

I've been teaching at Harvard for almost 20 years. After I earned my PhD at Harvard in 2004, researching testosterone and sex differences in cognition, I decided to pursue an academic career focused on teaching rather than research. That is because I fell in love with teaching. It's challenging, interesting, and so meaningful to me. I get to play a part in my students' development, and they play a part in mine. I get to infect them with my own love of science, and I especially enjoy infecting those who think that science is boring or just too hard. It's not either.

Some of the topics I teach about are sensitive and controversial, like our reproductive biology, the relationship of hormones to sex and gender, and the biological underpinnings of sex differences in behavior. As a graduate student, I was at times deeply offended and upset when encountering new ideas, especially ones with strong personal relevance; for example, hypotheses about the evolutionary origins of sexual assault. So I know how it feels.

But I had to learn how to put my emotions aside and dispassionately analyze evidence. This wasn't easy but learning how to do it ultimately empowered me, and helped me to become a clearer thinker and a better scientist. I learned to think this way because of caring professors who treated me as a rational adult.

What I teach about has special appeal for students who are in the minority in terms of gender expression, identification, and sexual orientation, and the facts can feel quite personal. I do my best to set a tone of trust and respect. I expect my students to sometimes disagree with me, and I expect that some people will feel offended or even hurt as they encounter and struggle with new ideas and information. I do not patronize my students or tell them what to think about controversial social issues. Instead, I try to create an environment in which students are motivated to seriously engage with the evidence and arguments I present. In my long experience, this usually works.

This is why I have strong feelings about teaching practices and the value of clear language. And I see that more and more educators are changing language and even backing off of controversial topics not because they think it's the right thing to do as educators, but out of fear. This is not the right way forward. We can be caring and sensitive to the needs and identities of everyone, while also sticking to biological reality. I will continue to speak out when I think it might have some positive effect on science education and people's lives.