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Teaching Undergraduates About LGBTQ Identities, Families, and Intersectionality

Teaching undergraduate students about LGBTQ identities and family issues presents several challenges, or “opportunities,” which we address within personal, ecological, and historical contexts. We begin by articulating our positionality as scholars and instructors, and the feminist intersectional and queer lens that guides our research and pedagogy. We organize our presentation of contemporary teaching opportunities around three primary and interrelated topics: (a) teaching about LGBTQ issues with attention to intersectionality as a conceptual framework, (b) teaching about sexual orientation diversity and fluidity, and (c) teaching about gender diversity and transgender identities. We incorporate suggestions for educational practice throughout and recommend that instructors continually revise their teaching practices to reflect the changing technological and social landscape, thus maximizing opportunities for student engagement and learning.

Universities, as institutions, and the knowledge produced and taught within them are largely heteronormative (Braun & Clarke, 2009), where *heteronormative* refers to the assumption that heterosexuality is the only normal and natural

expression of sexuality within society (Oswald, Blume, & Marks, 2005). Teaching undergraduates about LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer) identities and families, as well as intersectionality, is a radical act that serves to decenter heteronormativity (Oswald et al., 2005) by explicitly centralizing LGBTQ people and topics (Evans, 2000; Kuvalanka, Goldberg, & Oswald, 2013). In turn, it has potential to “queer” the curriculum and the institution (Bacon, 2006). Further, teaching undergraduates about LGBTQ individuals and their families specifically allows instructors to honor the range of sexual and gender identities that exist in the classroom and beyond. Such inclusive teaching normalizes, validates, and provides support for LGBTQ students and students with LGBTQ family members who typically do not see their life histories or experiences reflected in course content. Treating LGBTQ identities and families as a content area worthy of exploration may even help change the campus climate for LGBTQ students, faculty, and staff, who often are exposed to mistreatment (Dozier, 2015; Rankin, Weber, Blumenfeld, & Frazer, 2010; Yost & Gilmore, 2011).

Classes and coursework on LGBTQ identities and families are equally important for heterosexual and cisgender (i.e., not LGBTQ and trans) students, as they help cultivate awareness and acceptance. Often, this enables these students to more honestly and effectively relate to, work with, and interact with individuals of diverse backgrounds and identities, including

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sexual and gender identities. Many heterosexual students who take courses in family science, human development, psychology, sociology, and related disciplines go on to seek employment in counseling, social services, education, and related fields (National Council on Family Relations, n.d.). In turn, knowledge of LGBTQ lives in the context of families, and of how their identities intersect with other identities, such as racial identities, is likely to be valuable in the service professions (Blumer, Ansara, & Watson, 2013; LaMantia, Wagner, & Bohecker, 2015). It is essential that course content on LGBTQ issues be integrated into “mainstream” courses—such as those on human development and family policy—and not just specialized courses on topics such as human sexuality, which may tend to draw students who are comfortable with, or open to, topics related to sexual and gender diversity (Rothblum, 2012).

Teaching about LGBTQ individuals and their families today is, in some ways, easier than it has been in previous decades, given relatively rapid and recent changes in societal attitudes toward sexual and gender diversity. Students today are growing up at a time when acceptance of same-sex relationships, same-sex marriage, and adoption by LGBQ people are at an all-time high. For example, about 73% of millennials (i.e., persons born between about 1982 and 2004; Bump, 2014) favor same-sex marriage (Pew Research Center, 2015). At the same time, acceptance of these rights is far from universal; there is considerable variation in approval for same-sex marriage, for example, by religion, education level, race/ethnicity, and geographic region (Lipka, 2014; Pew Research Center, 2015). In part, given growing social acceptance as well as the many Internet resources that allow youth to explore their sexual orientation and gender identity (e.g., support groups, YouTube videos, video blogs; Raun, 2015), at increasingly younger ages youth are showing awareness of sexual identity (Floyd & Bakeman, 2006) and coming out (Russell, Toomey, Ryan, & Diaz, 2014), at least online (Bond, Hefner, & Drogos, 2009; Raun, 2015). In turn, “out” LGBTQ students on college campuses are increasingly present and visible (Renn, 2010). Such visibility has implications for the experiences of these students—and their heterosexual and cisgender counterparts—in the classroom and beyond, including the types of inquiry they are willing to engage in, content areas they

are open to, and discussions that are likely to ensue.

In this article we address several contemporary challenges—framed here as opportunities—in teaching about LGBTQ identities and family issues, which we situate within personal, ecological, and historical contexts. We begin by providing some background information about us, the two authors, as a means of providing context for our particular vantage point and teaching approaches. We then describe our feminist intersectional and queer lens more broadly, which informs our scholarship and teaching. Next, we discuss three interrelated teaching opportunities, providing suggestions and implications for practice throughout. Namely, we discuss teaching about LGBTQ issues with attention to intersectionality as a conceptual framework, teaching about sexual orientation diversity and fluidity, and teaching about gender diversity and transgender identities. We conclude by reflecting on the importance of continually revising pedagogical practice to meet the needs of our students and curricula. Indeed, given the pervasive role of technology in shaping students’ ideas about, identification with, and embodiment of sexualities, it is necessary that we regularly integrate new sources of knowledge into our teaching. In our writing, we draw on our personal experiences as feminist scholars teaching classes on human sexuality, families of LGBTQ individuals, sexual orientation, and related topics, as well as the literature on teaching about these issues and our own research.

SITUATING OURSELVES: PERSONAL COMMITMENTS AND EXPERIENCES

From a feminist perspective—upon which we later elaborate—reflexivity and openness about one’s positionality is an inextricable aspect of theory, research, and practice (Allen, 2000). The perspective of the person who is making various truth claims should come under self-conscious and critical scrutiny (Freire, 1970/1997; hooks, 1994) to move beyond the objectivist aim of sanitizing research reports and the obscuring of diversity and difference in families (Allen, 2000; Stanley, 1990). As we detail here, we are passionately engaged in studying and teaching about LGBTQ individuals and their families, yet our approach to this work necessarily is shaped by personal, generational, and institutional factors.

Abbie Goldberg: Standpoint and Background

I am an associate professor of psychology at Clark University, a private, selective liberal arts research university in Worcester, Massachusetts. Student enrollment is about 3,500 (1,100 graduate students, 2,400 undergraduate students). Among undergraduates, 58% are female; 89% of students receive some financial aid; 20% of students are Asian American, Latino, African American, and/or Native American; and 15% are international students. Psychology is one of Clark's "flagship" doctoral programs. Clark's motto is "Challenge Convention. Change Our World," and the university is "committed to scholarship and inquiry that addresses social and human imperatives on a global basis" (from the university's website, <http://www.clarku.edu>).

I teach undergraduate and graduate courses at Clark University. For the past 12 years, I have taught an undergraduate research course on LGBTQ families, which enrolls between 7 and 10 undergraduates per semester, who work in my lab—Research in Diverse Families and Sexualities—for credit. These students engage directly with data I am collecting (e.g., interviews with same-sex and different-sex couples who have adopted their children) through transcribing, data entry, and coding. Since 2010, I have taught an undergraduate course in human sexuality that enrolls about 50 students. I also have taught a variety of undergraduate seminars (which enroll about 15 students), including Contemporary Families and the Psychology of Sexual Orientation. At the graduate level, I have taught Ethics in Clinical Psychology for the past 12 years.

For more than 10 years, my research and writing have focused on the experiences of LGBTQ parents and their families, as well as other marginalized and understudied family forms (e.g., adoptive families, families formed via reproductive technologies). My research has evolved alongside changes in societal attitudes about the topics that I study. In turn, writing and teaching about LGBTQ issues has become easier over time in some ways but more complicated in others. For example, given recent legal gains in terms of same-sex marriage and adoption, student (and public) reactions to my work are often more positive—but also are sometimes marked by a sense of complacent satisfaction about the advancements that have been made in LGBTQ rights. And yet, as Signorile (2015) noted, continued homophobic

and transphobic violence, and ongoing political challenges to legal advancements (e.g., in the form of efforts to repeal LGBTQ-affirming legislation), provide strong evidence that the fight for LGBTQ rights—and thus, the need for continued research that can inform this fight—is far from over.

Further, while LGB identities and same-sex relationships are met with increasing acceptance in mainstream society in general, and in the college setting specifically, trans and gender-nonconforming (GNC) identities continue to elicit much lower levels of understanding or empathy (Norton & Herek, 2013). Here, we use *trans* as an inclusive term reflecting the many variations of transgender identities. However, we acknowledge the debate around terminology usage and encourage educators to be thoughtful in their choice of inclusive terminology in the classroom. Greater visibility of trans/GNC students on Clark's campus, coupled with advances in scholarship, has enabled me to grant increasing attention to the perspectives of trans/GNC people in my teaching and research. As a cisgender woman, I recognize that I inevitably possess knowledge gaps and "blind spots" about trans issues. In turn, I recently worked with several trans/GNC students as part of a collaborative faculty and student research project to develop a survey of trans/GNC college students' experiences.

In teaching, I seek to balance two approaches. One is a more evidence-based, data-driven approach, whereby research on families with LGBTQ members, for example, is provided as a means of countering heteronormative and cisnormative belief systems. The term *cisnormativity* refers to a belief system predicated on the gender binary, and in turn the assumption that all or almost all people are cisgender (i.e., male or female, with a gender identity that matches the sex they were assigned at birth; McGuire, Kuvalanka, Catalpa, & Toomey, 2016). The other is a more narrative approach, whereby personal experiences (told by me, or students, or research participants) are shared to provide meaning, nuance, and depth to the issues that LGBTQ people and families face. Both empirical and personal narratives are arguably important, as both have the power to challenge deeply held beliefs, prompt awareness of and respect for other perspectives, deepen understanding of complex topics, and cause shifts in worldviews. Compelling in their own

way, they may influence different students in different ways. Thus, I seek to offer students both quantitative and qualitative evidence in an effort to encourage and model a scientific approach to families (“I don’t just think this; I will show you the evidence”) as well as an impassioned and compassionate approach to studying, thinking about, and seeking to enhance the lives of real families (“these are real human beings; let’s listen to their voices”).

Katherine Allen: Standpoint and Background

I am a professor of human development and family studies (HDFS) at Virginia Tech and a member of the faculties associated with the Center for Gerontology, Health Sciences, and the Women’s and Gender Studies Program. I am also the faculty mentor for the graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) who are instructors for their own undergraduate courses, including on the life-span human development sequence, family relationships, and human sexuality. In a typical academic year (two semesters), our department offers 15 sections of Human Sexuality, enrolling about 1,300 undergraduates from every major on campus, in seat-based and online sections; about half of these courses are taught by doctoral-level GTAs whom I supervise.

Virginia Tech is a Research I public land-grant university with a global reach that currently enrolls more than 31,000 students (17% are graduate students). Historically a White, male, military, agricultural, and engineering institute, it became a comprehensive public university in 1970. Virginia Tech is unusual among public land-grant institutions in that 55% of its undergraduates are male, above the national average, as women now account for more than half of college students (Gonzalez, 2012). Undergraduate enrollment patterns at the university, by race, are 72% White, 7% Asian, 4% African American, 2% Hispanic, 2% international, less than 1% Native American, and 12% unknown. Virginia Tech’s tagline is “Invent the Future.”

My career teaching undergraduate and graduate students about family and sexual diversity spans three decades. My research decenters the hegemonic nature of a normative family structure, with the intention of integrating multiple ways of living and being into the knowledge that my discipline disseminates about families. As a feminist scholar, I believe that our research

often reflects our lived experience, and this is true in my own life (Allen, 1994, 2000). In 1989, I came out to myself, and to my “world,” as a lesbian (and later as bisexual), and I worked hard to make that identity known, in part to serve as a personal and professional example of coming out in the academy, even if it was a contentious move to make. As a feminist scholar and activist, I have incorporated sexual and family diversity in the courses I have taught, such as Human Sexuality, Gender and Family Diversity, Feminist Family Studies, Feminist Research Methods, and Family Theories. I have served on many graduate committees focused on issues related to queer pedagogy, theory, and research. Thus, I historically have tried to be a “shield” for students and scholars who wanted to be more out and study what were long considered highly stigmatized topics.

One of the first graduate classes I taught at Virginia Tech was in the Women’s Studies Program. I considered it a badge of honor that one of my students wrote in the course evaluation at the end of the semester: “Too much promotion of lesbianism.” Although still a risk, in the past it was especially dangerous to be out as a person who identified as LGBTQ—in society *and* in academia. For example, before scholars began to write from intersectional and queer perspectives, we theorized from the perspective of challenging the pervasive homophobia in academic scholarship and society at large (Barnard, 1993). I feel privileged to have this historical vantage point from which to trace social and historical transitions from illegality and insanity to “mere” stigmatization to increasing acceptance, but I do caution that the idealized vision of family in society and in academia is still patriarchal, heteronormative, cisnormative, middle class, and White (Allen, 2016). This cautionary message is one that I communicate to my students as a teacher of sexual and family diversity. I continue to teach about these issues reflexively by grounding them in my own life course, partly to model the way for others, partly to scaffold students in respecting diversity, and partly to carve out a space in the classroom where I am able to teach from a position of empowerment and knowledge.

OUR FEMINIST INTERSECTIONAL AND QUEER PERSPECTIVE

We both approach our teaching and scholarship from a feminist intersectional queer perspective.

Earlier feminist perspectives on teaching were grounded in second-wave feminism, which essentialized gender as a property of being either male or female and conceptualized “woman” as a universal category (Allen, 2016). As a result of feminist critiques by women of color and lesbians, in particular (Collins, 1990; Lorde, 1984), new streams of thinking emerged that extended the feminist emphasis on praxis to intersectionality and queering. Here, *praxis* is “a political position in which ‘knowledge’ is not simply defined as ‘knowledge what’ but also as ‘knowledge for’” and “the point is to change the world, not only to study it” (Stanley, 1990, p. 15). In this way, praxis translates disruptive theory into disruptive action. Both intersectionality (deconstructing social stratifications that disadvantage and marginalize) and queering (turning prevailing wisdom on its head) are forms of praxis. As activist and academic positions from which to criticize the entrenchment of traditional, binary ways of conceptualizing reality, intersectional and queer theories expand the politics of location and decenter essentialist notions of gender, race, social class, sexual orientation, and other hierarchical systems of oppression and privilege (de Lauretis, 1991; Few-Demo, Humble, Curran, & Lloyd, 2016). In addition, just as feminist theory has been continually critiqued and revised, so queer theory has resisted the academy’s intent to freeze it into a rigid position that strips it of its potential to resist, or trouble, dominant discourses (Jagose, 2009).

Given this background, we use a feminist intersectional and queer perspective that critiques and decenters the White, middle-class, patriarchal, heteronormative, and cisnormative standard that privileges the normative family structure (Oswald et al., 2005; Smith, 1993; van Eeden-Moorefield, Malloy, & Benson, 2016) and that is still prevalent in research, pedagogy, and the minds of 21st-century students (Allen, 2016; Few-Demo et al., 2016). Specifically, we seek to communicate to our students how the meaning and enactment of “family” and “families” are inextricably tied to notions of power, inclusivity, and context (Allen, Lloyd, & Few, 2009). We underscore how heteronormative and cisnormative frameworks historically have shaped how and which families were studied. These frameworks have led to particular understandings and theories of families that do not reflect or encompass (and thus cannot be

easily applied to) diverse families. Thus, by exploring the experiences of LGBTQ people and families, we shed light on the experiences of those who historically have been ignored, marginalized, or denigrated.

Studying LGBTQ individuals and their families through a feminist intersectional and queer lens can be powerful in terms of challenging dominant notions of family, parenthood, and intimate relationships, as well as dominant social science or family theories (e.g., those that emphasize or assume a mother–father combination as necessary for healthy child development). Further, by applying an intersectional lens, we are able to bring into sharper focus the matrix of domination (Collins, 1990) that shapes diverse and marginalized families; namely, we can see how interlocking systems of oppression function to disadvantage and suppress diverse families.

TEACHING PRACTICES AND POSSIBILITIES

LGBTQ Identities, Families, and Intersectionality

For those of us who teach courses in family science, sociology, psychology, and related fields, a common practice has been to tackle the topics of gender, sexual orientation, race, social class, immigration, disability, and so on separately (i.e., on different days or weeks). This practice often is selected out of convenience, in that it follows the organization of key textbooks. However, reducing the complexity of topics to a centralized focus (i.e., “today we are going to read about gay people and their families; next week about people of color and their families”) artificially segments identities, thus undermining the important lesson of having students understand the reality of multiple intersecting identities (Allen, 1995; Few-Demo et al., 2016; Kuvalanka et al., 2013). If we do choose or are required to divide up content in this way, we must acknowledge the interrelatedness of these identities and specifically include readings and assignments that facilitate awareness of their intersections. Such integration will create conceptual bridges across readings and topics and will serve as a springboard for more nuanced discussion of families. Further, such integration more accurately reflects the multiple identities staring back at us in our classes. By discussing, for example, the experiences of LGBTQ-identified individuals of

different religious faiths (e.g., Dahl & Galliher, 2012), and/or from diverse geographic contexts (e.g., Blackburn & McCreedy, 2009), we can better acknowledge the complexity and contradictions inherent in the lived realities of our students.

To deeply infuse an intersectional lens into our teaching about LGBTQ individuals and their families, or sexuality and families more broadly, we must give weight to how social locations structure and limit people's experiences. Careful thought should be paid to the readings assigned, including the social locations of participants and authors, so that multiple intersections can be examined. For example, the topic of identity development among transgender youth can be approached from a variety of perspectives. Rather than using a single reading to represent this complex issue, several sources, spanning multiple types of media, could be packaged together to provide greater substance and critique. Pairings might include an empirical study about an ethnically and racially diverse sample of male-to-female (MTF) and female-to-male (FTM) youth (ages 15–21) from rural and urban areas (e.g., Grossman, D'Augelli, & Frank, 2011); a theoretical article about the intersection of gender development and trans family members (McGuire et al., 2016); an op-ed critiquing media portrayals and dominant constructions of trans people as gender binary, and failing to capture gender-fluid or gender-queer identities (Micah, 2015); personal reflections by young adults coming out as trans (e.g., from the Transgender Law Center); and online blogs (e.g., on Tumblr, look for posts tagged “#transgender”).

Discussion questions should be crafted in a way that acknowledges and interrogates the intersections of race and ethnicity, age, geography, sexual orientation, gender identity, relational orientation (e.g., monogamous or polyamorous, where *polyamory* refers to the desire for or practice of romantic, sexual, or affective relationships with multiple people simultaneously; Blumer et al., 2013; Sheff, 2005), and other visible and invisible locations. These questions should help students unpack the complexity of intersectionality as a conceptual framework.

A beginning assignment to help students connect to the concept of intersectionality could be to have them write an autobiography about their identity development and resilience. The next step could be to lead a careful discussion in class,

initiated with a question such as, “When did you first start to notice that individuals may be treated differently in families (e.g., your parents had different expectations for boys and girls), schools (e.g., almost all of the kids in your elementary school were the same race as you), and the media (e.g., only male–female couples were shown kissing)?” This could be followed up by asking students to interview diverse others about their own experiences with identity development and resilience in the face of being treated differently. The class could collaborate in creating the kinds of questions to ask in an interview, and then, after conducting their interviews, discuss their results. The goal would be to help them to come “face-to-face” with diversity, then compare notes with classmates about prejudice and privilege in individual lives and society.

Ideas for Incorporating LGBTQ Families and Intersectionality into Course Content

There are many creative ways to address LGBTQ issues and families in intersection with other core identities and social location. By means of illustrative example, we offer the following suggestions for integrating LGBTQ issues and intersectionality into major topic areas:

- In discussing models of and research on sexual identity development, explore how this process unfolds in ways that are shaped by race, ethnicity, class, gender, and culture (e.g., Grov, Bimbi, Nanin, & Parsons, 2006; Kertzner, Meyer, Frost, & Stirratt, 2009).
- In exploring adolescent risk behaviors (e.g., substance use, delinquency), discuss the intersection of race, urbanicity, class, and sexual orientation (e.g., Newcomb, Heinz, & Mustanski, 2012; Rosario, Schrimshaw, & Hunter, 2004).
- In discussing marriage, address how the meaning and perceived benefits of marriage may vary for sexual minorities depending on gender, social class, race, culture, family relationships, and intersections of these (e.g., Badgett, 2011; Goldberg & Kuvallanka, 2012). Emphasize how marriage is inextricably interwoven with assumptions of (and the requirement of) monogamy, and interrogate the implications of these assumptions and associated pressures for sexual minorities, as well as individuals who identify with or

engage in consensual non-monogamy (including swinging, threesomes, open relationships, or polyamory; Rubel & Bogaert, 2015; Sheff, 2011, 2014).

- In examining the transition to parenthood, as well as associated topics of (in)fertility, use of reproductive technologies, and adoption, articulate the ways in which LGBTQ persons' access to and experience of these vary by gender, race, class, age, and other social locations (e.g., Boggis, 2001; Goldberg, 2012; Goldberg, Downing, & Richardson, 2009).
- In discussing routes to parenthood, encourage students to think beyond the status of either "parent" or "child-free" to consider various parenthood configurations and types of parenthood involvement, such as a female couple coparenting with a male couple; a known sperm donor who acts as an "uncle"; a gay male couple who adopts a sibling group via foster care; and a lesbian couple who uses donor insemination to become pregnant, such that each partner carries at least one child (e.g., Goldberg, 2012; Goldberg & Allen, 2013).
- In discussing parent-child relationships, and the role of parent and child gender in those relationships, incorporate discussion of families in which there are two parents of the same gender, single adoptive parents, and transgender parents (e.g., Farr & Patterson, 2013; Lev & Sennott, 2013; Tasker & Granville, 2011).
- In discussing religion and families, consider how different religions respond to diverse sexual orientation (e.g., Barrow & Kuvallanka, 2011) and the experiences of religious LGBTQ persons, including Catholics, Jews, and Muslims (Taylor & Snowdon, 2014).

In addition to adding content on LGBTQ issues and families, instructors may need to consider carefully the kinds of visuals, contexts, questions, and frameworks employed in their courses. Thus, we also offer the following general suggestions to instructors who wish to effectively incorporate an intersectional lens to teaching about LGBTQ families, and so move beyond the default position of positioning families from only a heteronormative lens:

- *Visuals*: Use pictures (e.g., PowerPoint) and video clips of diverse LGBTQ individuals and families—not just young, able-bodied,

attractive, economically privileged White same-sex couples with White babies.

- *International contexts*: Address, when relevant, how discussions of LGBTQ families reflect the U.S. context, and include examples of how the processes or phenomena at hand, such as same-sex marriage and parental rights, might be different in other cultural and geographic contexts (e.g., Lubbe, 2013, on South Africa; Pichardo, 2011, on Spain).
- *Intersectionality-focused questions*: Pose questions that prompt students to consider the intersections of gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, social class, and other social locations in the context of heteronormative societal power structures. For example, ask students to consider how biological parenthood in biracial same-sex couples might intersect with areas of minority stress and resilience. For another example, ask students to reflect on how heteronormative ideals about family life (e.g., the notion that women are responsible for unpaid work) affect different-sex couples and same-sex couples—and how class and race/ethnicity further shape the impact of those norms (e.g., Goldberg, 2013; Moore, 2011).
- *Theoretical frameworks*: Identify and incorporate theoretical frameworks, throughout all presentations of research and practice, to emphasize both the emergence of intersectional and queer theories out of traditional family social science theories. Further, examine how new intersectional perspectives challenge and reformulate ways of thinking about, studying, and experiencing LGBTQ families (Few-Demo et al., 2016; McGuire et al. 2016).

Non-Monosexual Identities, Non-Monogamy, Sexual Fluidity, and Families

In society in general, and among college students in particular, there is growing awareness of and identification with a multiplicity of identities under the larger umbrella term of "non-heterosexual" (Dilley, 2010; Russell, Clarke, & Clary, 2009). Students appear increasingly likely to prefer and embody nonbinary or non-monosexual sexual identities (Dilley, 2010), where *monosexuality* refers to romantic or sexual attraction to members of one sex or gender only (i.e., a person identifies as gay or heterosexual), and *non-monosexuality* (or

plurisexuality; see Mitchell, Davis, & Galupo, 2015) refers to romantic or sexual attraction to members of more than one gender, and may involve identification as, for example, bisexual, pansexual, or queer (Persson, Ryder, & Pfafs, 2016). Young adults are also increasingly likely to be critical of sexual identity labels in general (Coleman-Fountain, 2014; Dilley, 2010). Young adults are also increasingly likely to find resonance with the concept of sexual fluidity, or the notion that one's sexual identity is not fixed or static and can change over time (Diamond, 2008; Twist, 2016).

These changes in young adults' attitudes toward and engagement with non-monosexuality, sexual identity labels, and sexual fluidity may reflect changes in undergraduates' self-identification. Indeed, there is increasing evidence that more young adults (e.g., college-aged individuals) identify as "mostly heterosexual" or bisexual than in the past (Cruz, 2015; Dahlgreen & Shakespeare, 2015; Kuyper & Bos, 2016; Stacey, 2013). For example, in her human sexuality class (which typically has 40–50 students), Abbie asks students to respond to an anonymous survey early in the semester. A question on this survey asks whether they identify, in terms of sexual orientation, as "completely heterosexual, mostly heterosexual, bisexual, lesbian, gay, queer, or something else." The percentage of students who identify as "completely heterosexual" has declined over time, with 62% endorsing this option in 2010, 56% in 2012, and 35% in 2015. This in part may reflect the changing demographics at Clark specifically—but it is also consistent with Stacey's (2013) informal teaching observations, where she notes students are increasingly likely "to describe themselves as 'questioning, curious, undecided, or queer' [or] refuse to define their sexuality at all" (p. v).

Likewise, we both have observed that a growing number of students indicate they identify with or are interested in learning more about sexual fluidity and non-monosexual sexual identities (e.g., queer, pansexual), as well as LGBTQ subcommunities (e.g., kink, bear) and diverse relationship styles or orientations (e.g., polyamory; Sheff, 2005, 2011). Informal evaluations administered at the end of Abbie's courses on sexuality, gender, and families indicate that polyamory specifically, and consensual non-monogamy more broadly, are the most frequently named topics on which students wish they could have learned more.

That students are increasingly interested in learning about non-monosexual identities, sexual fluidity, and consensual non-monogamy reflects evolving scientific understanding of and media portrayal of sexualities as complex, diverse, and not fixed (Diamond, 2008; Elizabeth, 2013; Vassi, 1997). Although students' (and particularly women's) engagement with sexual fluidity and sexual variations is arguably positive, a challenge that instructors may encounter is balancing the desire to teach to students' interests without capitulating to voyeurism. It is extremely important to convey a deep respect for individuals about whom one is lecturing and to avoid in any way the suggestion that these individuals are odd, pathological, or deserving of ridicule. It is necessary to communicate a respectful stance in relation to these attention-grabbing topics, which require managing strong student reactions (e.g., regarding non-monogamy). Given the salience of television programs and films that offer LGBTQ sexual fluidity and non-monogamy as a source of humor and titillation (e.g., the movies *Basic Instinct* and *Horrible Bosses 2*), instructors should seek to deconstruct these images in the classroom and to distinguish them from research as well as lived experiences (Gamson, 2002).

Bringing in data and/or quotes from individuals who identify with non-monosexual identities or communities can be a powerful way of humanizing, demystifying, and destigmatizing these experiences. For example, in one class, Abbie read quotes aloud from a study of bisexual women who described their frustration with being labeled as "fence sitters," "undecided," and "promiscuous," and whose relationship narratives challenged such stereotypes that conflate relational style or orientation (i.e., non-monogamy, in this case) with sexual orientation (i.e., bisexuality). Afterward, some students who had seemed to endorse some of these stereotypes, as indicated by their response papers on the topic, were much more empathic to the experiences of bisexual individuals and more willing to engage the notion of bisexuality as a legitimate identity.

Similarly, in her undergraduate course on human sexuality, Katherine shared research regarding the rise in young adults identifying as bisexual and invited students to reflect on these data as their end-of-class exit slip, a teaching strategy in which students are asked to expand upon the content of the day's lecture or activity.

Students espoused strong reactions—either accepting and understanding bisexuality or condemning it altogether. Yet the opportunity to reflect on these data privately created a low-risk atmosphere for considering what has been previously presented as wrong, unusual, and titillating.

Teaching about topics such as relational and/or erotic diversity (e.g., consensual non-monogamy and polyamory specifically)—topics that, again, students appear to desire more content about—can be similarly challenging and gratifying. For a course on diverse families, Abbie assigned a reading about polyamorous parenting among sexual minority and heterosexual parent families (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2010). Reactions to the piece were mixed, but students generally acknowledged that they felt less judgmental of polyamorous parents than they had before and noted that the reading had informed their understanding of an identity about which they previously had little knowledge. Additionally, students universally agreed that reading about polyamorous parents both had stimulated an interesting and important discussion about the pervasiveness of monogamy as a “family value” (i.e., monogamism; see Anderson, 2012) and had powerfully revealed how intersecting stigmatized statuses involving sexual orientation and erotic or relationship style can create unique challenges for parents and children. (For other resources on polyamorous relationships and families, see Pallotta-Chiarolli, Haydon, & Hunter, 2013; Sheff, 2014.)

Finally, teaching about sexual fluidity (i.e., the notion that sexuality and sexual orientation can change over time), though highly engaging for undergraduate students, also can be challenging; we often have confronted students’ assumptions that sexual fluidity is experienced only by young people, often constitutes a “phase” or “stage,” and is exclusively experienced by females. Challenging ageist notions of sexuality is particularly important in the context of covering course content on families and aging. Indeed, after years of observing that undergraduates in large human sexuality classes feel free to groan or laugh when a middle-aged or older person’s sexuality is discussed or presented in a photograph or film (in contrast to their responses to young people’s sexuality, which is presumably “normative”), Katherine now includes illustrations of sexual fluidity among older adults as well. Doing so serves to decenter sexual fluidity

as acceptable only among the young, emphasizes the intersections among LGBTQ identity and aging, and cautions against simplistic views of sexual fluidity as an entirely recent phenomenon.

Trans Identities and Issues, Gender Fluidity, and Families

Historical shifts have occurred over the past 5 to 10 years with respect to societal awareness of transgender individuals and gender nonconformity. Certainly, transphobia is still a widespread concern (Belcher, 2014; Hill, 2002; Lennon & Mistler, 2014), and hate crimes against trans and GNC people often are reported in the news (Atkinson, 2015). However, shifts are evident in the visibility of transgender celebrities, including Laverne Cox and Caitlyn Jenner, the critical acclaim of the Amazon TV show *Transparent*, and the growing tendency for diversity trainings on college campuses to include trans issues (Boucher, 2011).

Research and media accounts have documented increasing awareness of nonbinary gender identities, whereby individuals, particularly youth and college-aged young adults, eschew gender binaries and labels, sometimes opting for gender-flexible or gender-neutral terms (Bilodeau, 2005; Murphy, 2015), thus paralleling the tendency for at least some youth to reject sexual identity labels (Coleman-Fountain, 2014; Dille, 2010). Universities have in some cases adapted to this trend—as well as the greater visibility of trans students on college campuses in general—by recognizing a “third gender” (i.e., gender neutral; Scelfo, 2015) as well as adapting college materials and paperwork to include gender neutral pronouns (e.g., *ze*, *zer*, *they*, *them*; Binkley, 2015). Likewise, an increasing number of colleges (151, as of July 2016) enable students to use a chosen first name (i.e., preferred rather than legal name) on campus records and documents (e.g., course rosters). Only three colleges (Hampshire College, Ohio University, and University of Vermont) enable students to indicate on course rosters the pronouns that they use for themselves (Campus Pride, 2016). In addition, trans students and advocates are increasingly pushing for universities to include gender identity and expression in nondiscrimination clauses, to reconfigure single-sex bathrooms on campus into unisex bathrooms, and to accommodate the gender of trans students in housing assignments (Boucher, 2011).

Yet at the same time that awareness of trans people and identities has begun to shift within higher education and beyond, greater empathy is not widespread, and backlash to advancements in rights for trans and GNC people is common, within and outside of the university (Boucher, 2011). As an example, new nondiscrimination rules guaranteeing access to bathrooms and other facilities on the basis of gender identity have been met with resistance, and some lawmakers responded by trying to find legislative solutions to undo these protections (Ford, 2015).

Teaching about the *T* has also shifted. Historically, transgender issues have been largely absent from the curricula of most courses in the social and behavioral sciences (Case, Stewart, & Tittsworth, 2009). When they are included, transgender identity often still is conceptualized in terms of the gender binary (i.e., people “transition” from male to female, or from female to male), surgery and hormones are treated as necessary steps in this “transition,” and the narrative of being born in the “wrong body” is still dominant (Engdahl, 2014). This narrow focus precludes acknowledgment and understanding of the full range of gender identities that exist under the umbrella of “trans” (e.g., individuals who identify as gender queer, agender, gender fluid, and other nonbinary gender identities; Richards et al., 2016). As an extension of this, students’ understanding of trans identities often reflects, in part, popular culture representations, such as TV sitcoms, reality shows, and popular films. In turn, some students may conceptualize transgender in binary terms, be overly focused on the bodies of trans people and the role of or necessity of surgeries and hormones in trans people’s gender identities, and be preoccupied with the question of whether one can ever really change one’s gender (Boucher, 2011; Carroll, Güss, Hutchinson, & Gauler, 2012). Also, similar to dominant understandings of bisexuality as a “phase” (i.e., not a legitimate sexual orientation), some students may believe that nonbinary gender identities represent a “phase” (i.e., not a legitimate gender identity; Richards et al., 2016).

A key challenge for instructors, then, is the diversity of knowledge, awareness, and empathy among students regarding trans and gender issues (Boucher, 2011; Carroll et al., 2012). Students on the “high” end of awareness (e.g., those who are leaders in campus LGBTQ groups, those who have taken numerous classes on LGBTQ issues) may express impatience and

frustration with students who lack basic knowledge about trans terminology, pronouns, and the like. Students on the “low” end of awareness may simply lack exposure to trans issues (and may therefore become defensive or upset when “challenged” about their lack of sensitivity); or, they may be openly repelled or disturbed by trans advocacy or educational efforts.

Teaching to these extremes, as well as managing the different affective or emotional reactions to trans issues can be challenging, as scholars have noted (e.g., see Fletcher & Russell, 2001; Kuvalanka et al., 2013). One useful strategy is to distribute an anonymous questionnaire that assesses knowledge and attitudes about transgender issues (as well as queer or sexual minority–related topics) at the beginning of the course, as this enables the instructor to assert early on—and throughout the course—that there is diversity within the class with regard to knowledge and views of trans issues. This, alongside a clearly articulated mission statement for the class (e.g., respectful dialogue, active and sincere efforts to listen to each other and learn from each other, an open mind) can help to remind students to avoid polarizing and potentially alienating commentary, and to thoughtfully engage each other and the instructor. Additionally, students who have both substantial knowledge of trans issues (including, innovative and less formal terms pertaining to trans identities and pronoun use) as well as an interest in educating others about the diverse realities of trans people, can be informally enlisted by instructors to assist in facilitating classroom discussions. Their contributions may be particularly valuable to students given their vantage point as peers (Wentling, Schilt, Windsor, & Lucal, 2008). Providing all students with a comprehensive list of trans-related terminology (e.g., American Library Association, 2016) may also be useful.

Instructors should be mindful about whether it is appropriate to ask students—even in an anonymous questionnaire—whether they endorse trans or GNC identities. In a large class it might be appropriate, if only to provide instructors with the data to remind the class that there is diversity in terms of gender identity. However, in pointing this out—even in passing—instructors run the risk of drawing unwanted attention to a student or small group of students (this is certainly true in a small class, and it may be true in a large class as well). Likewise, it is inappropriate to “call out” these

students to speak about their experiences or perspective in any way, just as we are mindful to not call on the one Latino student, or the one older male student, or the one biracial student, as if they are “experts” on their “group.” If students do speak up voluntarily, the instructor should assume the responsibility of facilitating and maintaining a safe and respectful classroom environment that acknowledges and supports those students and their contributions.

A continued challenge that Abbie has experienced is how to avoid reinforcing the gender binary when trans issues are not the focal topic. In other words, a single class or several classes can be used to sensitively introduce the concept of cisnormativity (McGuire et al., 2016) as well as the fact that some individuals do not report an exclusively male or female gender identity. Yet it can feel difficult and heavy handed to constantly reinforce this idea when, for example, discussing women’s experiences of pregnancy, men’s experience of fatherhood, dating among male–female couples, and employment patterns of men and women. One strategy that Abbie has used is to acknowledge the tension at hand (i.e., “I have made a real effort to emphasize the limits of, to problematize, and to deconstruct, the gender binary . . . and here I am, using it as a reference point, because it is such a fundamental assumption of much of the research that has been done, and it is also hard to get out of thinking and talking in terms of the gender binary”). Students’ reactions to this tend to be thoughtful and positive (although in rare cases, students can become hindered by concerns that they will offend others by using binary gendered language, and such concerns can interfere with their ability to spontaneously contribute to class discussions).

Also, this running commentary can be a compelling way to consistently disrupt, or queer, gender, family, and sexuality binaries (Oswald et al., 2005), and to emphasize the need for more research on gender nonbinary identities. It can inspire conversations about how a particular theory (e.g., social learning theory, as applied to the topic of gender socialization) or set of research findings (e.g., dating preferences among cisgender adults) might be challenged or undermined when we consider the experiences of trans and gender-nonconforming individuals. Indeed, discussions of gender variance and gender transition have great potential to destabilize notions of family, sexuality, and gender as “fixed,” and are excellent topics to incorporate in courses on

life-span development and family science. For example, discussions of gender-variant children raise questions about how family relationships change when, for example, “a mother–daughter relationship . . . transform[s] into a mother–son relationship,” and siblings must “adjust their notions of what it means to have a ‘brother’ or a ‘sister’” (McGuire et al., 2016, p. 68). Discussions of trans sexualities can help illuminate the intersections of gender and sexual orientation and raise relevant questions for college students about how identity, relational status, sex, and gender intersect over time. For example, consider a female couple in which both women initially considered themselves lesbians, but one partner undergoes gender transition and ultimately self-identifies as male and uses male pronouns. Important questions can be raised about the meaning and implications of this transition for each partner’s sexuality, independent of, but also within, the current relational context as well as how this couple’s relationship and sexual identities are perceived by others. Finally, exploring how transgender youth, young adults, and adults explore, manage, and articulate their gender identities online and offline (e.g., via newsgroups and websites vs. with family and friends) can raise provocative questions about community and identity, and how cyberspace can be employed as preliminary, complementary, and alternative spheres of support and connection (Marciano, 2014; Ybarra, Mitchell, Palmer, & Reisner, 2014). One question to ask is: How do encounters with(in) online trans communities affect or offset youths’ engagement with, connection to, and outness with offline (in real life) friends and family?

CONCLUSIONS

As instructors who seek to teach about LGBTQ lives and families in a meaningful way, we must continually revise our teaching practices in line with changes in who our students are and how they engage with the world around them. This has the potential to engage students and help them make deeper connections across academic content in ways that truly matter in their own lives. Intersectional, queer, and feminist frameworks provide the critical intellectual apparatus for deconstructing students’ ideological views that there is one reality of individual family life—White, middle class, heterosexual, nuclear, and the like—and opening

them up to the realities of variation and diversity. In this article, we have suggested strategies and reflexive positions that are grounded in our own experiences as teachers to help students grapple with and embrace LGBTQ identities, families, and intersectionalities. These teaching practices and possibilities include ways to incorporate LGBTQ identities as well as sexually fluid and gender-fluid identities within family contexts.

Tapping into the technological sophistication of our students' world allows us to wed scholarship on LGBTQ identities and families with the reality of their social worlds. For example, naming and exploring the greater visibility of feminine trans celebrities (e.g., Caitlyn Jenner, Laverne Cox) as compared to masculine trans celebrities (e.g., Chaz Bono) and gender-fluid or gender-queer celebrities (e.g., Ruby Rose) can provide important lessons about the role of cisnormative ideals, the power of the gender binary, and the transformative potential of aligning one's private identity with public presentation (Kellaway, 2014; Micah, 2015).

One of our key roles as instructors is to emphasize the potential benefit of incorporating greater "messiness" into discussions about LGBTQ family life. Gender and sexual fluidity, and the array of constantly changing categories to describe these emergent identities, provide crucially relevant opportunities to meet our students where they are. Our students' desire to discuss complicated truths and experiences can inspire us to continue to queer the curriculum and open the classroom in service of knowledge that is relevant and practical for the students we teach.

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