

# USING SELF-DISCLOSURE TO MANAGE STUDENT MISCONCEPTIONS IN A HUMAN SEXUALITY CLASSROOM

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## *Abstract*

This paper explores how three Human Development graduate student instructors of human sexuality have utilized student perception and instructor disclosure to challenge assumptions and misconceptions about sexuality. Three modes of pedagogy—culturally responsive pedagogy, experiential learning theory, and queer pedagogy—are discussed in order to illustrate the interplay of perception and disclosure when teaching. The authors provide a list of questions for instructors to be reflective as well as strategies to respond to student misconceptions about sexuality topics in the classroom.

*Keywords:* culturally responsive pedagogy, disclosure, experiential learning theory, queer pedagogy, sexuality

## USING SELF-DISCLOSURE TO MANAGE STUDENT MISCONCEPTIONS IN A HUMAN SEXUALITY CLASSROOM

The majority of the literature on sexuality education in the United States is focused on children and adolescents. When this education occurs, it is usually focused on risk prevention and is often taught from an abstinence-only curriculum, ignoring the variety of human sexual behaviors, attractions, and identities (Walcott, Chenneville, & Tarquini, 2011). Undergraduate human sexuality courses may be under less scrutiny than sex education courses taught in elementary, middle, or high schools (Goldfarb, 2005) and could act as a supplement to the sex education students may have previously received. These courses often provide a setting to discuss the many aspects of sexuality relevant to young adults, including sexual orientation.

As with any topic, students enter the classroom with a set of preconceived notions about human sexuality. Some of these notions are derived from research or personal experiences, but many students tend to come into the classroom with misconceptions about sexuality (Flowers-Coulson, Kushner, & Bankowski, 2000). Instructors could attempt to address these misconceptions in a variety of ways, including self-disclosure. An instructor's disclosure of their own sexual orientation could be a powerful experience for students (Allen, 2001) and could help students understand how they make assumptions about the sexual orientations of others. Instructors could use disclosure during discussions about sexual orientation to challenge these heteronormative assumptions, but first they must consider the risks of doing so.

For academics and professors, disclosing sexual orientation can be a concern regardless of whether it is to their students, to their colleagues, or to those in positions of power within the institution (Clarke & Braun, 2009; Foster & Perry, 2009). Rogers, McRee, and Artanz (2009) argue that homophobia is still a persistent problem on college campuses, despite efforts to increase acceptance of the lesbian and gay community. Some possible risks of disclosing include possible resistance or aggression from students and colleagues, negative impact

on the ability to gain tenure, being labeled as too political or too sexual, and being seen as flaunting sexuality or pushing an agenda (Wood, 2005; Foster & Perry, 2009; McLean, 2009). Allen (2011) stated that in some cases, professors are seen as trying to “recruit for homosexuality” (p. 86). In regard to self-disclosure as a teaching moment, Crawley (2009) responded to this idea by stating that she felt that students got too fixated on who she was as opposed to thinking theoretically and questioning the binary.

Despite the risks, disclosing a sexual identity in an academic setting could also be beneficial. Reasons for disclosing include disrupting the heteronormativity of an institution, being a role model and validating the experiences of sexual minority students that may be in the classroom, increasing visibility so that it is more difficult for others to deny the actuality of the presence of sexual minorities in academia, creating teachable and reflective moments for students in the classroom, and being able to be one’s true, authentic self in the classroom (Adams & Emery, 1994; Allen, 2011; Garber, 1994; Smith & Yost, 2009). Rogers et al. (2009) also found that those who have more positive interactions and direct exposure to the lesbian and gay community tend to be more supportive and show a decrease in levels of homophobia.

The authors of this paper intend to highlight methods of addressing student misconceptions in a human sexuality course. We will discuss how our own pedagogical approaches and identities shape our responses to student misconceptions in the classroom, as well as our use of disclosure as a method for contradicting these misconceptions. While we believe this approach could be effectively used in disclosing gender identity, our focus here is solely on sexual identities so as to avoid conflation between gender and sexual identity. We will present a fictional case study followed by a series of suggested questions for consideration in determining how an instructor might respond to student misconceptions. We provide a discussion of each question to facilitate critical thinking in each area, utilizing previous research as well as personal experiences in teaching human sexuality courses.

Our teaching experiences are primarily within a predominantly white, southeastern, mid-size land-grant research university located

in a small rural town. Each of us are doctoral candidates serving as instructor of record for the Department of Human Development and Family Science (HDFS). Within this university, human sexuality is an introductory course in which sexual orientation is one of many sexuality-related topics covered. Additionally, HDFS students are required to complete this course, but it is also offered as a general education requirement. Many students from across the university enroll in this course, which lends to a significant amount of diversity and beliefs regarding sexuality.

### **MICHELLE'S APPROACH: CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY**

Culturally responsive pedagogy is an approach to education that is student-centered and focuses on students' strengths rather than deficiencies (Richards, Brown, & Forde, 2007). In this style of teaching, learning is seen as constructivist, and instructors are aware that students are constantly interpreting and making meaning of new information (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). In culturally responsive learning environments, students are asked to take an active role in their own learning and are seen as responsible for their own education (Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Richards et al., 2007). As an instructor, I help facilitate this by asking questions that require students to think critically and connect to the material (Jackson, 1993).

This approach to pedagogy requires instructors to be aware of the cultural backgrounds of their students and appreciate diversity within the classroom (Jackson, 1993; Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Richards et al., 2007). In order to do this, instructors who use culturally responsive pedagogy must explore their own personal histories and become aware of their own biases (Richards et al., 2007). As I was born into a white, middle-class family in the southeastern United States, I have similarities with many of my students and realize that this can be both beneficial and a hindrance. I realize that there are aspects of culture that cannot be described by the color of a person's skin and their hometown and urge my students to reflect on the aspects of their culture relevant to the course. Religious affiliation, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, geographic location, age, and educational

opportunities help to create a person's sense of culture, though there are certainly other influencing factors. I help students realize this by positioning myself for them. I frequently wonder aloud how being raised Catholic and deciding to cease affiliation with the Church could have influenced my views on certain aspects of sexuality. I point out that living in a well-populated area and having the opportunity to seek educational opportunities outside of my public high school helped to supplement my school-based sex education and shape my ideas about sex. These and other aspects of my culture and identity help me model reflexivity for my students.

When teaching human sexuality in an undergraduate classroom, I am acutely aware of the numerous misconceptions students may have about the subject matter. Students come from a wide variety of different backgrounds and have accessed information about sexuality from many different sources (Milburn, 1995), some more reliable than others. Before students ever enter the classroom, they are equipped with a wealth of information about sexuality that they believe to be true. While much of this information is consistent with current sexuality research, many young adults believe common misconceptions about sexuality (Flowers-Coulson et al., 2000). When using a culturally responsive approach, addressing these misconceptions requires more than a simple statement correcting a student's untrue belief.

Before addressing misconceptions, I must build rapport with my students in order to have a trusting relationship in which students will be open to feedback (Han et al., 2014). While self-disclosure could help some instructors build a relationship with students, I choose not to disclose my sexual orientation in my class. Instead, I build relationships with my students by learning about their lives and cultures (Villegas & Lucas, 2002) and demonstrating respect for their backgrounds while teaching (Brockenbrough, 2014; Richards et al., 2007). While addressing misconceptions in the classroom, I take care to emphasize that varying beliefs about sexuality are normal and that any untrue belief is not the fault of the student. Together we explore how cultural influences affect opinions and beliefs without vilifying any aspect of that culture.

My decision not to disclose my sexual orientation was a purposeful one, though not a decision I made easily. Though there is little research on self-disclosure of sexual identities in the classroom, much of it points to the utility of this disclosure for creating an open environment and challenging assumptions (Barker & Reavey, 2009). In some ways, my lack of disclosure could be a missed opportunity for illuminating the tendency for most people to make assumptions about sexual orientation based on appearance and behavior. I am aware that most students perceive me as straight, though I never identify as such. I address this assumption but neither correct nor confirm it. Rather, I challenge students to think about what in their backgrounds is shaping these assumptions. We explore and critique elements of our society that drive us to make assumptions about others and cause us to believe misconceptions about sexual orientation and other aspects of sexuality. By challenging students' heteronormative assumptions in this way, rather than simply sharing my sexual orientation, I allow students to confront their own assumptions and their need to categorize others.

Because I do not disclose my sexual orientation in class, I make room for others to share their own experiences. One semester, I facilitated a panel discussion with individuals who are active in campus and/or community LGBTQ organizations. My students reported it was interesting and informative to be able to ask the panelists about their experiences and were grateful for the opportunity to do so. During the next class, my students revealed they had questions about sexual orientation and gender identity that they were hesitant to ask our panelists for fear of offending them. Cain (1996) reported a similar sentiment among his students after his self-disclosure; he found that about a quarter of them were worried they would offend him with comments or questions. I used this as an opportunity to challenge students to reflect on the assumptions they have made about me and about their classmates. By thinking they were "safe" from offending once the panelists were gone, they were assuming that anyone who does not announce their queer presence is automatically straight. I was able to challenge this assumption and draw attention to the fact that mine is not the only identity in the room that matters.

## MARY'S APPROACH: EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING THEORY

The theory of experiential learning was developed by David A. Kolb, drawing on the influences of Dewey, Lewin, and Piaget (Kolb, 1984). The main assumptions of this theory are that learning is grounded in experiences, and that there are two modes of grasping experience and of transforming experience (Kolb, 1984; Kolb & Kolb, 2009). The two modes of grasping experience are concrete experience (via apprehension) and abstract conceptualization (via comprehension). The two modes of transforming experience are reflective observation (via intention) and active experimentation (via extension) (Kolb, 1984; Kolb & Kolb, 2009).

Reflection is an important component to the experiential learning process (Hamilton & Klebba, 2011; Moon, 2004). Depending on the level goals of the class, varying degrees of reflection can be utilized to obtain the desired learning outcome. For instance, in an introductory course such as human sexuality, reflection can be built into the curriculum through journaling or pausing during lectures for group discussion (Hamilton & Klebba, 2011). Students can easily use their experiences with the subject matter to perpetuate misconceptions during group discussions. These experiences could be anywhere on the range from concrete experience to abstract conceptualization based on learned stereotypes.

Prior to handling a situation in which students present misconceptions as truth, it is important for me as an instructor to create a safe, conversational space (Baker, Jensen, & Kolb, 2005; Kisfalvi & Oliver, 2015). This is done through establishing ground rules from the first day of class regarding respect, trust, and a willingness to engage through sharing and active listening. As the instructor, it is my responsibility to directly establish this safe environment, but also to model this for the students. I take an active role in presenting as many sides to an argument as applicable to provide students with as much information as possible to engage in reflective conversations.

The classroom environment I seek when teaching a human sexuality course is consistent with the nine principles of promoting experiential learning in classrooms as presented by Kolb and Kolb (2009). These principles are a) respect for learners and their experience; b) begin learning with the learner's experience of the subject matter; c) creating and holding a hospitable space for learning; d) making space for conversational learning; e) making space for acting and reflecting; f) making space for feeling and thinking; g) making space for inside out learning; h) making space for development of expertise; i) making space for learners to take charge of their own learning. When handling misconceptions as a part of a discussion, I deliberately make space for acting, reflecting, feeling, and thinking in addition to allowing students to take charge of their own learning. Generally, this means opening the floor for discussions from other students that may correct the misconceptions. If students are hesitant to do so, I may also include a brief period of journal reflection with a prompt for students to consider alternatives to the topic that is being misrepresented. This time allows for further reflection on the topic further with a specific instruction that will likely lead to a correction of the misconception. Only in cases where the discussion continues towards validating the misconception will I insert authority as an instructor and provide correction and clarification.

As a white, middle-class instructor identifying as a bisexual cis female, I am acutely aware of assumptions and misconceptions students hold regarding identity, especially sexual orientation. The progression of my identity development in relation to teaching courses in human sexuality is an important detour. As a master's student, I had the unique opportunity to teach multiple sections of this course independently. During this time, I identified as a heterosexual cis female, giving very little thought to contextual factors of sexual orientation and gender identities other than a belief in equality. Upon completing my master's degree, I became a clinician, leaving behind a life of teaching. I married a man shortly after graduating, believing this was my romantic course. In my late 20s, I began to explore my sexual identity further and came to embrace my attraction to women. Currently, I am remarried to a cis female who identifies as a lesbian.



Highlighting the history of my identity development is important to this discussion, as this identity process was primarily done away from the academic environment. Upon returning to academia and teaching a human sexuality course for the first time since embracing my bisexuality, I have shifted my pedagogy. I struggled for a short time on the decision to disclose my sexual orientation, concerned about the ramifications for doing so. I finally settled on a model of purposeful disclosure to highlight assumptions and misconceptions regarding the sexual minority community. That is, I created a lesson plan specifically devoted to this very topic, which plays on students' perceptions of me being straight, utilizing many aspects of experiential learning theory, and with the intention of disclosing my sexual orientation at the end.

In this lesson, I created a PowerPoint presentation that included pictures of celebrities and non-celebrities that identify as various sexual orientations. The beginning pictures are of well-known celebrities who self-identify as lesbian and gay. As the presentation progressed, it became less clear, and students were asked to rely upon their preconceived notions regarding appearance and sexual orientation. The final slide was a picture of me, which led to a debate in the classroom. Once I revealed my orientation, I opened the floor for discussion, which was one of the most attentive class discussions we had throughout the semester. In this discussion, we covered stereotypes, misconceptions, assumptions, and heteronormativity. I also discussed my process of deciding to disclose and the various concerns that I wrestled with. By placing these ideas into a "real-life" person, the content was brought to life, and students understood the material on a deeper level.

## **SARAH'S APPROACH: QUEER PEDAGOGY**

When a misconception, myth, or stereotype enters the classroom, as an instructor, I try to address how the space opened for this idea to make its way into our shared classroom. In order to uncover the answer to this question, I employ queer pedagogy.

Queer pedagogy "aims to analyze discursive and cultural practices that create identities and privilege some over others" (Oswald et al., 2009, p. 52). In human sexuality courses, these "privileged" discourses

are heterosexual relationships and attractions, cisgender identities, and allosexual desires and/or drives. Rather than seeking to include non-privileged identities, queer thought interrogates the structures of intelligibility that keeps these identities from the realm of thinkability (Britzman, 1998). Imagine a student asking whether or not being gay is a choice; a pedagogically queer response to this could be to ask whether or not students believe being heterosexual is a choice and what would lead them to ask this question of same-gender but not other-gender attractions.

While queer pedagogy can be utilized by anyone, what benefits (if any) are there for these educational practices being used by sexual minority individuals? Instructors “coming out” in classroom settings are rarely discussed despite many influential writers of these discourses actually being queer (Bryson & de Castell, 1993). Allen (1995) considered how coming out can help students to unsettle essentialist categories and allow them to grapple with the course material in personal and analytic ways. Personally identifying with numerous sexual and gender minority identities forced me to consider which I want to be: a pedagogically queer instructor or a queer person utilizing a queer pedagogy. When considering which of these I want to be, I believe it is also important to consider how students will perceive me.

As an undergraduate student, I remember making societally normative judgments about my professors’ identities based on what they “looked like” they would identify as. I was always upset when they did not come out because it seemed like a missed opportunity to make marginalized identities visible and provide good representation of the greatness queer-identified people could achieve. I never read their lack of disclosure as meaning they identified as heterosexual and/or cisgender, just that they were closeted. These assumptions I made as an undergraduate student and, frankly, still make today are a problem that can be addressed in the human sexuality courses I teach.

What better way to actively interrogate the structures of intelligibility than by bringing these assumptions to the forefront of the conversation? By discussing these thoughts, stereotypes, and assumptions aloud, we expose a weak foundation. Where do my

perceptions come from if not cyclic and repetitive representations of myself that make me feel being gay is something I innately am and appear to be? How many times do I need to be told I “look gay” before I think coming out is something I do by merely entering a room, without saying anything?

Perhaps the question of whether or not to come out is a question wrongly asked and, as Oswald et al. (2009) states, “with a queer pedagogical approach, instructors are not required to have all the answers—they must be willing, rather, to engage with their students in the inquiry of subjectivities” (p. 53). Engaging our students critically with questions about disclosure, perceptions, and what it means to identify as anything may be the teaching moment that exposes the weak foundations of assumed knowledge. This is something all three of us agree upon, and it is present in our pedagogical approaches.

## CASE STUDY

To illustrate how instructors might use disclosure to address misconceptions in the classroom, we created the following case study. We will use this example to frame our discussion about addressing misconceptions in the classroom. We use our own pedagogical approaches to discuss how Todd, the subject of our case study, could respond to the misconception that arises in his classroom and encourage instructors to reflect on how their own experiences and pedagogical approaches would influence their response.

## EXAMPLE

Todd is a faculty member at a large research university and is teaching human sexuality for the first time. Todd identifies as a gay, cis man but is often perceived as straight. He is aware that his students perceive him as straight because they frequently ask him if he has a girlfriend or wife and make other comments alluding to his perceived straight identity. During Todd’s lecture on sexual orientation, a student raises her hand and asks why gay men are more promiscuous than straight men. Todd, realizing this is a common misconception about gay men, is unsure how to address this in the classroom.

Instructors in situations similar to Todd's have a variety of options when determining how to respond to a student's misguided comments. Because self-reflection is an important pedagogical practice (Moon, 2004), instructors must consider first whether or not they want to address the misconception, then how to proceed based on the choice they make. Instructors approach this decision by considering the personal, pedagogical, and environmental factors that influence their ability and willingness to challenge assumptions and misconceptions in the classroom. Based on our own pedagogical approaches and positionalities, we have created a series of questions to help instructors determine if and how they might address these misconceptions in the classroom. These questions were informed by previous scholars' investigations of self-disclosure in the classroom (Adams & Emery, 1994; Allen, 1995; Allen, 2011; Barker & Reavey, 2009; Cain, 1996; Foster & Perry, 2009; McLean, 2009; Wolfe, 2009). These questions can be used as a guide for instructors and are meant to encourage further self-reflection and exploration into the many ways student misconceptions can affect the way we interact with students. Following each question, we will respond and discuss using examples from our own approaches to highlight the various ways in which student misconceptions can be handled in the classroom. Each question is additionally listed in Table 1.

## **HOW DO YOU BELIEVE YOUR STUDENTS PERCEIVE YOU?**

Todd has evidence to suggest his students believe he is straight. What does that mean for his opinions in terms of addressing this stereotype? Mary's example above is one way in which Todd can utilize heteronormative assumptions to his advantage. Identifying as something other than what his students expect, Todd has the opportunity to employ experiential learning theory to actively interrogate this misconception. This can be done in numerous ways, one of which could be to have students reflect on their experiences, thoughts, and feelings that lead to the assumptions they make about Todd's personal life then engage them in a class discussion about those assumptions (Hamilton & Klebba, 2011). This activity could show how they don't think he fits the stereotype, which could then begin to deconstruct their schemas about what a gay man is and why

they believe them to be more sexually promiscuous. Additionally, this discussion could highlight the term heteronormativity in a tangible way.

Todd also has the option to delve into a queer pedagogical discussion. Stereotypes are bred within the climate of society, so he could explore with his class why society might view gay men in a negative way. He can help students deconstruct their assumption and ask why one might want them to view minorities negatively. Here Todd does not need to have definitive answers, nor does he need to disclose his own sexual orientation, but he should be willing to critically engage in this inquiry with his students (Oswald et al., 2009).

## **HOW DO YOU PERSONALLY WANT TO RESPOND TO THE STUDENT?**

When teaching sensitive topics, students can ask questions that affect the instructor on a personal level. It is important for instructors to be reflective about their own positionality before engaging critically in the conversation (Richards et al., 2007; Kolb & Kolb, 2009). Todd needs to be aware and reflective of his personal views and reactions to assure he addresses the misconception from a place of instruction and not of retaliation. Do parts of Todd's upbringing or culture support or refute the misconception? Does Todd come up against this stereotype daily with non-affirmative individuals around him? Does Todd also identify as polyamorous or foster relationships that are open and/or non-exclusive? Does he know gay men who "sleep around" and judge them for it? All of these factors play into how he enters this teaching moment and could affect the way he constructs his comment.

## **WHAT IS YOUR CONNECTION TO THE STEREOTYPE IN QUESTION?**

As stated above, Todd may structure his relationships in a way that others would consider to be "promiscuous." If this is the case, he may feel limited in how he addresses the comment. Reflectivity and openness through experiential learning can prove helpful, but Todd may feel that utilizing this option in a genuine way could further the stereotype instead of challenging it. However, pairing this approach with a culturally responsive pedagogy could allow him more directions

in applying these pedagogies without appearing less credible to his students. Each of the pedagogical approaches discussed here relies on a trusting relationship to be the foundation of open feedback with students (Han et al., 2014; Baker et al., 2005; Kisfalvi & Oliver, 2015). If this misconception comes at a time in the semester when he feels he has most students engaged in his teaching and has built a trusting, respectful relationship with them, the risk of self-disclosure may lend itself to more benefits than drawbacks.

### **WHAT SOCIAL, CULTURAL, OR SOCIETAL FACTORS COULD BE INFLUENCING THE WAY THE STUDENT THINKS ABOUT THIS TOPIC?**

It is extremely important for instructors to be aware of their students' backgrounds (Jackson, 1993; Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Richards et al., 2007; Kolb & Kolb, 2009). While some students may not wish to share personal information with their instructors, we believe that instructors can learn about their students' beliefs through large group discussions, individual conversations with students, or individual reflection assignments. Students interpret course material and make meaning of it using their own backgrounds and experiences (Villegas & Lucas, 2002), and instructors must be aware of this as much as possible in order to address misinformation. For example, a student with a gay family member may have a different reaction to the misconception presented than a student who does not.

In the case example, Todd must realize that the misconception may stem from deeper beliefs that the student has about minority sexual orientations, and depending on his relationship with the student and the classroom environment, he may be able to encourage the student to reflect on where these beliefs originate. Exploring and challenging social structures that may enable and encourage misconceptions is an invaluable tool used by instructors when faced with misconceptions (Britzman, 1998). Doing this in a respectful manner and ensuring the safety of all students in the classroom is vital to the learning environment (Kisfalvi & Oliver, 2015). This can be accomplished by stressing that misconceptions are not the fault of the student and by validating the student's experiences while explaining how the misconception could be hurtful and offensive. Using these techniques,

Todd and other instructors can encourage self-reflection and challenge their students to be critical of their own beliefs.

## **WHAT IS YOUR PHILOSOPHY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING?**

As highlighted above through the authors' discussions on various pedagogies, it is important to consider your views on learning and teaching. Pedagogical approaches differ depending on these views; therefore, they impact how we might respond to a situation like this. Todd should ponder what he believes about how students learn. It is important for him to consult his own learning preferences but also to consider the learning styles of his students. By allowing students to have some influence over the learning process, Todd is helping them take an active role in their own education (Richards et al., 2007). Using these beliefs, Todd would then formulate his teaching style to fit the styles of learning. For example, if Todd believes that students tend to learn best through applying the material to their own lives, he might seek to achieve this through reflective questions or asking for personal examples via in-class discussion. He could expand the question to the rest of the classroom, asking for other students' thoughts and experiences with this misconception in an attempt to draw out exceptions to it.

## **HOW DOES YOUR PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH INFORM HOW YOU MIGHT RESPOND?**

Expanding on the previous question, the pedagogical approach of Todd in this situation would largely depend on his philosophy of learning and teaching. From a queer pedagogical perspective, Todd might respond by questioning the aspects of society that perpetuate the stereotype (Oswald, 2009). Culturally responsive pedagogy would encourage Todd to use self-reflection and to consider where the students are coming from and how their culture and upbringing may have reinforced such misconceptions (Jackson, 1993). Experiential learning theory urges self-reflection as well, and would emphasize the importance of conversational learning and inclusive discussion (Baker et al., 2005; Hamilton & Klebba, 2011). Of course, there are many pedagogical approaches, and instructors may use one not listed here.

These approaches, as well as an instructor's individual philosophy on teaching, will inform how misconceptions would be addressed in the classroom.

### **WHAT IS THE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT LIKE?**

From a queer pedagogical standpoint, an important consideration when approaching misconceptions would be deconstructing the teacher-learner binary (Luhmann, 1998). Just as Todd's identities are up to interpretation from students, he also has his own perceptions of his students. Todd identifies with the orientation in question, but this does not mean he is the only one in the room who does. Understanding that the room may already hold the answer to challenging the misconception, Todd can challenge the "naturalness" of his role as instructor by instead creating space for classmates to instruct, teach, and challenge each other.

### **WHAT IS THE DIVERSITY CLIMATE OF YOUR INSTITUTION?**

Todd's choices of pedagogical stances are not purely agentic, as his decisions are constricted by the policies of the institution and the legal protections, or lack thereof, offered to him in his state. Understanding the limits of academic freedom at his university as well as what types of complaints are usually filed might be helpful in assessing what Todd should consider during his decision-making process. Disclosure of a minority sexual orientation could be accompanied by many risks (Clarke & Braun, 2009; Foster & Perry, 2009; Wood, 2005; McLean, 2009), and Todd should consider these when making his decision. In addition, does the state in which he currently works protect him from termination due to his sexual orientation? If not, using disclosure in the classroom may be an option deemed too risky with the potential harm outweighing the positive gains.

### **WHAT IS THE CLIMATE OF THE CITY OR TOWN IN WHICH YOUR INSTITUTION IS EMBEDDED?**

Responding to student misconceptions in the rural, conservative South is very different than doing so in the urban, liberal West. Assessing student "buy in" to socially just responses or queer-affirmative critiques to stereotypes is likely to vary across locations.



The level at which to intervene will then likely be affected by these factors. Todd could apply the culturally responsive pedagogy to make the message relatable and, therefore, get through to students who perhaps lack exposure to this topic (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). The use of this pedagogical approach could allow students to reflect on the aspects of their culture that influence their views on sexuality. Alternatively, in locations where you can safely believe decent exposure has already occurred, deconstructing the misconception through use of queer pedagogy may be a good way to address the negative assumption.

## DISCUSSION

These reflection questions can allow instructors to prepare themselves to address misconceptions in the classroom and can assist them in deciding whether or not disclosure could aid in this process. Regardless of an instructor's disclosure status, there are many ways to address misconceptions in the classroom. From the first day of class, instructors can work with students to build an open, comfortable environment. Showing an interest in students' cultures and backgrounds can help instructors begin to create this environment (Jackson, 1993). Appreciating students' differences and constructing an environment where students feel safe to express themselves allows for more open discussions to take place (Kisfalvi & Oliver, 2015). Building trust and respect between instructors and students is vital to the learning process (Brockenbrough, 2014) and could help make students more receptive to feedback about misconceptions they might be making.

During each class, instructors can use examples that are relatable to students to increase understanding of new topics (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Instructors can also make the subject matter relatable by utilizing activities that illustrate the concept in question (Kolb & Kolb, 2009). Making the course material relatable could also be important in preventing and addressing misconceptions because it makes the material more accessible. Using relatable examples could also encourage students to think about how the lecture topics relate to their own life, which makes them more engaged in the learning process.

Certain textbooks, videos, and presentations have the potential to reinforce misconceptions, and instructors need to be aware of this potential and choose course materials carefully and purposefully (Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Jackson, 1993). No textbook is perfect, and instructors can use specific examples from textbooks or other course materials to show students how ingrained certain misconceptions are in our society. Drawing attention to the compulsory heteronormativity evident in many societies can allow instructors to move the discussion beyond the classroom and question the institutional reinforcement of heterosexism (Britzman, 1998).

Even after making these considerations, some students might still be resistant to discussing misconceptions. A clear policy, both written in the syllabus and expressed in class, can help prepare students to critically examine many topics. If the goal in the classroom is to examine social and political structures that reinforce inequalities (Oswald et al., 2009), students should be aware of this and prepared to engage in critical discussion. A foundation of respect within the classroom could also be helpful in addressing student resistance. This respect should be evident not only between student and instructor, but among students as well. While these strategies might not eliminate all student resistance, they provide instructors with a framework for beginning the collaborative process of learning, exploring, and critiquing with their students.

## **CONCLUSION**

Self-reflection, using relatable examples, forging trusting relationships, and being critical of materials that reinforce heteronormativity are some of the many strategies instructors can use to address misconceptions and assumptions in the classroom (Brockenbrough, 2014; Hamilton & Klebba, 2011; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). By doing these things, instructors can create an environment where students feel safe to ask questions and are generally receptive to feedback. This allows instructors to not only correct misconceptions in the classroom, but also to encourage students to think critically about their own beliefs and challenge any misconceptions they encounter outside the classroom as well.

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<b>Table 1. Questions for Reflection</b>		
<b>Personal</b>	<b>Pedagogical</b>	<b>Climate</b>
How do you believe your students perceive you?	What social, cultural, or societal factors could be influencing the way the student thinks about the topic?	What is the classroom environment like?
How do you personally want to respond to the student?	What is your philosophy of learning and teaching?	What is the diversity climate of your institution?
What is your connection to the stereotype in question?	How does your pedagogical approach inform how you might respond?	What is the climate of the city or town in which your institution is embedded?

