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Incorporating LGBTQ Issues into Family Courses: Instructor Challenges and Strategies Relative to Perceived Teaching Climate

This study investigated the experiences of 42 college/university-level instructors with regard to incorporating lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) content into their family-oriented courses. Based on how supportive they rated their colleagues, departments, and institutions for their teaching about LGBTQ issues, and how open they deemed their students to learning about such perspectives, participants were categorized as working in one of three teaching climates: the least positive, moderately positive, or the most positive. Notably, the authors found that educators faced resistance from other faculty members in addition to students. Further, most faculty assessed their students as open to learning about LGBTQ issues, yet teaching about transgender and queer issues appeared to be particularly challenging for some. Perceived challenges varied by the teaching climates in which participants reportedly worked. The challenges and strategies shared by participants have implications for both faculty and administrators concerned with creating more inclusive classrooms and departments.

Prior to the 1990s, *sexual orientation* and *gender nonconformity* were rarely discussed in higher education, prompting scholars to call for greater inclusion of these issues in course curricula (Allen, 1995; Simoni, 1996). Since the 1990s, college-level instructors in the social sciences have increasingly incorporated lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) issues into their courses. Despite this progress, a national higher education survey found that only slightly more than one half of respondents felt that classrooms were accepting of LGBT people, and only 22% reported that course curricula adequately represented the contributions of LGBT people (Rankin, 2003). Indeed, many instructors teach courses without discussing explicitly the experiences of LGBTQ persons and families (Hackman, 2012), and students—heterosexual, cisgender, and LGBTQ-identified—may be ignorant about such topics (Case, Stewart, & Tittsworth, 2009;

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Fletcher & Russell, 2001). Thus, there remains a need for further integration of LGBTQ issues into college-level family courses.

Basic understanding of sexual orientation and gender identity and expression is important (Fletcher & Russell, 2001), especially for students aiming to become professionals who can competently provide services to a diverse range of individuals and families. Further, family courses are natural settings for discussing some of the most controversial social issues of the past few decades, such as marriage and parenting in the LGBTQ community. Given that citizens are often called upon to shape public policy by voting on issues such as marriage equality, the education of students (i.e., future potential voters) on such matters is paramount. The failure to incorporate LGBTQ content into family courses is a lost opportunity to explore the contemporary social and political significance of these issues (Fletcher & Russell, 2001).

Inclusion of LGBTQ content in college courses is also believed to increase students' tolerance of diverse sexualities and gender presentations (Case et al., 2009; Fletcher & Russell, 2001). Inclusion of LGBTQ content in higher education may promote more tolerant attitudes toward LGBTQ people and families, and help to reduce LGBTQ individuals' exposure to stigma; indeed, LGBTQ students, faculty, and staff disproportionately experience harassment at U.S. colleges and universities (Rankin, Blumenfeld, Weber, & Fraser, 2010). Teaching about LGBTQ issues may contribute to an improved learning environment for all.

Family scholars have shared their experiences of and recommendations for incorporating these topics into the classroom (Allen, 1995; Fletcher & Russell, 2001). Yet little empirical data exist on the challenges they face or the strategies they employ when teaching about LGBTQ issues. To address this gap, we collected data from 42 college and university instructors about their experiences of incorporating LGBTQ issues into their courses on families. Before discussing this study, we summarize the existing research that addresses challenges and strategies when incorporating LGBTQ issues into family courses.

BARRIERS TO INCORPORATING LGBTQ ISSUES INTO FAMILY COURSES

There are a variety of barriers to teaching LGBTQ content. One challenge that educators may face is their own ignorance or discomfort regarding sexual orientation and gender diversity (Case et al., 2009; Fletcher & Russell, 2001), perhaps due to limited formal preparation for teaching about LGBTQ issues (Allen, 1995). Educators who lack knowledge about or are uncomfortable with LGBTQ issues may implicitly marginalize them in the classroom, for example, by relegating them to a single lecture in which LGBTQ individuals and families are simply described as alternatives to the norm (Allen, 1995; Campbell, 2012).

An additional challenge is that students may be resistant to learning about LGBTQ issues. Resistant attitudes can make it difficult to engage students in the topic (Allen, 1995; Fletcher & Russell, 2001). Furthermore, students may feel comfortable making derogatory comments regarding sexual orientation and gender non-conformity (Fletcher & Russell, 2001). Indeed, some scholars have asserted that heterosexism, homophobia, and transphobia continue to be socially acceptable (Case et al., 2009; Fletcher & Russell, 2001).

Institutional climate may also be a barrier. Teaching about LGBTQ issues has historically garnered less institutional support than other aspects of diversity, such as race and gender (Brauer, 2012). Attention to transgender issues in the classroom is met with even less support than issues of sexual orientation (Case et al., 2009). Lack of institutional support may be expressed as passive inattention to LGBTQ issues. It may also include explicit nonsupport from other faculty and administrators (Rankin et al., 2010). Some faculty have been advised to not teach about such issues prior to tenure (Savin-Williams, 1993) and have colleagues who make disparaging remarks about members of the LGBTQ community (Rankin et al., 2010). Thus, although integration of LGBTQ issues across curricula is needed, educators who aim to incorporate LGBTQ content may face institutional obstruction.

STRATEGIES FOR INCORPORATING LGBTQ ISSUES INTO FAMILY COURSES

A small canon has addressed instructors' strategies for incorporating LGBTQ issues into family-related curricula. Scholars in psychology (Simoni, 1996), sociology (Eichstedt, 1996), and criminal justice (Fradella, Owen, & Burke, 2009) have provided discipline-specific suggestions

for doing this. Simoni (1996), for instance, provided examples of LGBTQ-specific topics (e.g., coming out as a developmental process) which could be woven into psychology courses. Many of these suggestions, such as using examples of LGBTQ people in neutral contexts (e.g., in test items that pertain to general topics), inviting panels of LGBTQ individuals to speak to classes, and showing videos of LGBTQ people, have relevance to courses with family-related content (Fradella et al., 2009; Simoni, 1996).

Two landmark pieces by Allen (1995) and Fletcher and Russell (2001) have provided the field of family studies with similar guidance. Allen called upon faculty and administrators to create more inclusive academic environments by reflecting on their own privilege and taking responsibility for teaching about family diversity and sexual orientation, rather than leaving it to sexual minority instructors to do so. Fletcher and Russell asserted that all family studies faculty have an ''opportunity and responsibility'' (p. 34) to provide research-based information about the family lives of sexual minority individuals to undergraduate and graduate students. Both pieces discussed faculty-related challenges (e.g., instructor comfort level) and student-related challenges (e.g., intolerance) and strategies to overcome them.

Specific examples of classroom activities related to LGBTQ issues and perspectives utilized by instructors in family-related courses have also been published (e.g., Humble & Morgaine, 2002). Oswald (2010), for example, describes a classroom simulation she uses to teach students about marriage inequality. Few empirical studies, however, have examined the experiences of instructors who teach LGBTQ content.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of how post-secondary-level instructors incorporate LGBTQ issues into their family courses, and the challenges faced when doing so. Further, we sought to examine whether and how differences in context, such as teaching climate, shape the challenges and strategies used by instructors. Thus, the study aimed to answer the following questions: What challenges do instructors face when incorporating LGBTQ issues perspectives into family courses? What

strategies do they use? Are these challenges and strategies shaped by teaching context (e.g., teaching climate, rank)? We utilized a queer theoretical lens (Oswald, Kuvalanka, Blume, & Berkowitz, 2009) in approaching this study and the analysis. Thus, we were interested in learning not only about instructors' experiences when teaching about LGBTQ populations per se, but also whether/how respondents addressed issues of power and privilege and challenged their students to question the centrality of heterosexuality and gender nonconformity.

METHOD

Participants

The survey respondents were 42 college/ university-level instructors from the United States (11 from the Midwest, 11 from the South, 10 from the West, and 7 from the Northeast) and Canada ($n = 3$). Most ($n = 28$) identified as female, 13 as male, and one as transgender. Most ($n = 34$) held doctoral-level degrees, whereas eight held master's degrees. Most participants' highest degrees were in the field of human development/family studies (HD/FS; $n = 27$). Most ($n = 29$) were tenure-track/tenured faculty members. Others held non-tenure-track teaching positions ($n = 10$) or were graduate students ($n = 3$). Most were at public universities/colleges ($n = 34$), whereas others were at private liberal arts colleges ($n = 3$), private universities ($n = 3$), a school of professional psychology ($n = 1$), and a community college ($n = 1$). Although all participants had incorporated LGBTQ issues into their family courses, participants varied widely in length of time/level of experience teaching about these issues (see Table 1).

Procedure

Requirements for participation included being at least age 18 and an instructor of a college/ university-level family course. An e-mail advertisement of the study was sent to members of the National Council on Family Relations (NCFR) via section listservs. Founded in 1938 and currently with more than 3,400 members, NCFR is ''the oldest, multi-disciplinary non-partisan professional organization focused solely on family research, practice and education'' (NCFR, 2013). Invitations were also sent

Table 1. *Participant Demographics by Teaching Climate Category*

	Teaching Climate Category		
Total Sample $N = 42$	Least Positive ($n = 9$)	Moderately Positive ($n = 24$)	Most Positive ($n = 8$)
Gender			
Female ($n = 28$)[a]	7	16	4
Male ($n = 13$)	1	8	4
Transgender ($n = 1$)	1	0	0
Highest degree held			
Doctorate ($n = 34$)[a]	6	19	8
MA/MS ($n = 8$)	3	5	0
Field			
Human development			
Family studies ($n = 27$)[a]	7	15	4
Sociology ($n = 8$)	0	4	4
Psychology ($n = 2$)	1	1	0
Education ($n = 2$)	0	2	0
Marriage family therapy ($n = 2$)	0	2	0
Social work ($n = 1$)	1	0	0
Job position/title			
Tenure track ($n = 29$)[a]	4	16	8
Assistant ($n = 14$)[a]	3	4	6
Associate ($n = 7$)	0	7	0
Full ($n = 8$)	1	5	2
Nontenure track ($n = 13$)	5	8	0
Adjunct ($n = 5$)	3	2	0
Graduate student ($n = 3$)	1	2	0
Lecturer ($n = 2$)	1	1	0
Other ($n = 3$)	0	3	0
Years teaching LGBTQ issues[b]			
< 1 to 5 years ($n = 17$)	5	7	5
6 to 10 years ($n = 6$)	1	4	1
> 10 years ($n = 18$)[a]	3	13	1
Type of institution			
Public 4 year ($n = 34$)[a]	8	19	6
Private 4 year ($n = 6$)	1	3	2
Other ($n = 2$)	0	2	0
Geographic region			
Midwest ($n = 11$)	2	9	0
Northeast ($n = 7$)	3	2	2
South ($n = 11$)[a]	3	4	3
West ($n = 10$)	1	6	3
Canada ($n = 3$)	0	3	0

[a]One participant was not placed in a teaching climate category due to lack of response to questions asking about level of student openness and institutional support. [b]One participant in the most positive climate category did not indicate how many years s/he has taught LGBTQ issues.

LGBTQ = lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer.

directly to family scholars who are known by the field to teach about LGBTQ family issues. Invitations included the Internet link to complete the online survey, as well as an opportunity to enter a $100 incentive lottery.

In addition to collecting demographic data, the following two closed-ended questions were asked to gauge teaching climate: (a) How supported have you felt overall by your department/college/university in your teaching about LGBTQ issues/perspectives (*not very supported, somewhat supported*, *very supported*)? (b) In general, how open have your students been to discussing and learning about LGBTQ issues/perspectives (*not open at all, somewhat open, mostly open, very open*)? To gain an understanding of the challenges faced by participants, as well as the strategies they utilized to incorporate LGBTQ issues into their courses, we asked the following open-ended questions:

1. What are some challenges, if any, you have faced with students, faculty, or administration regarding teaching about LGBTQ issues/perspectives? How have you dealt with these challenges?
2. Describe your most successful activity/assignment/lecture for teaching about LGBTQ issues, and explain why it was successful.
3. Describe your least successful activity/assignment/lecture for teaching about LGBTQ issues, and explain why it was the least successful.
4. Are there approaches/techniques that you use in the classroom to increase students' openness to discussing and learning about LGBTQ issues/perspectives? If yes, please describe.

Data Analysis

An inductive semantic thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was conducted. The goal of this approach is to identify themes that encapsulate respondent experiences. To begin, the first author generated initial codes as she read the responses (e.g., student resistance due to religion and whether/how to confront religious beliefs). Initial codes were then subsumed under broader, more inclusive categories. For example, the two examples of initial codes previously mentioned were put under the category ''dealing with students' religious beliefs.'' The first author

then shared her coding scheme, as well as direct evidence (i.e., excerpts from transcripts), with the second and third authors, who provided feedback. The coding scheme was then refined. Teaching climate emerged as a salient context that varied, and thus a teaching climate typology was created to capture different combinations of institutional support and student openness. We then overlaid the climate categories with challenges and strategies to assess whether and how teaching climate appeared to influence participant pedagogies. Other contextual factors, such as geographic region, type of institution, and job position/rank, were considered as well. First, trustworthiness of the analysis was established by use of peer debriefers/researchers (Morrow, 2005). That is, the coding process was iterative, whereby the second and third authors reviewed the scheme and provided feedback at several points, until the final scheme and analysis was agreed upon by all authors. Second, we provided explicit description of the fit between the data and the scheme, in that specific counts were provided of how many participants spoke to each challenge or teaching strategy.

FINDINGS

We first list the overall challenges faced and strategies utilized by respondents when incorporating LGBTQ issues and perspectives into family-related courses. Next, we describe the three emergent teaching climate categories (see Table 1 for a summary of demographics by climate). Perceived teaching climate was constructed as a combination of institutional support and student openness. Participants were placed into one of three broad categories—the least positive, moderately positive, and the most positive—to reflect perceived teaching climate for incorporating LGBTQ issues and perspectives into family courses. One participant did not provide an answer regarding institutional support and was, thus, not placed into a climate category. When presenting each teaching climate category, we also describe and provide examples of the challenges and strategies that were most salient to respondents in each of these categories. Finally, we conducted cross-tab analyses that revealed no significant associations between contextual factors and teaching climate; however, we note how job/position rank had an impact on some participants' challenges and strategies.

Challenges to and Strategies for Incorporating LGBTQ Issues into Family Courses

Respondents reported student-, faculty-, and institution-related challenges. Four specific student-related challenges were identified: (a) dealing with students' religious beliefs, (b) students' hesitancy to share ignorant or negative viewpoints, (c) students' beliefs that coverage of LGBTQ topics is unnecessary, and (d) students' lack of familiarity and comfort with transgender and queer issues. In addition, two institutional challenges were identified in the data: (a) other faculty members' limited integration of LGBTQ issues across the curricula and (b) feeling powerless to effect change. The occurrence and specifics of these challenges, described below, varied by perceived teaching climate (see Table 2).

In addition to challenges faced when teaching about LGBTQ issues, participants also shared strategies for creating more inclusive classrooms and departments. The most common strategies were: (a) use ''real-life'' LGBTQ examples, (b) discuss LGBTQ content in a ''matter-of-fact'' manner, (c) integrate LGBTQ content throughout courses, (d) utilize experiential activities and assignments, and (e) create a comfortable classroom climate. As with reported challenges, the likelihood of using these strategies varied by climate (see Table 3). Lastly, three participants felt their own lack of knowledge on LGBTQ topics and for how to incorporate them was a challenge.

Perceived Teaching Climate: The Least Positive

Nine respondents (21%) were categorized as experiencing ''the least positive'' teaching climate, because they rated their department, college, or university as less supportive than those in other categories: ''somewhat'' ($n = 7$) or ''not very'' ($n = 2$) supportive. Their reports of student openness ranged from ''somewhat'' ($n = 4$) to ''mostly'' ($n = 5$) open. Only one respondent in this category had earned tenure. Of those without tenure, three were assistant professors, and five were in non-tenure-track positions. More than one half of these participants ($n = 5$, 56% in this category) had been teaching LGBTQ issues for less than 1 to 5 years; three for more than 10 years; and one for between 6 and 10 years.

Table 2. *Reported Challenges by Teaching Climate*

| | Teaching Climate Category | | |
| | Least positive | Moderately positive | Most positive |
Challenges	$n = 9$	$n = 24$	$n = 8$
Student negativity or ignorance ($n = 26$[a])	5	15	5
• Dealing with religious beliefs ($n = 11$)	3	8	0
• Hesitancy to share ignorant or resistant viewpoints ($n = 5$)	1	3	1
• Thinking it is unnecessary to cover LGBTQ topics ($n = 5$)	1	2	2
• Lack of familiarity/comfort with transgender/queer issues ($n = 4$)	0	1	3
Faculty and administration negativity or ignorance ($n = 15$)[a]	8	6	1
• Other faculty's limited integration of LGBTQ content ($n = 6$)	4	2	0
• Feeling powerless to effect change in department/institution ($n = 5$)	4	1	0
• Own knowledge gap/ignorance of LGBTQ issues ($n = 3$)	0	3	0

[a]One participant was not placed in a teaching climate category due to lack of response to questions asking about level of student openness and institutional support.

LGBTQ = lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer.

Table 3. *Reported Strategies and Approaches by Teaching Climate*

| | Teaching Climate Category[a] | | |
| | Least positive | Moderately positive | Most positive |
Strategies/Approaches	$n = 9$	$n = 24$	$n = 8$
Use ''real-life'' LGBTQ stories ($n = 22$)	2	14	6
• Show movies, TV clips, documentaries			
• Bring in guest speakers			
Discuss in ''matter-of-fact'' manner ($n = 14$)	3	9	2
• Emphasize importance of understanding research/facts as opposed to beliefs/opinions			
• Model openness and acceptance			
• Emphasize relation of content to students' future work as family professionals			
Integrate LGBTQ issues throughout ($n = 12$)	5	7	0
• Avoid ''gay day''			
• Use LGBTQ people and families in practical, general examples			
Use experiential activities/assignments ($n = 10$)	4	6	0
• Role plays, conducting interviews			
• Push students beyond comfort zone			
• Way to deconstruct social categories			
• Keep all students (including LGBTQ individuals) in mind when developing			
Create comfortable classroom climate ($n = 8$)	0	6	2
• Administer anonymous survey to exhibit students' range of viewpoints/knowledge			
• Make asking questions/showing of ignorance ok			

[a]One participant was not placed in a teaching climate category due to lack of response to questions asking about level of student openness and institutional support.

LGBTQ = lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer.

Teaching challenges in least positive climates. Five respondents working in the least positive climates (56% of the instructors in this category) described student negativity and ignorance as a challenge when teaching about LGBTQ issues. Of these five, three specifically noted student religious beliefs as an obstacle, one reported that students were hesitant to discuss their ignorant or negative attitudes, and one that students did not feel that LGBTQ topics were necessary to cover. A male assistant professor in the South seemed to indicate that even a mere mention of LGBTQ issues brought about negative student feedback:

> There has been a lot of bigoted resistance, including students writing on my course evaluations that we shouldn't talk about these issues at all. Sadly, too many students consider anything different from their own views, especially anything that challenges their own views, to be automatically wrong and a sign of ''bias.''

Last, only one respondent working in this climate reported that their students were unfamiliar or uncomfortable with transgender and queer issues.

Eight (89%) of the respondents teaching in the least positive climates reported that their institutions, including their colleagues, were barriers to teaching about LGBTQ issues. Four stated that other faculty members did not teach about LGBTQ issues. Speaking to the difference she had noticed between herself and her colleagues, a female lecturer in the Midwest stated, ''Many simply just don't put it in their curriculum or, like myself, 'target' it as a perspective we should teach.'' Thus, despite some participants' successful efforts at integration of LGBTQ perspectives in their own courses, they sometimes felt that other faculty posed the greatest challenge when it came to department-wide integration. This limited integration led some to feel that they must overcompensate for their colleagues' inattention to LGBTQ content. As one female full professor in the South stated, ''Some faculty have difficulty with their personal perspectives and can't bring themselves to address LGBT families in their teaching. So I probably over address it to compensate and balance.'' Indeed, some participants thought that because they were viewed by colleagues as ''experts'' on LGBTQ issues, other faculty left it to the participants to cover LGBTQ content and did not take the initiative to integrate such material into their own courses. Speaking to this issue, a female adjunct faculty member in the Northeast shared her frustration with her colleagues:

> Professors expect *me* to cover the issues, and don't become educated.... My biggest challenge is not having people see this as ''my agenda,'' but rather an important clinical, scholarly pursuit, and necessary for all students to have knowledge in.

Thus, a challenge for participants in the least positive climates was not only colleagues who were overtly negative regarding LGBTQ issues but also those who were passively neutral and failed to acknowledge these issues as worthy of significant classroom time and attention.

Four respondents in this category reported feeling powerless to effect departmental or institutional change. They struggled with how to change the culture of their departments and institutions, which they perceived as negative or ignorant in regard to LGBTQ issues. A female assistant professor in the Midwest shared how she handled situations with colleagues who ''perpetuate[d] stereotypes and myths'': ''I refuse to laugh at jokes that are at the expense of the LGBTQ population.... It is scary, though, to confront senior faculty members in a group setting, as I'm not tenured yet.'' Thus, lack of job security contributed to feelings of powerlessness, precluding some of them from advocating for departmental change.

Strategies in the least positive climates. Most respondents teaching in the least positive climates ($n = 5$, 56%) said they emphasized the integration of LGBTQ issues into the overall curriculum, for example, by avoiding ''gay day'' and using LGBTQ families as examples for general content. A female assistant professor from the Northeast described her frequent use of examples of ''same sex couples and issues, so that it is part of the fabric of the content. It is 'normal' to me to have these topics as part of the class, and thus I try to 'normalize' it for students as well.'' Participants in this category reportedly used this strategy most prominently, perhaps because they felt other professors at their institutions did not.

Four also utilized experiential activities where students were put in the shoes of LGBTQ individuals—a strategy cited most often by instructors in this category. A female adjunct

faculty member in the South described the benefits of her assignment:

> Interviewing a GLBTQ couple helps [majority] students understand the couple/family faces similar challenges and triumphs to other family types. If the student is a member of the GLBTQ community, the interview assists them in looking toward a successful ''role model.'' The one student I had who was raised with a lesbian couple actually discovered more history than he was aware, [such as] some of the problems the couple had with enrolling him in schools, etc.

Similar to respondents in the other two categories, three in the least positive climates reported discussing LGBTQ issues in a factual way that distinguished research findings from opinions and emphasized the importance of this distinction in students' future work as human service professionals. A female assistant professor in the West said that by presenting LGBTQ content in a matter-of-fact way, she modeled acceptance, ''I assume that everyone is ok with LGBTQ persons and just go from there teaching about LGBTQ issues in a seamless manner.'' Dissimilar from respondents in the more positive teaching climates, only two participants in this category described using real-life examples in their courses, and none said that they tried to create a classroom where ignorance and dissent could be openly addressed.

Perceived Teaching Climate: Moderately Positive

Twenty-four participants (57%) were classified as working within a ''moderately positive'' teaching climate. Although all of them felt ''very supported'' by their institutions, their students were also reported to be only ''somewhat'' ($n = 6$) or ''mostly open'' ($n = 18$) to learning about LGBTQ issues. Most participants in this category (66%, $n = 16$) were tenured ($n = 12$) or tenure track ($n = 4$) faculty; there were also four instructors, two adjuncts, and two graduate students. Most participants in this category (54%, $n = 13$) had taught LGBTQ issues 10 or more years; seven for fewer than 1 to 5 years; and four for 6 to 10 years.

Teaching challenges in moderately positive climates. Fifteen respondents (63%) working in moderately positive climates reported student negativity and ignorance as a challenge. Similar to participants in the least positive category, eight of these 15 respondents specifically noted student religious beliefs as an obstacle. A female associate professor in the South described the tension she felt in regard to some students' responses:

> Sometimes I get students who stand up and give sermons about the evils of being gay. I stop them and I provide hand outs that they can take or not about what the Bible really says about these issues, but it seems inappropriate to me to argue theology with the students in a public university. I wish I could address the issues more directly.

A female assistant professor in the Midwest spoke to some religious students' intentions and whether their perspectives were based on a lack of knowledge or explicit intolerance:

> With undergrads, it feels more like ignorance. With grad students, it's more righteousness and hate.... I approach my classes with some dread when I have . . . religiously conservative students, which I do not feel good about. I work hard to be accepting of all students but have trouble when students . . . are unwilling to go outside their comfort level.

In contrast to respondents who described overtly negative student responses to LGBTQ topics as challenging, some faculty seemed to have the opposite problem. Three participants in moderately positive climates cited as a challenge that students were hesitant to discuss their ignorant or negative attitudes. These participants said that they had a difficult time getting their students to express their less-than-fully accepting or knowledgeable views about LGBTQ issues, which had consequences for the ''liveliness'' of class discussions. For example, a male doctoral student in the West shared the following:

> Sometimes it is difficult to stir discussion and debate on LGBTQ family issues, because students are afraid of what it will look like if they do not hold progressive views. I find those who are more approving of LGBTQ [issues] are the quickest to chime in and have the most to say. There can be some ''dead space'' in class after the initial round of student comments, because those who take another perspective are particularly reticent to speak up on these issues.

For these participants, ''teachable moments'' created by the expression of diverse student

viewpoints were scarce, because ''students know they should not vocalize negative or biased beliefs about GLBTQ persons and issues'' (male doctoral student in the South). Given that teaching about LGBTQ issues through ''debate'' of opinions regarding the legitimacy of LGBTQ families can create an unsafe learning environment for LGBTQ and allied students, other teaching strategies should be explored, such as engaging students in critical thinking about heterosexual privilege (Oswald et al., 2009). It seems that positive attitudinal change in regard to LGBTQ issues has led to new challenges for some faculty in each of the three teaching climates who cited students' hesitancy to share unpopular views as a challenge.

Parallel to the least positive category, only two participants in the moderately positive climate category reported that their students did not feel that LGBTQ topics were necessary to cover, and only one respondent noted that students were unfamiliar or uncomfortable with transgender/queer issues.

Respondents in the moderately positive category were considerably less likely than those in the least positive climates to report that faculty or institutions were a barrier to teaching about LGBTQ issues (25% vs. 89%; see Table 2). Of the six in moderately positive climates who reported this challenge, three identified their own lack of knowledge as a barrier, two stated that other faculty members did not teach about LGBTQ issues, and one reported a feeling of powerless to effect departmental or institutional change. Indeed, institutional-level challenges were much less salient for participants in more positive teaching climates.

Strategies in moderately positive climates. Respondents teaching in moderately positive climates ($n = 14$; 58%) emphasized using real-life LGBTQ examples, such as showing documentaries or bringing in guest speakers. A female full professor in the Midwest provided an example of her strategy and her thoughts on why it was effective: ''Having a lesbian mother of a heterosexual adolescent male visit the class and talk about child-rearing.... Heterosexual students were able to see gay families as normative and deconstruct ... their own homophobia.'' Indeed, some participants used this approach so that students would see LGBTQ people and families as similar to heterosexual people and families.

Respondents in moderately positive contexts ($n = 9$) were modestly more likely to report discussing content in a matter-of-fact manner than respondents in the least positive category. A female assistant professor in the Midwest described her approach: ''I've given a lecture on same-sex marriage rights that basically laid out the facts from a legal standpoint. This was effective in presenting it as a legal/civil rights rather than moral/religious issue.''

Seven respondents in moderately positive climates reported integrating LGBTQ issues throughout the curriculum to avoid marginalizing LGBTQ issues. Meanwhile, six assigned experiential activities whereby students engaged in active learning, such as taking part in role-plays and conducting interviews. A female lecturer in the Midwest explained her role-taking assignment, and why she thought it was effective:

> [I have students write] a letter from the perspective of a LGBTQ person to their parents, coming out, and talking about fears, etc. as that person. [It is] successful because people were very challenged by this and forced them to take a very different viewpoint in ''the shoes'' of an LGBTQ person. More often than not, students were able to shift to being more understanding, etc. Others were angry at doing the assignment and had to struggle with their own reactions.

Experiential activities such as this may push some students out of their comfort zones (Humble & Morgaine, 2002). A female assistant professor in the Midwest, in the moderately positive category, described one of her most successful experiential activities: ''Students spend an hour acting like what they perceive to be their opposite gender.... Students have difficulty identifying what their 'opposite' gender is. It sets the stage for critiquing the binary notion of gender.'' Experiential activities may work especially well when trying to push students to contemplate the construction of sexuality or gender (Humble & Morgaine, 2002).

Some respondents ($n = 6$) in the moderate category reported trying to establish an effective classroom climate for addressing ignorance and negative attitudes. A female full professor in the Northeast described the changes she made after having several students with negative opinions about LGBTQ people ''state their views in no uncertain terms'' in class:

I now spend a good deal of time talking about the importance of creating a ''safe'' place to share ideas, values and beliefs without targeting others. I do an anonymous survey at the beginning of each semester that assesses all sorts of attitudes (e.g., gay marriage, divorce, cohabitation) and then share the survey results as we discuss each topic so we understand the range of opinions that are in the room.

On the other hand, others—similar to those in the most positive category—discussed trying to make their classrooms a safe place for those who held negative views or not-well-informed beliefs about LGBTQ people and issues, so that these students would feel comfortable sharing their perspectives. A male doctoral student in the West shared, ''I try to create a safe, 'academic' feeling ... in which students know I'm not going to criticize [what] they say, but rather try to tie back what has been said to the literature on LGBTQ families.''

Perceived Teaching Climate: The Most Positive

Eight participants (19%) were classified as working within the most positive teaching climates because they rated their colleagues and institutions as ''very supportive'' and their students as ''very open.'' All of these participants were tenure-track or tenured faculty members: six were assistant professors and two were full professors. More than 60% (*n* = 5) had been teaching LGBTQ issues for between 1 and 5 years; one for between 7 and 10 years; and one for more than 20 years (one participant did not provide a response).

Teaching challenges in the most positive climates. Five respondents (63%) in the most positive teaching climates reported student negativity and ignorance as a challenge. Three of these five participants noted that they found it especially difficult to overcome the fact that their students were unfamiliar or uncomfortable with transgender or queer issues. A female assistant professor in the South expressed the following: ''I have not had much trouble with teaching issues related to sexual orientation ... [but I've had] somewhat less success with transgender issues.'' This same participant pointed to media exposure as a partial explanation for students' preconceived notions about transgender people: ''Many of the students are only familiar with transgender issues via caricatures in the media,

and I have a hard time getting them past those exaggerated images.'' Further, a male full professor in the Northeast said he had experienced ''little success in getting students to see anything at all positive about ... queer politics.'' His students were open to LGBTQ issues, but were not willing to question the normality of heterosexuality (Oswald et al., 2009).

Also more commonly reported by respondents in the most positive category than those in less positive teaching climates was that students felt coverage of LGBTQ topics was unnecessary. Two participants in this category reported this as a challenge despite an absence of anti-LGBTQ bias among students. A female assistant professor in the West said: ''Most of the responses have been very positive ... but students sometimes voice a belief that it is unnecessary to cover these issues.'' Although students in less positive teaching climates may be resistant to the inclusion of LGBTQ content due to anti-LGBTQ sentiment, students in more positive teaching climates may feel that class time devoted to LGBTQ topics is not needed precisely because LGBTQ issues are not foreign or abhorrent to them.

One respondent in this category reported that students were hesitant to discuss their ignorant or negative attitudes. Meanwhile, it is striking that no participants in the most positive climate category cited students' religious beliefs as a challenge.

Only one respondent in this category reported that their colleagues or institutions were a barrier to teaching about LGBTQ issues. This male full professor in the Northeast had shared many positives about his institution and the support he had received for teaching an undergraduate course fully devoted to LGBTQ perspectives—yet, he had a bleak prediction for the future: ''When I'm fully retired in a year or two, my course will die.... In this time of no money and contraction of programs and resources, courses like mine will be the first to go.'' Thus, even in the most positive climates, some believed that ''nonmainstream'' topics were not valued enough to survive broader changes in higher education (Powers, 2008).

Strategies in most positive climates. Almost all (75%) of the respondents teaching in the most positive climates reported using real-life LGBTQ examples and stories, including

showing movies, TV clips, and documentaries, and inviting guest speakers to their classes. A male assistant professor in the South shared what he felt were his most successful activities:

> I have a panel of LGBQ students. I solicit questions from students anonymously in advance ... then run class like a talk show using the questions submitted by students. I share those questions with the panel in advance so they can each select the questions that are best directed toward them, and to give them time to develop a well-thought response to each question.... When focusing on [transgender issues], the use of films has been particularly effective.

Additionally, two respondents in the most positive climate category reported using the factual approach and two reported trying to establish an effective climate for open discussion. A female assistant professor in the West shared how she helped students to feel comfortable with disclosing their ignorance about LGBTQ issues:

> In one class, we had a lengthy discussion about when and for whom it was appropriate to use the term ''queer'' ... I think they felt relieved when I explained that there were not clear guidelines and they needed to be clear with themselves that they were not being derogatory, but it was not necessarily true that non-queers should never use the word queer.... Several students thanked me later for the frank discussion.

Unlike those teaching in less positive climates, respondents in most positive situations did not report integrating LGBTQ issues throughout the curriculum, nor did they report using experiential pedagogies. Further discussion of observed differences in relation to strategies utilized by instructors of family-related courses in various teaching climates follows.

DISCUSSION

This study builds upon a small literature on instructors' experiences incorporating LGBTQ issues and perspectives into family coursework (Allen, 1995; Fletcher & Russell, 2001). This investigation is the first to examine the challenges and strategies of instructors of family-related courses, and the first to relate these experiences to variations in institutional climate. Most participants in this study perceived high levels of support from their institutions regarding their efforts to incorporate LGBTQ topics into their courses, as well as general openness by their students. It is possible that the fairly high level of support described by participants reflects the ''changing tide'' when it comes to LGBTQ issues in general; national surveys show growing acceptance of marriage equality, adoption by same-sex couples, and the like (Saad, 2012). It may also reflect a sampling bias, whereby persons who were themselves more likely to incorporate such issues into the classroom—and in turn to receive more support for doing so—were more likely to volunteer to participate. Indeed, a limitation of the study is that it used a convenience sample and thus cannot give a sense of how many institutions in the United States are positive or negative about LGBTQ issues in family courses.

Although this sample was limited, it did include diverse experiences, with almost 60% of participants endorsing a ''moderately positive'' teaching climate, whereby they reported a high degree of support from their institutions but only a fair degree of openness from their students related to learning about LGBTQ issues. Likewise, one fifth of the sample ($n = 9$) also described their students as fairly open but felt only somewhat or not very supported by their institutions. This latter group was striking in that all but one faculty member was untenured. Conducting research on or teaching about issues that are deemed controversial by one's university or department may reduce one's chances of reappointment or tenure (De Santis, 2012). Also to be considered is the fact that perceived teaching climate may depend as much upon individual factors, such as faculty rank, as institution-level factors, such as student openness. As such, two faculty members at the same institution may perceive and experience teaching climate very differently; one may have the security of tenure and feel supported in her efforts to teach whatever she wants and able to ignore the anti-LGBTQ sentiments of other faculty, whereas another without tenure may experience other faculty members' LGBTQ negativity as oppressive and threatening. Noteworthy is that all eight participants in the most positive teaching climate category (all of whom rated their institutions as highly supportive and students as very open) had doctoral-level degrees, half of them in sociology. More than 70% of participants in the other two teaching climate categories had their

highest degrees in HD/FS or marriage and family therapy. Perhaps certain disciplines are more socially progressive than others and inherently provide more positive teaching climates for faculty. Future research should examine the specific institutional policies and practices that contribute to climate for teaching LGBTQ content.

Majorities of participants in the least (56%) and most positive (63%) categories had been teaching LGBTQ issues for the shortest time, whereas most participants in the moderately positive category (54%) had been teaching these issues for the longest. Given that most participants in the least positive climate held non-tenure-track positions, less teaching experience may be expected. What might account, however, for the difference between the primarily tenure-track faculty in the moderately and most positive climates—all of whom described their institutions as very supportive but varied in student openness—in regard to years of teaching LGBTQ issues? Perhaps faculty in the moderately positive category, most of whom were tenured, have witnessed students' changing tide of attitudes toward LGBTQ issues and, thus, responded to our question about student openness with all of their student experiences—past and present—in mind. Meanwhile, perhaps the mostly pre-tenure faculty in the most positive climate began teaching these issues after the tide had changed, and only had positive student experiences from which to draw. Future work could explore generational differences and their consequences among faculty teaching LGBTQ issues.

Primary challenges discussed by faculty with regard to students included dealing with some religious-based beliefs, students' hesitancy to discuss ignorant or negative views, sentiment that coverage of LGBTQ topics was unnecessary, and lack of familiarity with transgender and queer issues. The beliefs of a subset of religious students who were aligned with certain faiths were especially salient to instructors in the least and moderately positive climates. Our finding that some faculty feel ill equipped to address religious beliefs as they pertain to LGBTQ issues, and are uncertain about the appropriateness of challenging students' religious beliefs, points to a gaping hole in faculty development. New faculty members especially may experience uncertainty about how to deal with students' religious values when teaching about LGBTQ

issues. There is a need for more preparation in doctoral programs regarding how to appropriately handle such situations. And rather than approaching all religions as ''anti-LGBTQ,'' deeper learning might come from an exploration into the ''mixed bag'' of religious doctrine that exists toward LGBTQ people and issues, thereby revealing the LGBTQ-supportive and celebratory stances of some faiths (Rodriguez, 2010).

A contrasting issue—dealing with students' hesitancy to voice unpopular or less-than-accepting views of LGBTQ issues—was raised by other faculty. Addressing ignorant or negative viewpoints—rather than simply airing them for lively debate—can be appropriate and worthwhile, given that anti-LGBTQ views on the part of government and religious leaders and others are shared widely via media and continue to be institutionalized via social policies and laws. To do this, instructors can help students identify different positions (e.g., general arguments for and against marriage equality). Faculty can then emphasize the basis for divergent arguments (e.g., religious- vs. civil rights-based) and how social science research supports—or fails to support—such arguments. Further, pointing out where popular opinion stands on such issues can inform all students as to how U.S. society is growing increasingly more inclusive of LGBTQ people. Future work might examine the effectiveness of pedagogical strategies aimed to promote critical thinking about LGBTQ families.

Another challenge that cut across teaching climate category was students' thinking that coverage of LGBTQ topics was unnecessary. Participants in less positive teaching climates attributed this sentiment to anti-LGBTQ attitudes and beliefs. Faculty in more positive teaching climates who described their students as accepting of LGBTQ people may have students who think that exposure to LGBTQ content is solely to eradicate prejudice. Thus, a relatively newer challenge for those in highly positive teaching climates may be to persuade their students that they do have something to learn from the coverage of LGBTQ topics, such as a nuanced understanding of the experiences of LGBTQ people and families.

Students' lack of familiarity and comfort with transgender and queer issues was reported as challenging by a few participants. Our finding that respondents in the most positive

teaching climates were particularly likely to raise this as a challenge may reflect the fact that these faculty—who encounter a fairly high level of openness to LGB issues—treat transgender and queer issues as ''the next frontier,'' thereby seeking to incorporate these issues fairly intensely into the curriculum. In contrast, faculty in less positive teaching climates may still be working on cultivating greater awareness and knowledge of LGB issues and may therefore focus on transgender and queer issues less intensely. Indeed, transgender and queer identities are still marginalized in research as well as in teaching (Downing, 2013). Thus, faculty in all teaching climates likely could benefit from training and support in regard to integrating transgender and queer identities, topics, and approaches into their courses.

Several faculty members—particularly those in less supportive teaching climates—described other faculty members' lack of teaching about LGBTQ issues as a challenge. Many of these participants were untenured, yet were sometimes seen as the ''go to'' person for teaching about LGBTQ issues, thus freeing up other faculty members from sharing this responsibility. Lack of job security kept some participants from advocating for department-wide integration of LGBTQ issues. Thus, similar to Allen (1995), who called upon heterosexual faculty to share in the responsibility for teaching about LGBTQ family issues, we advocate for tenured faculty members, especially, to fully integrate LGBTQ topics into their courses and to support untenured faculty members who may feel hesitant to do so.

In addition to discussing challenges in teaching about LGBTQ issues, participants shared strategies for creating more inclusive classrooms and campuses. The most common strategies were using real-life LGBTQ examples; discussing LGBTQ content in a matter-of-fact manner; integrating LGBTQ information throughout the course; using experiential class activities and assignments; and creating a comfortable classroom climate. The most common strategy was providing LGBTQ examples and stories via movies, documentaries, and guest speakers. Some faculty did so with the hope that students could relate to and empathize with LGBTQ people and families, and see them as ''normative'' and as similar to heterosexual people and families. Instructors in less positive teaching climates with more resistant students may aim to give

majority students the opportunity to realize how the experiences of LGBTQ people and families may be similar to their own. From a queer theoretical perspective, faculty should ideally also be challenging the construct of ''normal'' and seeking to educate their students about the dangers of using heterosexual people and parents as the ''gold standard'' to which LGBTQ people and parents must be compared (Goldberg, 2010; Oswald et al., 2009).

That this strategy was used mostly by those in more positive teaching climates may reflect greater confidence on the part of instructors (e.g., that their students would treat guest speakers with respect), as well as greater LGBTQ resources on campus (e.g., student LGBTQ resources and panels; the availability of videos on LGBTQ issues). On the other hand, the presence of such campus resources and others, such as other LGBTQ programming, could cause some faculty to feel more institutional support. Further, perhaps faculty in less positive teaching climates have received, or fear receiving, negative feedback for use of such ''highly visual'' LGBTQ stories. Use of such teaching aides might also reflect a lack of confidence among some faculty who may feel unsure about how to discuss LGBTQ issues. Future work might examine if and how faculty facilitate follow-up discussions to these real-life examples.

One third (33%) of respondents said they factually discussed LGBTQ issues in the classroom, modelling for students acceptance and the validity of LGBTQ perspectives for academic inquiry. That this strategy cut across climate categories suggests that it can be used by all instructors and may be an easy first step for instructors who are new to the idea of incorporating LGBTQ issues and wary of initiating controversial discussions on the topic. More in-depth coverage of LGBTQ research throughout course textbooks, rather than relegating such issues to ''special topics'' sections, could also facilitate integration.

Over 25% of participants described integrating LGBTQ issues throughout courses. Participants in the least positive climate reportedly used this strategy most prominently, possibly to make up for what they perceived as their colleagues' failure to do so. Unknown is whether respondents in more positive teaching climates regularly integrated LGTBQ topics throughout their courses. Given the reported challenge of addressing transgender and queer issues, we

assume that many of them were likely to do so—at least with LGB topics.

Almost 25% of participants described using experiential assignments as a strategy. These were seen as helpful in that they pushed students to contend with the experiences of groups who might seem alien to them. Given that this strategy was most common among participants in the less positive teaching climates, perhaps those with the most open students feel that their students already empathize with LGBTQ perspectives and, thus, would have little to gain from such activities. Yet such activities could be quite useful in helping students to assume a more queer perspective, whereby they are able to recognize the limitations in categorical systems and deconstruct binaries more generally (Oswald et al., 2009).

Finally, almost one fifth of participants described the strategy of seeking to create a safe climate within their classrooms that would enable all students to express their beliefs and opinions regarding LGBTQ topics. Respondents in less positive teaching climates utilized this strategy to make their classrooms more comfortable for LGBTQ students, heterosexual students with LGBTQ family members, and those wanting to share accepting viewpoints regarding LGBTQ issues. Those in more positive teaching climates, on the other hand, were aiming to create space for students' resistant views and ignorance to be shared. Thus, participants in the more positive teaching climates employed it to confront a newer challenge likely resulting from rapidly changing attitudes in the wider culture (Saad, 2012).

This study adds to a growing body of literature regarding LGBTQ-inclusive teaching. The educators in our research faced resistance from other faculty in addition to students, teaching about transgender and queer issues appeared to be particularly challenging, and the identified challenges varied by the perceived teaching climates in which participants worked. Further, the fact that strategy use varied by teaching climate suggests that climate may enable and constrain different pedagogies. These findings point to the need for better support for faculty as they aim to integrate LGBTQ issues into the classroom, and for the family field, as a discipline, to examine how to integrate LGBTQ family content into education and training to move the field forward toward more inclusive notions of ''family.''

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