

As a gay boy growing up in Kansas I experienced first-hand what it feels like to be excluded. I was on occasion teased, ignored, and never felt at home in the macho culture that predominated my high school's male spaces. Leaving Kansas for Amherst College, I was lucky enough to find out what a difference a welcoming educational environment can make. Those were the years when I came out, had my first queer relationships, read Michel Foucault, and discovered my passion for the history of sexuality.

I remain passionate about creating inclusive learning environments as a teacher and a researcher. My own experiences have helped make me aware of the struggles students of all backgrounds face, whether they are first-generation students, LGBT, or students of color.

I believe that inclusivity begins with the syllabus. For generations, history was defined as the history of and for propertied, straight, white men. As a discipline, it heralded their contributions to the progress of the European nation-state and rarely questioned the supposed good that its heroes wrought. Only in the last several decades have historians writing from the margins begun to seriously challenge that view of the past by centering the experiences of women, working classes, queer people, and people of color.

When creating course content, I make sure to find readings and design activities that will speak to all my students' backgrounds, whether that means examining the place of black German children of Allied occupation troops in postwar Germany, focusing on understanding the role gender played in the growth of European social democracy, or teaching with the memoir of a gay Jew persecuted by the Nazis.

In class discussions, I strive to ensure that every student feels safe and welcomed. I intervene in the conversation when needed to ensure a respectful atmosphere or when I sense that a student has a contribution but is nervous about jumping in. Outside of class, I encourage students to drop by my office hours for any reason at all. I have discussed with students everything from their postgraduate plans (when they asked me for a reference) to their parents' flight from genocide in Somalia.

More than anything, my own background has given me empathy for those who do not feel like they "fit in." It has also made me cognizant of my own limitations. As a teacher, I try to be a resource for all my students by listening to their needs and empathizing with their life experiences. I believe history is a powerful discipline for not only deconstructing insidious social norms, but also for making individuals feel as though they have a community to which they belong. The goal of forging an inclusive environment for our students is, to my mind, one of our highest imperatives.