

# Experiential Exercise

## Feeling Excluded

This 6-step exercise takes approximately 20 minutes.

### Individual Work (Steps 1 and 2)

1. All participants are asked to recall a time when they have felt uncomfortable or targeted because of their demographic status. Ideally, situations at work should be used, but if no work situations come to mind, any situation will work. Encourage students to use any demographic characteristic they think is most appropriate, so they can write about feeling excluded on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, age, disability status, religion, or any other characteristic. They should briefly describe the situation, what precipitated the event, how they felt at the time, how they reacted, and how they believe the other party could have made the situation better.
2. The instructor asks the students to then think about a time when they might have either deliberately or accidentally done something that made someone else feel excluded or targeted because of their demographic status. Once again, they should briefly describe the situation, what precipitated the event, how they felt at the time, how the other person reacted, and how they could have made the situation better.

### Small Groups (Steps 3 and 4)

3. Once everyone has written their descriptions, divide the class into small groups of not more than four people. If at all possible, try to compose groups that are somewhat demographically diverse, to avoid inter-group conflicts in the class review discussion. Students should be encouraged to discuss their situations and consider how their experiences were similar or different.
4. After reading through everyone's reactions, each group should develop a short list of principles for how they personally can work to avoid excluding or targeting people in the future. Encourage them to be as specific as possible, and also ask each group to find solutions that work for everyone. Solutions should focus on both avoiding getting into these situations in the first place and also on resolving these situations when they do occur.

### Class Review (Steps 5 and 6)

5. Members of each group are invited to provide a very brief summary of the major principles of how they've felt excluded or targeted, and then to describe their groups' collective decisions regarding how these situations can be minimized in the future.
6. The instructor should lead a discussion on how companies might be able to develop comprehensive policies that will encourage people to be sensitive in their interactions with one another.

# Ethical Dilemma

## You Must Have Sex

Recently, The University of Florida changed its policy to provide health benefits for cohabitating partners. The change ignited some dissent. For example, Larry Cretul, a member of the state legislature whose district includes the university, introduced a bill to make it illegal to use taxpayer dollars to fund a domestic-partner benefit program.

In explaining his bill, Cretul said, “I just happen to be one who supports the idea that marriage should continue to be held in the elevated position.”

Another part of the policy sparked as much controversy—to qualify for benefits, cohabitating partners must sign an agreement indicating they’re having sex with each other. The policy stipulates that enrollees “must have been in non-platonic relationship for the preceding 12 months.” One employee of the university said she was offended by the policy and wondered how the university was going to enforce it.

In response, the university’s director of human resources, Kyle Cavanaugh, said that the “non-platonic” clause was increasingly common in domestic-partner benefit plans, to rule out qualification for people who happen to be living together but aren’t in a romantic relationship. Cavanaugh promises that responses to the question are confidential, but some still wonder. “That’s a personal question,” said one employee.

In the meantime, a 2008 survey revealed 39 percent of all employers offer domestic partner benefits. Among large employers, the percentage is higher—57 percent among the Fortune 500. Benefit policies continue to operate in a sea of public policy controversy. President Obama extended domestic partner benefits to federal workers only in 2009, earning jeers from conservative leaders on one side and from many gay activists (for not pushing for more comprehensive legislation) on the other. Voters in some states and municipalities—notably California—have rejected statutes that would provide domestic partner benefits. This may be one case where change in practice is occurring faster than change in law.

### Questions

1. What do you think about same-sex domestic partner benefits? To what extent are your views affected by your religious or political views?

**Answer:** This answer will depend on the student’s religious, moral, ethical and/or political viewpoint. The definition of marriage in the minds of the students will help them determine the answer. The distribution of benefits has legal implications such as taxpayer monies/allocation and state laws but the benefits must also be disseminated fairly. One example would include heterosexual couples living together. Should they also receive benefits?

2. What do you think about the policy that requires employees to stipulate that they have sexual relations with their domestic partner? If you think it’s a bad policy, what (if anything) would you propose in its place?

**Answer:** Sexual activity is a private issue and should remain private. If the state allows for same-sex unions, then that certificate is the legal proof required. If not, the use of similar policies for heterosexual couples should be fairly applied.

3. Do you perceive age differences in how people view this issue?

**Answer:** This answer will depend on the student's beliefs and opinions. It may represent preconceived ideas about age stereotypes. In general, students might perceive that older people are more conservative and, therefore, have more conservative beliefs about the propriety of sexuality and open discussion about sexual issues is contrary to the privacy that older people might believe is an important part of life.