Diversity and inclusivity at university: a survey of the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) students in the UK

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Abstract

The extent to which UK universities are 'gay friendly' has received some attention in the press. Whilst there are a number of published studies exploring campus climate for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans (LGBT) students and/or staff, these are primarily localised studies undertaken in State Universities and Baccalaureate Colleges in the US. The present study is a nationwide UK study of campus climate, based on survey data collected from a sample of 291 LGBT students from 42 universities across the UK. The findings show that despite the increased implementation of an equality agenda (e.g. equal access; widening participation) in UK Higher Education, homophobia on campus is still a significant problem and therefore universities are not perceived nor experienced by LGBT students as 'safe spaces' in which to be open about sexual orientation/gender identity. The implications of the findings for university policy and practice in relation to LGBT (and indeed all) students is also explored.

Keywords

Diversity and equal opportunities; Inclusivity; Higher Education; Homophobia; Lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans students.

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Introduction

Historically, lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) people have been heavily stigmatised and therefore subject to harassment and discrimination. However, in recent times, most western countries have made considerable moves to afford legal rights on a basis of sexual orientation and/or gender identity. While it is difficult to identify tangible evidence that society itself is more inclusive of LGBT people, recent research (e.g. Ellis, 2002; Hegarty, Pratto & Lemieux, 2004) suggests that, at least in principle, equal rights for LGBT people are well supported. However, homophobic/transphobic hate crimes (i.e. crimes against people or property with sexual orientation/gender identity as a motive) are relatively common. For example, in the UK from April 2006 to March 2007, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) heard 822 such cases, with 73.5% resulting in convictions (http://www.cps.gov.uk).

As with many types of victimisation, hate crime centring on sexual orientation/gender identity is massively underreported. This is often because victims fear further retribution, stigmatisation from the police, and in some cases the risk of their orientation/identity being disclosed. Furthermore, the term 'hate crime' does not encompass all forms of victimisation that LGBT people (and indeed those assumed to be LGBT) might encounter. For example, it does not include more mundane incidents such as 'name-calling', discriminatory practices and other forms of hostility which may not be crimes (in the legal sense), yet may still be psychologically or emotionally damaging and/or result in social marginalisation. The focus of this paper, therefore, is on the wider remit of harassment and discrimination as it applies to LGBT people. Adopting the widely used definition of sexual orientation/gender identity

discrimination as any incident which is perceived to be homophobic/transphobic by the victim or any other person, this study will focus primarily on the perceptions of homophobia by LGBT students.

In the UK, issues around discrimination against LGBT people within a higher education (HE) context have recently received considerable media attention. A number of articles in Times Higher Education (THE) have featured league tables (e.g. Fazackerley 2005) and reports of good practice (e.g. Shepherd 2006) in relation to LGBT issues. Equally though, other articles have highlighted the ways in which universities may be seen as far from 'gay-friendly' (e.g. Tysome 2006; Wojtas 2006). For the most part, these reports focus on the experiences of LGBT staff working in UK HE, with limited attention to the student experience.

Context

The study on which this paper reports was carried out between April and August 2006, and is set within the context of the UK government's agenda of widening participation and equal opportunities in HE. Aims of the widening participation agenda include encouraging participation by under-represented groups and ensuring that all students have the best possible chance of succeeding in their studies. Since there is a paucity of work on the participation and prospects of LGBT students in Higher Education, and information on the sexual orientation/gender identity of students is not collected; it is impossible to determine the extent to which LGBT people are underrepresented in HE and what retention rates look like for this group of students. However, there is considerable research evidence to suggest that LGBT youth are overrepresented in the statistics for truancy, underachievement, and premature exit from education at secondary school (e.g. see Rivers 2000). It would therefore seem reasonable

to presume that LGBT people should be included within policy and practice aimed at facilitating access to HE and actively supported to ensure their retention. However, all too often widening participation policy and practice focuses primarily on ethnic minority, and occasionally working-class students, at the expense of other underrepresented groups (e.g. disabled students; LGBT students; etc). This is largely due to the fact that (a) funding is often tagged for the support of specific minority groups; (b) that legislation is piecemeal, addressing different forms of prejudice and discrimination under a disparate range of Acts; and (c) the greater visibility of some marginalised groups means that they are more readily identifiable and their participation more easily monitored.

With the introduction in December 2003 of the Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations, universities in the UK are now required to ensure that staff and students are not discriminated against on the basis of sexual orientation. Similarly, the Gender Equality Act (2006; revised from the Sex Discrimination Act, 1975) was similarly instituted to protect not only women and men, but also Trans people in the workplace. It should be noted, however, that although UK law addresses sexual orientation discrimination and gender discrimination separately, these two issues are deliberately conflated in this paper as homophobia is underpinned by prejudice based on non-conformity in relation to *both* gender and sexuality.

Whilst many universities have acted to develop policies for addressing such discrimination, the implementation and enforcement of these policies is much more opaque. Nevertheless, if these legal obligations are to be fully instituted, consideration of issues around campus climate for LGBT students (and staff) should be a priority for universities and other institutions within the education sector. Furthermore, the UK Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (2007) prohibits sexual orientation discrimination in the provision of goods, facilities and services in the public and private sector; including education.

Universities are therefore now legally obliged to ensure that LGBT students are afforded equality in the same way as ethnic minority and other marginalised students.

A third reason why this issue is especially pertinent to HE is that university is typically the first time that young people will have been away from home for an extended period. For young LGBT students this is often the first opportunity to explore their identity without the limiting constraints of the home and the secondary school, both of which in many cases are not gay-affirmative settings in which to 'come out' (Epstein et al. 2003). Similarly, because of potential repercussions from parents, the school climate often mitigates against LGBT teachers being open about their sexual/gender identity. Therefore, university is often the first time that LGBT youth have encountered openly LGB or T role models. Few will have encountered adult LGBT people prior to coming to university, and for the most part, their knowledge of LGBT issues and people will be that articulated through the homophobic lens of playground bullying, and the negatively biased stereotypes of media portrayals. For all these reasons, it is important to ensure that the university setting is a 'safe' environment for LGBT people in the same way that it is desirable that it be a safe and affirming environment for *all* students, independent of class, race, (dis)ability and so forth. However, this is also a time when the demands on young people to fulfil the heterosexual imperative and form adult opposite-sex couple relationships (Epstein et al. 2003). This places LGBT students at particular risk, highlighting the need for appropriate and adequate support.

Homophobia on Campus

Within the social science literature, several works (e.g. see Tierney & Rhoads 1993) have highlighted the negative experiences of LGBT academic staff working within universities. However, there are also a number of published studies exploring homophobia in universities more generally under the banner of 'campus climate', and typically through localised studies

undertaken in State Universities and Baccalaureate Colleges in the United States (e.g. Eliason 1996; Malaney, et al. 1997; Brown et al. 2004). In addition to the published work, several US institutions (Indiana University; Kansas State University; University of Arizona) have undertaken assessments of campus climate with reports of their findings widely available (e.g. see http://www.lgbtcampus.org/resources/campus_climate.html). In the main, this body of research comprises survey-based studies undertaken in a single institution for the purposes of monitoring equal opportunities for LGBT students on campus. However, these studies vary in the samples which they employ. In most cases both staff and students ('gay' and 'straight') have been surveyed about campus climate for LGBT people. However, there is one notable exception, a UK study (Fahey, 1995) undertaken more than a decade ago, in which 105 'gay' students from (up to) 35 UK institutions were surveyed about their experiences of homophobic discrimination in HE.

Although the findings of these studies vary somewhat, all indicate that homophobia on campus is endemic, with little evidence of real change over the past two decades. For example, in D'Augelli's (1989) study, 75% of lesbians and gay men surveyed had experienced verbal harassment, 25% had been threatened with physical violence at least once, and 17% had sustained property damage. Similarly, Norris (1991) found that more than 80% of those surveyed had overheard stereotypical or derogatory remarks about lesbians, gay men and bisexuals. In contrast, studies which have surveyed heterosexual students and/or staff have tended to suggest that campus climate is less hostile than is reported in studies with exclusively LGB samples. For example, only 57% of employees in Eliason's (1996) study thought that anti-LGB attitudes were prevalent, whilst in a study by Malaney et al. (1997) only 25% of students surveyed thought anti-LGBT attitudes were prevalent on campus. A detailed examination of past studies and their reported findings would seem to suggest that differences in findings are more a function of the samples used, the questions asked, and

differences in the types of institutions than 'real' differences in the occurrence of homophobia. In particular, the fact that more general samples report less experience of a homophobic climate is to be expected. Although homophobia is not exclusively aimed at LGBT people, it is these people who are most directly affected by it.

In contrast, a few small scale qualitative studies looking at campus climate within specific settings – in particular, residence halls (e.g. Taulke-Johnson & Rivers 1999; Evans & Broid, 2002) – have also been published, including one of the few UK studies on campus climate (Taulke-Johnson & Rivers 1999). These studies report findings from samples of fewer than 15 participants based in a very localised setting. Whilst qualitative research lends itself to small samples, and indeed it is difficult to access large samples of LGBT participants, these studies offer valuable insights into LGBT students' experiences in residence halls. The main finding reported in this type of study centres on the difficulty which LGBT people have in 'coming out' in this context. Although some felt supported by the sense of community in their particular corridor/flat, others encountered hostility which made their life at university unnecessarily difficult. However, because there are only a few studies of this kind, and they focus on a residential setting, little is known about students' experiences on campus more generally. Furthermore, studies which explore campus climate more generally tend to focus on documenting incidences of homophobia and perceptions of homophobic climate with little emphasis on who the perpetrators are, and the contexts within which these incidences occur. Although one UK study (Epstein et al. 2003) explored the experiences of gay male students (N = 12) longitudinally identifying a numbers of structural and implicit issues, the small sample size means it is unclear how widespread these may be.

Despite the limitations of existing studies, research over the past 20 years consistently suggests that – at least in the US – homophobia on campus is a significant problem. In particular, verbal harassment and threats of physical violence have been found to be common.

Whilst actual incidents of violence are small in comparison, the subjective climate for LGBT students is one of fear in which many 'choose' to stay silent and invisible. For example, most LGBT students report not feeling comfortable disclosing their sexual identity and many report deliberately making changes to their behaviour (e.g. avoiding known lesbian/gay locations; 'passing' as straight; disassociating from known LGBT people) in order to avoid harassment and discrimination (e.g. see Taulke-Johnson & Rivers 1999). As with any form of harassment and discrimination (overt or covert) such a 'climate of fear' places LGBT students at increased risk of psychological distress. Indeed, research on the psychosocial correlates of homophobia consistently reports a much higher incidence of depression, anxiety and attempted suicide - all of which are subclinical indicators of social stress - among LGBT youth (e.g. see Koh & Ross, 2006).

Within the literature, homophobia in education is recognised as a problem which needs addressing. Whilst most of this work is UK-based it primarily focuses on a school rather than university context. For example, there are a number of studies which focus on social exclusion of LGBT youth (e.g. Epstein 1997; Rivers 2000, 2004) and homophobic bullying in school (e.g. Rivers & D'Augelli 2001). On the other hand, work which focuses on intervention in higher education settings is typically US-based, and focuses specifically on the classroom setting and curriculum context. For example, a number of papers highlight the benefits of panel discussions (e.g. Burkholder & Dineen 1996; Nelson & Krieger 1997), the creation of 'safe zones' (e.g. Evans 2002), zero tolerance of homophobia in the classroom (Neumann 2005) and diversity training (Finkel et al. 2003) as solutions to address the issue of homophobia on campus. Whilst these approaches have typically been found effective in changing attitudes, they only address part of the problem. By focusing on providing 'safe spaces' for LGBT people and increasing awareness of these issues, they are limited in their ability to effect change in the wider social setting of the university. Only a few papers explore

the need for support at an institutional level through policy development and the development of innovative student support services (Messinger 2002; Biaggio et al. 2003), and none address extra-curricular concerns.

Rationale

Whilst the existing body of literature on campus climate is very illuminating, and that on intervention offers some interesting approaches to addressing this issue, the fact that it is overwhelmingly US-based research raises some issues about its application in a UK context. First, there are some differences between US Universities/Colleges and UK Universities in that the former tend to function like small close-knit communities. This may contribute to differences in the way issues such as homophobia are managed. For example, the tendency for students in the US to live in university/college accommodation on campus, means that the university/college may have the ability to address issues of harassment and discrimination in ways that are not possible in the UK where most students live in accommodation which is not university owned or managed. Perhaps more significant though is the difference in socio-political climate between the UK and US. In particular, the US has tended to be much more conservative about the inclusion of LGBT people and issues whereas in the UK (and in Europe) there has been a much more liberal approach to these issues. It could therefore reasonably be expected that the dominant political ethos in each country would impact both on the way in which such issues are managed within the university context, as well as on the attitudes and behaviours of individuals within those contexts.

Potential cross-national differences aside, despite the increased attention to equality and diversity, widening participation, and inclusivity in UK universities, surprisingly little is known about the prevalence (or otherwise) of harassment and discrimination against LGBT people in UK HE. Whilst data may be collected in some institutions, data on this issue is not

systematically nor routinely collected. To date, there is no publicly available baseline data on this topic.

The purpose of this study is, therefore, to explore LGBT students' perceptions and experiences of homophobic discrimination/harassment on campus, and to gather baseline descriptive data regarding campus climate (in relation to homophobia) in the UK. Rather than focusing on a single setting (e.g. halls of residence; classroom teaching) this study aims to explore campus climate more generally, with a view to identifying barriers (or points of resistance) to inclusivity for LGBT students. Unlike other studies published to date this is a national study and therefore focused on general issues rather than those specific to a given institution. Furthermore, it offers a more comprehensive approach to campus climate through a multifaceted questionnaire rather than the more narrowly focussed (and somewhat patchy) questionnaires used in previous studies.

Method

Participants

Participants comprised a self-selected sample of 291 LGBT students (57% male; 42% female; 1% unspecified) from 42 universities across the UK, primarily recruited via student union based LGBT groups. They ranged in age from 18-52 (mean = 22) and 88.4% of the sample were aged 25 or under.

In the UK, the Higher Education sector comprises 'traditional universities' (those inaugurated prior to 1992), 'modern universities' (those incorporated since the institution of the Further and Higher Education Act in 1992) and 'University Colleges' which teach degree programmes, but are not recognised as a university and typically are affiliated to a university through which their degrees are awarded. All three types of institution were represented

within this sample: Respondents represent 32 traditional universities, nine modern universities, and one university college.

Although 0.7% of the sample identified as heterosexual, 51.9% identified as gay male, 25.4% as lesbian/gay female, 16.8% as bisexual (9 male; 40 female), 0.7% as trans and 4.1% 'other' (e.g. "gay AND trans", "I don't identify myself", "predominantly gay but open-minded"). The sample predominantly comprised 'white' participants (90.7%) with a small number identifying as Irish (3.4%), Asian (1.3%), Black (0.6%) or other. Most (87.6%) were undergraduates and the sample as a whole represented students from a wide range of subjects and disciplines.

Procedure

Based on surveys used in existing published studies, a questionnaire was developed to explore both actual experiences of homophobia on campus and perceptions of the 'gay-friendliness' of the university. The final questionnaire consisted of 25 questions comprising 5-point likert-type scales, forced-choice (yes/no) and open-response formats. Questions included in the survey covered four main aspects of campus climate. These were *actual harassment/discrimination* (e.g. 'since you have been at university have you ever been a victim of homophobic harassment/discrimination?'); *perceptions of campus climate* (e.g. 'how often do you think students at your campus might experience direct verbal harassment because they were thought/known to be LGBT?'); *campus climate and outness* (e.g. 'since you have been at university have you ever deliberately concealed your sexual orientation or gender identity to avoid intimidation?'); and *LGBT inclusiveness* (e.g. 'LGBT issues are adequately represented within the curriculum').

The survey was administered electronically via an online Proforma hosted on the University's server. A request for participation, which contained the direct URL link to the

questionnaire was sent to every university in the UK. Where a contact point could be established, the request was sent directly to the Chair/Leader of the university's LGBT Society/Association. Where the existence of such a group could not be confirmed, the call for participants was sent to the President (or similar Executive) of the Students' Union requesting that it be forwarded to the appropriate contact person. By the number of responses returned per institution, it was evident that in many cases the message was forwarded to mailing-list members of the respective LGBT group as requested. It is likely that through 'snowballing' (see Ritchie & Lewis 2003) some non-members of such groups may have been reached; however, it is not possible to determine the extent to which this was the case.

Questionnaire responses were automatically collated by Questionnaire Maker (the programme with which the survey was created). At the end of the survey period, the quantitative responses were imported into SPSS for analysis. The quantitative data did not meet the assumptions of parametric analysis (i.e. normal distribution; at least interval level data) therefore non-parametric analyses have been used throughout this paper. Analyses were carried out both for the whole sample, and by group (i.e. on a basis of gender, age, sexual identity, and discipline of study). Age differences were not found for any of the questionnaire items. Where analyses have been undertaken on sexual identity, the 17 respondents who did not identify as gay male, lesbian or bisexual have been excluded from the analysis. Since participants represented a wide range of degree subjects, these were categorised into two groups: 'people-based' (e.g. Psychology, Social Sciences, Education, Medicine) and other (e.g. Humanities, business, art). Degree subjects were deemed 'people-based' if their focus was primarily about people (i.e. behaviour, learning, health, social wellbeing).

Qualitative data was derived from open-response items within the questionnaire (e.g. 'if you are aware of any specific homophobic incidents which have occurred at your university, please outline these here'). All qualitative data was accessed directly from

Questionnaire Maker and analysed using content analysis (see Robson 2002). This involved categorising and coding responses into similar types of responses. These have been used to illustrate the findings of the quantitative analysis.

Results

The findings reported in this section have been organised under headings representing the four main subsections of the questionnaire: Actual harassment/discrimination, perception of campus climate, campus climate and outness, and LGBT inclusiveness. Each of these will now be considered in turn.

Actual Harassment/Discrimination

23.4% of the students surveyed indicated that they had on at least one occasion been a victim of homophobic harassment/discrimination since being at university. Of these incidents, the most common forms of harassment/discrimination comprised derogatory remarks (77.9%), direct or indirect verbal harassment or threats (47.1%), and threats of physical violence (26.5%). The incidence of verbal harassment reported here would appear to be significantly higher than the 39% reported by Fahey (1995) more than a decade ago. Whilst this appears to be a cause for concern, it may simply be a product of increased awareness of LGBT issues and therefore higher levels of reporting, rather than increased incidence. However, it is also worth noting that compared with US studies, the incidence of homophobic harassment appear to be substantially lower in the UK. Less common forms of harassment were also noted, including pressure to be silent about one's sexual orientation/gender identity (16.2%), being the recipient of written comments containing anti-LGBT sentiments (13.2%), having been denied services (10.3%), actual physical assault or injury (8.8%), having been threatened to

have one's sexual orientation/gender identity exposed (5.9%), and being the target of anti-LGBT graffiti (4.4%).

Typically, respondents reported these incidents as commonly occurring in public spaces on campus such as the Student Union or cafeteria (38.2%), in a hall of residence (27.9%), or whilst walking around campus (25.0%). In comparison, such incidents infrequently occurred in a class (8.8%) or in the office of a staff member (1.5%). Consistent with this, the overwhelming majority of incidents were perpetrated by students (76.5%), with only a small number being perpetrated by lecturers/tutors (4.4%), admin staff (1.5%), security staff (1.5%), or catering staff (1.5%). This concurs with the findings of Fahey's (1995) UK study in which students, rather than staff, were also reported to be the main perpetrators of homophobia at university. However, some respondents indicated that it was often difficult to identify the source of harassment/discrimination due to the fact that their university was not campus based which opened up the possibility of incidents being perpetrated by members of the general public as they moved between university buildings or frequented venues (e.g. cafes) near the university which were predominantly occupied by students.

In this study many of the specific incidents of homophobic harassment/discrimination which were reported, occurred in student accommodation (e.g. halls of residence; university assigned flats). These incidents tended to be much more extreme and/or enduring forms of harassment, and therefore more troublesome for the individuals affected by them:

> My first year, 1 of the 3 people I was randomly assigned to share a flat with turned out to be homophobic and acted very disrespectfully towards me. My second year, I moved, and the 1 person out of two that the university selected to share my flat in the second year was very homophobic, saying things like "better dead then gay" and threatening me several times. (#3242)

> I know of two guys who found a disabled (wheelchair bound) guy's gaydar [a web forum for gay men] photos (partially naked) and then pinned them to his room door in our halls of

> residence out of his reach. They remained there for over 24 hours before they were removed. (#3025)

Another common site of oppression were student organisations, in particular (although by no means exclusively) religious groups such as the Muslim or Christian Societies. These groups were often reported as perpetrating discrimination against LGBT students/groups:

> The Uni Christian Union invited a guest speaker to address their congregation, a known homophobic preacher, who suggested in the course of his address that Christians shouldn't give up on gay people that they can be 'saved', equating us with other godless people such as Osama Bin Laden (#3090)

> The Debating Society put forward the motion "The LGB should be banned because it promotes segregation" They failed to apply this motion to the Christian Union, Islamic Society, Afrocarribean Society, etc. (#2990)

However, hostility towards LGBT people and their advocates was not necessarily direct and overt, nor directed specifically at LGBT individuals. For example, some respondents reported incidences of homophobia as resistance to attempts to increase LGBT visibility and raise awareness of LGBT issues:

> We have recently run our LGBT Awareness Week, all of the LGBT volunteers and our committee were quite surprised at the anti-gay feelings of some students that we hadn't ever noticed before. For example – we gave out flyers, lollys and other things in front of our library, whilst decorating the library with rainbow colours. Many people openly avoided us, took the flyer and seeing what it was about gave it back to us, or approached us to ask what was going only to step away with a frightened look when they found out! (#2949)

> I'm involved with my university LGBT association, and had a stall in my college (which is like halls of residence) for an 'awareness week'. The Principal of the college was concerned to make sure that the stall was 'not too overt'. (#3068)

Respondents were also asked about the frequency of anti-LGBT sentiments. Consistent with the above findings, only 2.7% had frequently or quite often heard lecturers or tutors stereotyping, making negative remarks, or telling jokes which put down LGBT people. In contrast, 28.8% had heard friends and 31.3% other students stereotyping, making negative remarks, or telling jokes which put down LGBT people (see Table 2). An analysis of these results using the Wilcoxon test indicated a highly statistically significant difference between responses (Chi^2=356.128, df = 2; p<.001) suggesting that lecturers and tutors were significantly less likely to have been heard espousing anti-LGBT views than were both friends and other students. These findings are comparable to those reported in the US study by Malaney et al (1997) in that students were much more likely than lecturers/tutors to have been heard making negative remarks.

Table 1: Frequency of anti-LGBT sentiments by source (%)

	frequently	quite often	sometimes	seldom	never
4. How often have you heard *lecturers or tutors* stereotyping, making negative remarks, or telling jokes which put down LGBT persons?	1.0	1.7	14.1	30.2	52.6
5. How often have you heard *friends* (at university) stereotyping, making negative remarks, or telling jokes which put down LGBT persons?	11.3	17.5	39.5	23.4	6.5
6. How often have you heard *other students* stereotyping, making negative remarks, or telling jokes which put down LGBT persons?	12.4	18.9	35.4	26.8	5.5

Analyses exploring group differences were carried out using the Mann-Whitney test (a non-parametric test used to compare mean responses of groups). No significant differences were found for responses to any of these questions on a basis of gender (male/female) or sexual identity (lesbian/gay male/bisexual). However, an analysis based on responses of participants studying for degrees in ‘people-based’ disciplines vs those studying in other

disciplines found significant differences. Those studying in people-based disciplines were significantly more likely to have heard lecturers/tutors (U=6119.5, N=289, p<0.001) and friends (U=6716, N=285, p=.05) making negative remarks or telling jokes which put down LGBT people. It is likely that these differences are attributable to the fact that LGBT issues/perspectives are more salient in people-based subjects, and therefore, there is more opportunity for both lecturers/tutors and students to express their resistance to such issues being made visible. Furthermore, a heightened awareness of LGBT issues/perspectives through their explicit inclusion in the curriculum may facilitate out-of-class discussion between students, thus increasing the likelihood of students expressing anti-LGBT views.

Perception of Campus Climate

Despite the evidence that actual harassment/discrimination against LGBT people was widespread on campus, more than half of respondents (54.7%) indicated that they thought anti-LGBT attitudes existed to a little/very little extent, and only 7.9% indicated that they thought they existed to a great/very great extent. However, a sizeable minority (37.1%) believed that they existed to some extent. Likewise, only 13.4% of respondents thought that an LGBT person was likely/very likely to be harassed on campus, whilst the majority of respondents (79.4%) thought that an LGBT person was unlikely/very unlikely to be harassed on campus.

Table 2: Perceptions of frequency of victimisation

	frequently	quite often	sometimes	seldom	never
8. How often do you think students at your campus might experience having their personal property defaced or otherwise vandalised because they were thought/known to be LGBT?	0.0	0.7	8.9	46.4	43.6
9. How often do you think students at your campus might experience direct verbal harassment because they were thought/known to be LGBT?	0.7	3.8	25.1	58.1	12.0

10. How often do you think posters advertising LGBT activities/events might be defaced, destroyed or otherwise vandalised?	3.1	5.8	25.1	39.5	25.4
11. How often do you think students at your campus might receive threatening or otherwise derogatory notes, phone calls or emails because they were thought/known to be LGBT?	1.0	0.0	6.5	46.7	45.0

With the exception of Q2 "to what extent do you think anti-LGBT attitudes exist on your campus", no significant differences were found for any of these questions on a basis of gender (male/female) or sexual identity (lesbian/gay male/bisexual). For Q2, a significant gender difference was found between responses (U=8617.5, N=285, p=.039) suggesting that male participants were significantly more likely than female participants to believe that anti-LGBT attitudes exist on campus. The existing literature on homophobia overwhelmingly suggests that males are significantly more homophobic than females (e.g. see Donnelly et al., 1997; Schellenberg et al. 1999) and that gay men are significantly more likely than lesbians to be the targets of homophobia. It would therefore seem reasonable that male participant (gay, bisexual or trans) might perceive the campus climate more negatively than their female counterparts.

Campus Climate and Outness

Item 24 asked students to indicate the extent to which they agreed with the statement 'I feel comfortable about being out on campus'. Of all respondents, 77.7% agreed/strongly agreed with this statement, whilst only 18.2% disagreed/strongly disagreed. Whilst no significant differences were found for this question on a basis of gender and discipline of study, for sexual identity there were significant group differences (Chi^2=9.683, df=2, p=.008). For this item, bisexual participants were significantly more likely than both gay male and lesbian participants to feel comfortable about being out on campus. This is, however, not entirely

surprising in that bisexuality is commonly seen by young people as a 'safe' alternative to a lesbian or gay identity. Many lesbian and gay youth initially identify as bisexual as a way of averting the stigma of being labelled lesbian/gay, enabling them to retreat into the closet should they feel the need.

Despite most respondents reporting feeling safe about being out on campus, responses to questions around other indicators of 'climate' were much more mixed (see table 3).

Table 3: Indicators of 'climate of fear'

	yes	no
13. Since being at university have you ever feared for your safety because of your sexual orientation or gender identity?	23.4	75.6
14. Since being at university have you ever deliberately concealed your sexual orientation or gender identity to avoid intimidation?	54.3	44.7
15. Since being at university have you ever avoided disclosing your sexual orientation or gender identity to a tutor, lecturer, supervisor or other staff member of the university due to fear of negative consequences?	40.5	59.1

Whilst most LGBT students (75.6%) reported that they had not feared for their safety whilst at university, around half had deliberately concealed their sexual orientation or gender identity to avoid intimidation. Similarly, two fifths (40.5%) reported having avoided disclosing their sexual orientation or gender identity to a lecturer, tutor, supervisor or other staff member due to fear of negative consequences. An analysis of responses to these questions showed a statistically significant difference ($Chi2=71.7$, $df=2$, $p<.001$) between responses to Q13 and both Q14 and Q15. This would seem to suggest that LGBT students do not particularly perceive a 'climate of fear' but actively behave in ways that respond to such a climate.

No significant differences were found for any of these questions on a basis of gender (male/female) or sexual identity (lesbian/gay male/bisexual). However, an analysis based on responses of participants studying for degrees in 'people-based' disciplines vs those studying in other disciplines found statistically significant differences for question 15 ($U=6812$,

N=290, p=.009) suggesting that those studying in people-based subjects were more likely to avoid disclosing their sexual orientation or gender identity to staff of the university due to fear of negative consequences.

Although respondents were not specifically asked to explain their responses to these questions, one respondent explained it in the following terms:

> The problem is that visible homophobia is pretty much illegal now at British unis, and academics aren't allowed to act on it openly. However, one always worries if they can discriminate against you and you'll never know… so you end up keeping your sexuality in the closet simply because you know it is likely there will be some people who dislike your identity enough to treat you badly, and that you can't identify them, so the only safe option is to stay in the closet. (#3242)

Overall, the findings in relation to outness suggest that despite the relatively low incidence of homophobia on campus, it occurs frequently enough to have created a 'climate of fear' whereby LGBT students deliberately act to conceal their sexual orientation/gender identity in order to avoid discrimination/harassment. So, rather than homophobia on campus being simply about overt forms of harassment and discrimination, the threat of *potential* harassment/discrimination ensures that LGBT students more often than not 'voluntarily' choose not to be out on campus (see Kitzinger 1996 for a detailed discussion of this).

LGBT inclusiveness

The final part of the questionnaire asked respondents for their perception of their university's LBGT inclusiveness. These questions largely centred on the visibility of LGBT issues and concerns in the curriculum, through the provision of resources, and the addressing of issues in practice.

39.2% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that 'the university thoroughly addresses campus issues related to sexual orientation/gender identity', whilst a similar number

(36.8%) disagreed/strongly disagreed with this same statement. This would seem to suggest considerable variation between institutions in the degree to which these issues are seen to be addressed. However, respondents were more inclined to believe that their universities provided visible resources on LGBT issues/concerns, with 58.4% of respondents agreeing/disagreeing with this statement. With regard to inclusion of issues within the curriculum and the climate of classes, the pattern of responses was somewhat different. Only 17.5% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that LGBT issues are adequately represented within the curriculum, whilst 37.8% agreed/strongly agreed that they felt comfortable raising LGBT issues in class and 74.6% agreed/strongly agreed that the climate of classes they have taken are accepting of LGBT people. A summary of responses for these questions can be found in Table 4.

Table 4: Perceived extent to which the university delivers LGBT inclusiveness (%)

	strongly agree	agree	don't know	disagree	strongly disagree
20. The university thoroughly addresses campus issues related to sexual orientation/gender identity	7.2	32.0	23.4	29.6	7.2
21. LGBT issues are adequately represented within the curriculum	3.1	14.4	29.9	28.5	23.7
22. The climate of classes I have taken are accepting of LGBT persons	16.5	58.1	12.7	8.9	2.1
23. I feel comfortable raising LGBT issues in class	7.6	30.2	15.1	31.3	15.5
25. The university provides visible resources on LGBT issues/concerns	13.4	45.0	7.9	22.0	11.3

No significant differences were found for any of these questions on a basis of gender (male/female), nor for sexual identity (lesbian/gay male/bisexual). However, an analysis based on responses of participants studying for degrees in 'people-based' disciplines vs those studying in other disciplines found statistically significant differences for questions 20

(U=3550.5, N=221, p=.004), 21(U=3230, N=203, p<.004), and 25 (U=5164, N=267, p=.001). In all three cases, those doing 'people-based' degrees were significantly more likely to disagree/strongly disagree that the university thoroughly addresses LGBT issues, that LGBT issues are adequately addressed within the curriculum, and that the university provides visible resources on LGBT issues/concerns.

A number of respondents reported specific examples illustrating inadequate coverage of LGBT issues and concerns within academic courses. Typically students reported minimal coverage and an extremely narrow focus: "nursing coverage of LGBT issues revolves around STD's – one lesson in a 3 year programme!"(#3080). Others, however, reported resistance (and even hostility) to inclusion of these issues:

> In sexual health education classes the whole class has made humour of gay men's sexual health issues, as encouraged by the facilitator. At its worst one comment extended to "it makes me sick" on discussing gay sexual practices. The comment was unchallenged. They were all medical students, the facilitator a student doctor and the observer a doctor. This was in my first week of medical school – before I had come out. (#3093)

> Courses can do more to teach people about LGBT people or at least provide cases studies in lectures that are appropriate. This did happen on my course but many people began to voice "I don't see why we should have to learn about 'them', I'm sick of it" or "I don't see how gay people's experiences are any different to ours. It's a waste of time!'. These remarks were from people who knew that I was gay. (#3013)

Whilst many respondents reported examples of good practice within their universities, it is clear that in some cases more attention needs to be paid not just to the inclusion of LGBT issues/concerns, but to the ways in which these are managed within a classroom setting.

For many respondents, the problem appeared to be wider than the curriculum and what does/does not happen in a classroom setting. Many reported that they felt the university itself

was not supportive of LGBT issues/concerns and did little to indicate a commitment to addressing these issues:

> Although I know the sexuality of some of my tutors (some of which actually told me themselves) and LGBT issues are being raised to a higher degree at the moment, I feel that the university itself does not… offer any fully obvious support for LGBT students other than of guidance to the LGBT forum within the student union (# 3006)

> In terms of directly improving the campus climate for LGBT persons I suggest that all university publicity material reflect the fact that LGBT students exist and succeed at university. Whilst acknowledging the shallow tokenistic gesture of such rationally capitalistic branding and publicity exercises I do in part believe that by projecting what can be, we work some way towards creating 'what is'. (#3079)

It would appear then that in terms of the widening participation and equality agendas, universities could be much more proactive in addressing the inclusiveness of LGBT students.

Summary and Conclusions

The purpose of the present study was to explore LGBT students' experiences and perceptions of harassment and discrimination on campus. Overall, the analysis of the data suggests that whilst homophobia on campus is not an overwhelming problem, it is still a significant one. Although extreme acts (e.g. actual physical violence) are relatively uncommon, verbal harassment and anti-LGBT sentiments are prevalent. It is also evident that fellow students are, in the main, responsible for incidents of homophobia, both through explicit anti-LGBT sentiments and also through resistance to visibility and inclusiveness. The findings suggest that there is some resistance to LGBT inclusivity creating a climate which inhibits many LGBT people from being open about their sexual orientation/gender identity and therefore to collude in their own oppression by actively 'passing' as heterosexual. Therefore, far from

enhancing the student experience, this campus climate ensures that LGBT students continue to feel vulnerable and marginalised.

In part, the data suggests that universities as organisations are in neglect of their duties of ensuring equality for LGBT students. In particular, universities are reported to fail to ensure adequate representation of LGBT perspectives in courses, not making LGBT students visible in marketing, and not actively enforcing their non-discrimination policies in relation to sexual orientation/gender identity issues. Whilst policy can be an important catalyst for change (Epstein et al., 2003) – and many universities in the UK have detailed policies for addressing 'sexual orientation' and 'gender' discrimination – as others (e.g. Biaggio et al., 2003; Epstein et al., 2003) highlight too often these fail to be implemented in any practical way. Policies may be useful for dealing with grievances, but are not easily able to be used to address more mundane and pervasive forms of homophobia which are unlikely to be brought before a grievance panel. Furthermore, for much the same reasons that I highlighted in relation to hate crimes, homophobic incidences are likely to be considerably underreported. Consequently, even the best policies and procedures will have little impact on the wider context.

Although structural issues may contribute to campus climate, the findings of this study suggest that primarily homophobia on campus is perpetrated by students towards other students. Therefore, the problem is predominantly not (in this instance) curriculum content nor staff conduct as suggested in previous work. Consequently, any effort to effect positive change needs to shift its focus away from staff to students. Providing appropriate (and dedicated) student support services for LGBT students (e.g. see Messinger 2002) might be beneficial, however, this merely addresses the aftermath of homophobia rather than proactively preventing it. While studies on campus climate have typically suggested raising awareness of LGBT issues, this has tended to constitute extra-curricular classes for staff

(particularly those based in Halls of Residence) and/or LGBT people as 'guest lecturers'. Typically these classes attract attendees who are already sympathetic to LGBT issues, whilst attendance is resisted by those who wish to distance themselves from the issues (in case someone presumes that they are LGBT) or who hold extreme negative views towards LGBT people/issues. They also tend to centre on attitudinal change, ignoring the ways in which the wider social context contributes to a positive or negative climate. However, awareness raising is an important strategy for addressing issues of prejudice and discrimination and also falls within the remit of education. For all these reasons, embedding LGBT issues (along with other diversity issues) in curriculum content is a much more powerful way of awareness raising and contributing towards a more positive climate. It also more reliably ensures engagement by a much wider audience.

Focusing solely on curriculum content will, however, only have a limited effect in that it neglects the wider context which has a more direct impact on the student experience. The main focus, therefore, needs to be on creating a campus climate of zero tolerance of all forms of prejudice (including homophobia). Some of the data excerpts in this paper highlight the way in which, when it occurs, blatant homophobia passes without comment. By doing nothing, both staff and students are complicit in reproducing a homophobic climate and ensuring the continued marginalisation of LGBT students. It is therefore important to develop a climate in which LGBT students feel safe to choose to come out (or not) and in which staff and other students feel empowered to challenge homophobia and other forms of resistance to the inclusion of LGBT issues. The challenge is how to achieve this.

As I see it, the key to addressing the issue of homophobia on campus is to establish a climate of zero tolerance (Neumann 2005) towards all forms of harassment and discrimination. To implement this would involve a multi-pronged approach which would include embedding LGBT issues in the curriculum; implementing policy and monitoring

practice; instigating sanctions for prejudiced behaviour; and most importantly, embedding LGBT issues within the wider practices around inclusivity. Universities need to be much more proactive in addressing diversity issues. Bringing LGBT issues under the diversity and inclusivity umbrella will strengthen the ability to address homophobia on campus. Addressing any form of prejudice on its own facilitates discrimination by mobilising opposition to that particular group or issue. However, to package all the strands together helps to construct a welcoming and creative environment that is inclusive of all students regardless of difference. Such an environment would be one which not only takes LGBT issues seriously, but *as* seriously as issues affecting any other subgroup of the student (and staff) population.

In summary, this study highlights that there is still some way to go before the inclusivity agenda is realised within universities. While the focus of this paper has been on the experiences of LGBT *students*, it is important to recognise that addressing homophobia and promoting a 'gay friendly' campus climate does not just benefit this group. If the experience of LGBT students at university is poor, this affects the overall campus climate for *all* students (LGBT and 'straight'). If it is not safe for LGBT students to be open about their sexual/gender identity, then it will be difficult for any student to deviate from the narrow stereotyped notions of heterosexuality which are perpetuated on campus. Furthermore, the student who is still exploring his/her sexuality will also struggle in this climate. This situation makes it more difficult for students to integrate fully into university life and to benefit socially and emotionally from attending university. Likewise, it is not just students who are affected by homophobia on campus - its existence (and persistence) affects the quality of life of university staff also. Exploring the experiences of staff was beyond the scope of this study, but clearly, student homophobia will undoubtedly impact on the experiences of LGBT staff. Enhancing the campus climate is therefore of benefit to the whole university community: to ignore homophobia is to impoverish the quality of life for all who work, study and visit there.

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