



# LGBTQ Diversity Trainings with Law Enforcement Personnel: Reactions and Resistance

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## Introduction

- Few studies have looked at resistance toward LGBTQ diversity and knowing about the types of resistance that often surface can help in the preparation and delivery of the training.
- Resistance to diversity includes: “A range of practices and behaviors within and by organizations that interfere, intentionally or unintentionally, with the use of diversity as an opportunity for learning and effectiveness” (Thomas & Plaut, 2008)
- Resistance can surface for a variety of reasons including individual readiness, trainers and training tactics, and the larger socio-political context (Mildred & Zúñiga, 2004).
- Resistance can include open denial of prejudice, bias, or discrimination, non-verbal body language, refusal to engage in diversity work or trainings, and as hostility or anger (Mildred & Zúñiga, 2004).
- The goal of the present study is to articulate the ways in which resistance occurs in the context of an LGBTQ-specific training for law enforcement personnel (LEP) and to compare the resistance encountered with current descriptions of diversity resistance in the literature.

## Participants

- 120 Law Enforcement Personnel; 30-40 per training
- 81 Provided demographic data:
  - 90.1% sworn officers
  - Average of 14.13 years on the force
  - 74.1% male; 25.9% female
  - 90.1% heterosexual: 9.9% did not report sexual orientation
  - 63% Euro-American/White, 16% Hispanic, 2.5% African-American, 2.5% Asian, 2.5% Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, 4.9% Other.



## Procedure

### TRAINING

- Four five-hour trainings
- Trainings included: terminology related to LGBTQ communities, societal messages about gender, statistics of LGBTQ experiences with LEP, role play scenarios, and small group discussions.
- Two main facilitators with expertise in diversity training, one additional facilitator from a local LGBTQ-serving non-profit organization, and one university researcher.
- Teaching methods included: brief lectures, personal reflection, group discussion, role-plays and problem solving in small groups.

### DATA COLLECTION

- Four research team members took turns acting as a scribe at each training.
- Scribes captured participants’ comments and questions, the context of these comments, non-verbal behaviors, and trainer responses.

### DATA ANALYSIS

- Scribed material was coded using thematic analysis
- Resistance was coded using the working definition:

*“The ways in which participants responded to the training that indicates some struggle, discomfort, distancing, concern, anxiety, lack of acceptance, or rejection regarding material being presented. It can take many forms, including removing attention (leaving room, texting), arguing, and questioning to prove wrong (not questioning to help understand).”*



## Results

### Resistance about LEP

- LEP is doing a good job, no additional training needed.
- LEP treat everyone the same
- LEP do not have personal biases
- Concerned about how the public perceives LEP
- Challenging statistics about LEP  
*“I understand that maybe a lot of these facts or numbers were counted by an advocate or student who didn’t really understand law enforcement.”*

### Resistance about LGBTQ community

- LGBTQ community does not understand LEP
- LGBTQ community can harm LEP with accusations of bias
- LGBTQ people allege discrimination to get out of trouble
- Language should not be taken so seriously by LGBTQ people
- LGBTQ concerns are no longer as much of an issue because there is greater acceptance
- LGBTQ people want special treatment  
*“I feel like I’m very empathic and I have skills to work with minority groups that feel that they have extra rights that they believe they have.”*

### How LEP do their job

- LEP is just doing their job and following protocol
- No time to further engage with LGBTQ persons in the moment
- Don’t want to go digging for evidence of a hate crime
- Reluctance to intervene
- LEP believe intervening could cause more harm than good

### Non-verbal resistance

- Discomfort with role play activity
- Joking and laughing during training
- Low engagement during training

## Discussion

- Some of the resistance identified is similar to what is found in the literature
  - Denial of any biases
  - Disengaging from the training
  - Non-verbal body language
  - Challenging information provided
  - Belief that LGBTQ people want special treatment
- Some resistance was unique to LGBTQ diversity training and LEP participants
  - Concerns about how LEP are portrayed in media
  - Reluctance to intervene when witnessing harassment or hate speech
  - Belief that anti-LGBTQ language should not be taken seriously
  - Not wanting to pursue hate crimes

## Limitations

- The training was mandatory which made it easier to access LEP, though it may have increased the resistance from the outset
- Trainings were not audio or video recorded and scribes captured varied amounts of context, side conversations, and non-verbal body language.

## Future Directions

- It is important to know how the trainers responses to resistance may have altered the resistance.
- Data was collected and will be analyzed to understand how trainers responses may have increased or decreased the resistance in meaningful ways.

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