) and (b) social work students may not be ready to practice with LGBQQ clients after graduation (Craig, Dentato, Messinger, & McInroy, 2016; Martin et al., 2009). Therefore, this document provides a framework to help social work programs and CSWE site visitors assess whether programs proactively support LGBQQ students, faculty, staff, and administrators. Developing knowledge and building skills of all stakeholders in social work education can contribute to environments that ensure dignity and respect for all LGBQQ students, faculty, administrators, and staff and ultimately promote cultural humility within social work practice. This document also can be used by social work faculty to incorporate and effectively infuse social work content on LGBQQ issues into the curriculum, to enhance classroom activities, and ultimately create LGBQQ affirmative and supportive environments across degree programs.

The authors represent scholars and practitioners with a wide array of clinical and macro practice experience and sexual orientations and gender identities. These guidelines have been created through consultation with CSOGIE members as well as the broader social work education community.

This document is organized into six sections: (1) Institutional Equity for LGBQQ Individuals; (2) Recruitment, Admissions, and Retention; (3) LGBQQ Inclusive and Affirming Staff and Faculty Training; (4) LGBQQ Inclusive and Affirming Explicit Curriculum; (5) LGBQQ Inclusive and Affirming Implicit Curriculum; and (6) LGBQQ Inclusive and Affirming Field Education.

LGBQQ inclusive and affirmative education is an expectation for social work programs and the universities that house them. Given the social work profession's commitment to supporting diversity, promoting social justice, and challenging marginalization and oppression, it is critical for social work academic programs to provide LGBQQ inclusive and affirmative education in a safe and welcoming environment. The purpose of these guidelines is to assist and support social work faculty, staff, and administrators in creating LGBQQ inclusive and affirming classrooms, field placements, policies, and academic environments. These guidelines offer social work programs assistance and suggestions needed to meet the evolving needs of LGBQQ students, staff, and faculty.

# Institutional Equity for LGBTQ Individuals

Some universities and colleges have made substantive progress in creating a more inclusive environment for LGBTQ students over the last decade. Numerous colleges and universities now have specific nondiscrimination policies related to sexual orientation. Findings from a study of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) issues in social work by CSWE and Lambda Legal found that among 157 social work programs, nondiscrimination policies were more common in social work programs than in their host institutions (Martin et al., 2009). Recently, however, some religiously affiliated schools and universities have sought a waiver and exemption from Title IX laws that protect LGBTQ students (Human Rights Campaign, 2015). Clearly, there is still much that universities can do to be explicit in their support for LGBTQ individuals through the creation of specific policies—and the enforcement of these policies (i.e., nondiscrimination)—to ensure all students, staff, faculty, and administrators have an educational and work environment that allows them to feel safe and supported.

Specific frameworks for change and action across college/university settings should include multitiered prevention and intervention strategies (Merrell, Ervin, & Gimpell, 2006).

Such frameworks should include three tiers of strategies: those at the primary level (e.g., policy development, curricular modifications, diversity education), secondary level (e.g., at-risk student support services, LGBTQ and ally student alliance groups, private group counseling spaces), and tertiary level (e.g., individual counseling services for those experiencing problems) (Fisher et al., 2008; Merrell et al., 2006).

Numerous studies depict a challenging campus climate for LGBTQ students (Alessi, Sapiro, Kahn, & Craig, in press; Craig, McInroy, Dentato, Austin, & Messinger, 2015; Dentato et al., 2014, 2016; Rankin, 2003; Rankin, Blumenfeld, Weber, & Frazer, 2010; Woodford, Han, Craig, Lim, & Matney, 2014; Woodford & Kulick, 2015; Woodford, Kulick, & Atteberry, 2015; Woodford, Kulick, Sinco, & Hong, 2014). LGBTQ students report experiences of verbal and physical harassment, isolation, and being expected to represent their identity group (Alessi et al., in press; Dentato et al., 2016). Therefore, explicit efforts to move toward institutional equity for LGBTQ students are needed. Although changing institutional policies and practices may require long-term strategies, social work programs have the opportunity to take up the charge and institute more progressive policies (Golom, 2015; Messinger, 2002).

***The purpose of these guidelines is to assist and support social work faculty, staff, and administrators in creating LGBTQ inclusive and affirming classrooms, field placements, policies, and academic environments.***

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INSTITUTIONAL EQUITY

1. Make departmental and institutional nondiscrimination policies visible to students, staff, and faculty through departmental websites, bulletin boards, print media, and other communication materials.
2. Include visible signs of support such as rainbow flags and safe zone signs in administrative offices, departmental hallways, and student lounges.

3. Ensure that policies regarding harassment, bullying, and violence are clear. Communicate that these behaviors will not be tolerated and will be fully investigated.
4. Ensure there are specific and clear mechanisms for students, staff, and faculty to raise concerns or complaints regarding experiences of discrimination.
5. Include LGBQQ persons in faculty and employment searches, advisory groups, and committee meetings.
6. Include LGBQQ alumni in advisory councils, with particular attention to the inclusion of LGBQQ people of color.
7. Assess inclusivity regarding diverse sexual orientations and identities during regularly planned meetings with faculty and staff.
8. Ensure the department's vision and mission includes a commitment to diverse sexual orientations and identities.
9. Advocate for inclusive LGBQQ spouse, health care, and parenting policies and related family programs. Spousal/same sex partner benefits and parenting policies should recognize the multitude of family formations, including those created through adoption, fostering, and surrogacy. Tuition remission and health care benefits should be afforded to LGBQQ married and unmarried partners alike.
10. Work with university healthcare centers to ensure they offer culturally competent current prevention and care initiatives while adhering to recommended best practices for LGBQQ people.
11. Identify and support relevant cultural events related to LGBQQ communities (e.g., National Coming Out Day, Transgender Day of Remembrance, LGBQQ Pride Month, and World AIDS Day, plus intersectional celebrations such as Take Back the Night marches and African American History Month).

# Recruitment, Admissions, and Retention

Despite improved attitudes among social work faculty and students, antigay bias toward LGBQQ persons continues to linger (Chonody & Smith, 2013). This bias is premised on an ideology that defines heterosexuality as normative. Such heterosexism stigmatizes and discriminates against any other type of sexuality. Antigay bias may create barriers to care and affect the overall quality of services that social workers provide to sexual minority populations (Chonody & Smith, 2013). Such bias is problematic given that social workers subscribe to a Code of Ethics that promotes social justice (National Association of Social Workers, 2008).

## RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION EFFORTS

Stigmatization and discrimination influence recruitment and retention efforts for faculty and students from marginalized communities in schools of social work. To improve this situation, social work programs must make a visible and explicit commitment to diversity, increase education about the

*Social work programs should make a visible and explicit commitment to LGBQQ diversity.*

LGBQQ community, and offer LGBQQ curriculum and continuing education courses, among other efforts. Additionally, it is recommended that future research related to LGBQQ recruitment and retention address the impact of institutional religious affiliation and political ideology on the hiring of LGBQQ faculty (Chonody & Smith, 2013).

## ADMISSIONS

LGBQQ students have a greater need for supportive services when entering and attending university programs (Angeli, 2009). Social work programs have been called on to increase the cultural competence of staff and faculty and to offer related courses in the curriculum (Messinger, 2013; Van Den Bergh & Crisp, 2004). To create more inclusive programs, LGBQQ students, faculty, and staff need to be present in these programs, and their voices need to be heard during application review and decision-making processes. Inclusive admission procedures that explicitly affirm a commitment to equity for LGBQQ students are critical (Moxley, Najor-Durack, & Dumbrigue, 2000).

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RECRUITMENT, ADMISSIONS, AND RETENTION

1. Ensure that admission materials, applications, and reporting forms allow for inclusive concepts of partnership and/or family status and collect data associated with sexual orientation. For example, many institutions have modified forms to include an open-ended field for applicants to communicate sexual orientation.
2. Provide LGBQQ training for staff and faculty (and possibly involved students) who take part in the admissions policies, program development, outreach, engagement, and applications review processes.

3. Actively expand representation of LGBQQ persons through producing and disseminating promotional materials with increased LGBQQ representation and affirmation (e.g., apparel, pins, door plaques, posters, business cards, stickers). Departments can also maintain lists of LGBQQ faculty, staff, and administrators and publicly designate their (and others') research projects, courses, and other programs as LGBQQ-related.
4. Recruitment and retention should include financial considerations such as support for grant and scholarship applications specific to LGBQQ individuals.
5. Create and support networks for LGBQQ students, staff, faculty, and alumni. These can include proctored electronic mailing lists, social networking sites (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn), Web directories, meeting spaces, and LGBQQ-related programming.



Ongoing faculty and staff training on LGBQQ issues is a key component of effective social work education (Martin et al., 2009). Many campus LGBQQ centers as well as external community organizations provide training (e.g., Safezone) to staff, faculty, and students. Such training often focuses on strategies for supporting LGBQQ students and creating a more inclusive and affirming educational environment. Although research on the impact of this kind of training is limited, evidence suggests it may contribute to more affirmative institutional environments and improve the competency of social work students to work with sexual minority clients (Finkel, Storaasli, Bandele, & Schaefer, 2003; Woodford et al., 2014). To date, the focus of most training is often on the development of knowledge and awareness, but there is increasing recognition of the need to focus on skill building as an outcome of ally training (Craig, Doiron & Dillon, 2015).

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LGBQQ TRAINING

There is a critical need for ongoing faculty and staff training that address the following areas.

1. **Intersecting identities:** The impact of understanding intersecting identities as they pertain to members of the LGBQQ community (i.e., race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, urban/rural location, religion and spirituality) cannot be overstated (Bowleg, 2012).
2. **Policies:** Because faculty and administrators (Martin et al., 2009) as well as students (Craig et al., 2016) often are unaware of their institutional nondiscrimination or grievance policies based on sexual orientation, training should include specific guidance regarding the existence of such policies and their use to promote equity. State and federal nondiscrimination laws and workplace protections also should be discussed.
3. **Broad engagement:** Because LGBQQ training is voluntarily and attended by social work faculty and staff who are already aware of LGBQQ-affirmative services, it is critical that this training specifically target staff and faculty who are less familiar with LGBQQ issues.
4. **Needs and interventions:** Training for social work faculty and staff should provide critical information that aligns with social work and other professional guidelines to familiarize them with LGBQQ issues guided by evidence-informed interventions to address key needs. Training should provide specific steps to address homophobia and heterosexism when it arises in the classroom or campus settings (Dentato et al., 2016).
5. **The campus:** Training should provide faculty and staff with information about how to access LGBQQ affirmative campus services (e.g., employee assistance programs, health-related services).

Numerous social work scholars have discussed the importance of training students to practice affirmatively with LGBQQ clients (Alessi, 2014; Appleby & Anastas, 1998; Craig et al., 2016; Crisp, 2006; Morrow & Messinger, 2006; Van Den Bergh & Crisp, 2004). Training associated with sexual minority issues and affirmative practice can help social work students obtain the attitudes, knowledge, and skills to practice affirmatively. It also helps students understand the importance of monitoring their homophobia and heterosexist bias to ensure that it does not interfere with treatment. Training efforts have improved in recent years, but much more needs to be done. Findings from the CSWE, Lambda Legal study of LGBQQ issues in social work found that only 19% of social work programs formally assessed students' competence to work with sexual minority clients (Martin et al., 2009).

## LGBQQ AFFIRMATIVE PRACTICE

Affirmative practice with sexual minority clients is determined by a multitude of factors, including (a) attitudes toward sexual minority individuals, (b) affirmative counseling self-efficacy, and (c) beliefs about affirmative practice (Alessi, Dillon, & Kim, 2015). Assessing these three areas may enhance training efforts.

*Attitudes toward sexual minority individuals:* To underscore the importance of holding affirmative attitudes, the American Psychological Association's (2012) revised Guidelines for Psychological Practice With Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Clients reiterates that (a) stigma and prejudice increase

sexual minority individuals' risk for health and mental health problems; (b) LGBQQ orientations do not indicate pathology; and (c) homophobia, heterosexist attitudes, and bias may affect student experiences, training, and the ability to effectively assess and treat LGBQQ clients.

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*Affirmative counseling self-efficacy:* This term refers to the clinician's belief in his or her confidence to practice affirmatively with LGBQQ clients. This includes the belief that one can help LGBQQ clients cope with heterosexism and homophobia, establish a therapeutic environment that consists of trust and affirmation, and recognize when heterosexist bias interferes with the treatment a therapist provides (Dillon & Worthington, 2003; Dillon et al., 2015).

*Beliefs about affirmative practice:* Refers to the beliefs that (a) clinicians need to affirm the identities and relationships of LGBQQ clients and (b) practicing affirmatively results in better treatment outcomes for LGBQQ clients (Craig, Austin, & Alessi, 2013; Crisp, 2006).

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LGBTQ AFFIRMING EXPLICIT CURRICULUM

1. Include appropriate and affirming language in all syllabi, including course assignments, readings, and current content on LGBTQ populations.
2. Incorporate use of preferred names and gender pronouns for all students within the classroom, and include this language within course syllabi.
3. Incorporate LGBTQ-affirming content (readings, assignments, class discussions) into required social work foundation and advanced level courses rather than relegating them to electives.
4. Include evidence-based practice and best practices with sexual minority populations in all syllabi.
5. Teach beyond pathology and oppression to include specific LGBTQ-affirming practice guidelines. This means discussing LGBTQ populations not only in connection with topics such as HIV/AIDS, substance use, suicide, and homelessness, but also when talking about all facets of development across the lifespan, including a resiliency and strengths focus.
6. Include textbooks, class activities, and assignments that focus on sexual diversity and discuss/unpack homophobia, heterosexual privilege, and heteronormative ideology.
7. Ensure that classroom discussions on conversion and reparative therapies are consistent with the 2016 CSWE Position Statement on Conversion and Reparative Therapy ([Alessi, Craig, & Spence Coffey, 2016; http://www.cswe.org/File.aspx?id=85010](http://www.cswe.org/File.aspx?id=85010)) and 2015 Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's Ending Conversion Therapy and Affirming LGBTQ Youth report. Curriculum resource documents: "[How to Talk About Sexual Orientation Change Efforts in Social Work Education](#)," (Pittman-Munke, Galarza, Jacinto, Alessi, & Craig, 2016; [www.cswe.org/File.aspx?id=85017](http://www.cswe.org/File.aspx?id=85017)) and a [bibliography](#) ([www.cswe.org/File.aspx?id=85015](http://www.cswe.org/File.aspx?id=85015)) may help facilitate classroom discussion about these issues.
8. Use LGBTQ experts and individuals as guest lecturers or panelists.
9. Model LGBTQ-affirming practice in the classroom by using inclusive language and examples.
10. Address anti-LGBTQ sentiment, heterosexism, and homophobia in the classroom as an instructor without expecting LGBTQ students to speak on behalf of all LGBTQ individuals or issues.

# LGBQQ Inclusive and Affirming Implicit Curriculum

The implicit curriculum refers to the learning environment in which the explicit curriculum is carried out (CSWE, 2015). Social work schools and departments must ensure that the environment for LGBQQ students, staff, and faculty provides a space where diverse sexual identities are not only accepted but also affirmed. Paying close attention to this issue is critical. Researchers have found that heterosexual social work faculty expressed prejudice regarding sexual minorities (Chodony, Woodford, Brennan, Newman, & Wang, 2014). Educators, staff, and students can directly impact the learning environment for LGBQQ faculty, staff, and students (Dentato et al., 2016).

***Social work schools and departments must ensure that the environment for LGBQQ students, staff, and faculty provides a space where diverse sexual identities are not only accepted but also affirmed.***

For example, women in an MSW program who identified as either lesbian or bisexual reported that affiliations with others, language, affirming symbols, ideology, and managing heteronormativity were factors that affected their ability to reveal their identity and feel welcomed in their programs (Hylton, 2006). The implicit curriculum must continue to address the covert bias that may result from noninclusive or nonaffirming learning environments for sexual minority students, faculty, and staff. This is especially crucial for people of color who also identify as LGBQQ.

The 2015 EPAS focus on diversity (AS 3.01-3.03) underscores the importance of creating social work programs that are attendant and responsive to the needs and experiences of LGBQQ faculty, students, staff, and community members. The following recommendations will help guide programs in their efforts to comply with diversity standards (3.01-3.03):

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LGBQQ AFFIRMING IMPLICIT CURRICULUM

1. Mandate that diverse sexual orientations are reflected in the learning environment.
2. Consistently and effectively respond to and manage homophobia in the classroom (Dentato et al., 2016).
3. Discuss the challenges of being an LGBQQ social worker in the field (Craig, Iacono, Pacey, Dentato, & Boyle, in press).
4. Affirm LGBQQ student identities (Craig et al., 2016).
5. Understand the positive impact of “out” faculty, staff, and students (Dentato et al., 2014).
6. Secure commitment from all members of the department to engage in respectful dialogue that reflects awareness of sexual identities that are beyond the heteronormative.

7. In the department of events, include regularly scheduled activities specific to LGBQQ populations, such as National Coming Out Day, LGBT Pride events, LGBT speakers of various racial and ethnic backgrounds, announcements regarding social justice events, and campus-wide sponsored activities.
8. Develop mentoring opportunities and appropriate advising for faculty, staff, and students, including practicum/internship planning, development of placement sites that affirm LGBQQ students, career and educational planning, and networking events.
9. Identify safe and respectful spaces with affirming signs or notations (e.g., rainbow flags, pride stickers, pink triangles), providing equitable meeting spaces and financial support.
10. Create a public relations plan and disseminate advertising and newsletters that include topics of interest related to LGBQQ students, alumni, faculty, and staff.
11. Provide faculty with the opportunity to incorporate literature on LGBQQ identities and affirmative practice in syllabi.
12. Administrators must ensure that their school or department commits to an organizational structure that affirms LGBQQ individuals and their intersecting identities.
13. Schools and departments must actively recruit and hire faculty who identify as LGBQQ or whose research and teaching interests pertain to LGBQQ-related issues.

Field education in social work is the signature pedagogy and offers a primary opportunity for students to synergize classroom learning with real-world experiences. In the United States and Canada, social work education accrediting bodies have directed schools of social work to prioritize diversity throughout field opportunities. Although there is a lack of research in this area, researchers have found that this is not always the case (see, for example, Fredriksen-Goldsen et al., 2011). Inclusive field programs cannot be disconnected from the larger implicit and explicit curriculum of a social work program. To that end, it is important to recognize that LGBQQ students need structural supports to participate fully and succeed in their social work education (Mackelprang, Ray, & Hernandez-Peck, 1996; Messinger, 2002).

A lack of attention to sexual diversity and social justice can limit opportunities for students. This kind of obstruction occurs in social work programs as well as in field agencies, which often mirror the cultures in which they are embedded. Such conditions negatively affect the psychological, let alone physical, health of LGBQQ employees, which can include practicum students (Smith & Ingram, 2004). Fostering a more inclusive curriculum and appropriately mentoring LGBQQ social work students is not only justice for them but, in turn, also has beneficial effects on the service delivery and quality of care for LGBQQ clients (Lim, Brown, & Jones, 2013).

Students without the necessary training to work appropriately with LGBQQ clients or queer issues will find these limitations further compounded in the field environment (Craig et al., 2016). Similarly, faculty who are not informed about the experiences of LGBQQ persons and the resources that exist in the school, university, and community may not know how best to support inclusion in school policies and practices. Teaching resources are needed for faculty to understand how to incorporate sexual diversity content and relate it to the existing course subject (such as research) rather than subjugating it to a diversity or social justice course only (Donahue & Lubert, 2015; Fredriksen-Goldsen et al., 2011; Levy, Leedy, & Miller, 2013).

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LGBQQ AFFIRMING FIELD EDUCATION

### Field Departments

1. Create field placement applications that allow students to express interest in LGBQQ populations and communities.
2. Develop and maintain accurate lists of placement opportunities that serve, relate to, and affirm LGBQQ communities. Similarly, work with faculty and students who take the initiative to create new opportunities in such areas.
3. Disseminate to students an up-to-date list of field staff and faculty who are expert in these areas and may be of particular support.
4. Include the perspectives, experiences, and concerns of LGBQQ students, staff, and faculty, such as ensuring that they are represented in field advisory committees and planning.

5. Conduct routine audits of field curricula for foundational and advanced curricula for LGBQQ competence, representation, and inclusion.
6. Understand the policy context for LGBQQ people in your university, locality, state, and country. What protections are in place? What risks do LGBQQ individuals face?
7. Develop policies and procedures related to established field placements to ensure that agencies or settings do not condone discrimination against LGBQQ individuals.

### **Field Faculty**

1. Participate in continuing education to increase understanding of the experiences of LGBQQ people, homophobia, heterosexism, and the unique needs of LGBQQ students in field, including experiences and issues related to people at the intersections of multiple identities who face oppression and discrimination (e.g., lesbian women of color).
2. Develop specialized field groups for LGBQQ students to help them discuss the unique issues related to negotiating the field experience and environment.
3. Identify LGBQQ professional mentors to connect with students for support and guidance.
4. Understand and respond to the needs of all students engaged in field placements, who will inevitably serve LGBQQ individuals and communities.
5. Support and respond to LGBQQ students who may need to reflect on trauma associated with working in agency settings and who may be targets for discrimination, harassment, and threats of violence.

### **Field Agency and Supervisors**

1. Assess the field agency environment for inclusion of LGBQQ clients, staff, and interns. For example, does the agency have a fully inclusive nondiscrimination policy? Offer strategies for increasing visible inclusion of LGBQQ individuals in the agency context.
2. Educate the field agency and staff about issues related to sexual identity disclosure and the importance of an affirmative field environment for LGBQQ students.
3. Programs and field agencies can work together to ensure LGBQQ issues are discussed in field supervision and to ascertain how LGBQQ students are experiencing the practicum.
4. Support field agencies and supervisors in directly addressing discomfort among their staff about LGBQQ people and in combatting homophobia and heterosexism in the agency environment.

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