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Teaching intersectional LGBT psychology: reflections from historically Black and Hispanic-serving universities

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Recent curricular developments emphasising coverage of sexuality resulted in the creation of psychology courses devoted to ‘lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender’ (LGBT) content that parallel diversity courses that focus on gender or race. However, an intersectional pedagogical approach may strengthen student understanding of not only the LGBT psychology but also the matrix of oppression as related to a multitude of social inequalities. This article presents instructors’ reflections documenting the benefits and challenges of using critical liberatory feminist pedagogy and an intersectional framework in teaching two courses, Black Issues in LGBT Psychology and Psychology of Gender, Race, and Sexuality within the cultural contexts of a historically Black university and a Hispanic-serving university. Examples of assignments and student reactions are provided. Implications are drawn for diversity-themed courses that may focus exclusively on race/ethnicity, sexual orientation and/or gender identity without attention to intersections of race, gender, class, religion, ability or national origin. This ignores powerful pedagogical opportunities to advance students’ critical consciousness. Instructors’ use of an intersectional pedagogical approach can provide opportunities to enhance student consciousness regarding multiple identities and oppression and, subsequently, may result in increased student action to promote social change towards group equality.

Keywords: intersectional; LGBT psychology; historically Black university; Hispanic-serving institution; critical liberatory feminist pedagogy; cultural contexts

Introduction

This article argues that teaching ‘lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender’ (LGBT) psychology using an intersectional pedagogical approach provides several advantages to enhance student learning. This reflection documents the benefits and challenges of critical liberatory feminist pedagogy and the intersectional framework used in teaching two courses, Black Issues in LGBT Psychology and Psychology of Gender, Race, and Sexuality. Taught in the context of a historically Black university (originally developed for disenfranchised people of African descent in the United States) and Hispanic-serving institution (universities with 25% or more Hispanic student population and officially recognised by the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities), respectively, the intersectional
theoretical approach offered integration of students’ privileged and marginalised identities with their learning about LGBT psychology.

**Critical liberatory feminist pedagogy**

Developed by Paulo Freire ([1970] 2000), critical consciousness (or conscientização) produces ‘deepening of the attitude of awareness’ (p. 109) as the oppressed recognise their own abilities as social change agents. Further popularised by priest and scholar Ignacio Martin-Baro (1996) within a framework of liberation psychology, critical consciousness motivates people into action against oppressive forces within their lives stemming from an increased awareness and understanding of the negative and limiting social factors within a community. Within the classroom, this approach promotes a learning process that encourages students’ critical analysis of multiple realities as well as co-creation of knowledge. Expanding on Freire’s concept, Lather (1998) described critical pedagogy as emphasising empowerment of marginalised student populations including antiracist, feminist and queer pedagogies. Critical theory acknowledges that educational systems, the process of knowledge building and knowledge itself can never achieve objectivity, but instead are social constructions ‘deeply rooted in a nexus of power relations’ (McLaren, 2003, p. 72).

Critical feminist pedagogical research examines an assortment of classroom strategies and innovations, developed within historic sites of oppression from around the world, to promote transformational learning (Bohmer, 1998; Deay & Stitzel, 1998; Hase, 2002; Maher, 1998; McKenna, 2003; Naples, 2002; Sanchez-Casal, 2002; Short, 2002; Sinacore & Boatwright, 2005) appropriate for application to teaching LGBT psychology. In addition, Moane (2003), writing within and about the Irish context of both conflict and colonialism, cites concentration on the collective, emphasis on structural levels of oppression, and analysis of internalised oppression as benefits of liberation psychology. Given the emphasis of feminist, critical and liberation pedagogies on asymmetrical power, empowerment, structural change and reflection, we incorporated these approaches, labelled by Case, Kanenberg, Erich, and Tittsworth (2012) as ‘critical liberatory feminist psychology’, into designing LGBT psychology courses taught at a historically Black university and a Hispanic-serving institution with a racially diverse student population.

**Learning through an intersectional lens**

Work by Greene (2000a, 2000b, 2005), Wing Sue (1996) and Wing Sue and Sue (2008) not only called for culturally competent clinical practices and transformative curricular content, promoting such competencies within counselling programmes, but also influenced psychology education more broadly. In terms of curriculum design, psychology as a field now typically includes courses focused on ‘women’ or ‘gender’ as well as race, nationality and ethnicity usually labelled as ‘multicultural’ or ‘cross-cultural’ psychology. With the widespread addition of gender-focused courses, the psychology curriculum began to challenge the traditional androcentric models in favour of incorporating women’s lived experience and voices that were previously neglected into course materials. Much less common are courses or infused curricular content devoted to sexual orientation, gender identity or both (Case, Stewart, & Tittsworth, 2009; Goldfried, 2001; Green & Croom, 2000; Neumann, 2005; Simoni, 2000; Weinstock, 2003). Within psychology programmes offering such courses, common titles such as *LGBT Psychology* and *The Psychology of Sexual Orientation* indicate a targeted focus on LGBT content. As more psychology courses focus on LGBT content, the marginalised group’s experience become the central
focus of the curriculum and assumptions of heteronormativity are challenged. Although entire courses devoted to LGBT Psychology provide space for advancing student learning in a neglected area of psychology, teaching LGBT psychology from an intersectional framework offers pedagogical avenues for complicating dichotomous notions and assumptions. As noted by Greene (2000a, 2000b), ‘heterosexism is not a singular or isolated experience’ (p. 2) and must be studied with attention to the complexities of sexism, race, class and other influential aspects of identity.

Both bell hooks (1984) and Kimberle Crenshaw (1989) argue that each person represents a specific social location built upon a set of simultaneous and multiple identities (e.g. gender, ability, race, class, sexuality and nation). Introducing the term ‘intersectionality’, Crenshaw (1989) described these complex identities in opposition to categorical generalisations. Collins’ (1990) ‘matrix of domination’ offers a pedagogically useful conceptual structure for unravelling unique social locations that include both disadvantaged and advantaged identities. By implementing the framework of intersectionality, scholars and teachers avoid over-emphasising any single characteristic or quality in their understanding of individual realities (Dill & Zambrana, 2009) and turn their focus to examination of social locations with respect to privilege and oppression (Cole, 2009).

Within mainstream disciplines, including psychology, instructors rarely incorporate intersectionality into diversity courses (Dill, 2009). Pedagogical design and praxis through an intersectional lens support the development of a critical framework for making privilege and power visible, examining social location and complex identities, exploring subjugated knowledge and developing action strategies for empowerment (Collins, 1990; Dill & Zambrana, 2009). For example, Santos de Barona and Reid (1992) provided an early model for incorporating ethnicity into psychology of women courses such as content addressing the interactions between gender and cultural identities. Use of an intersectional pedagogical design is supported by research that extensively examined intersectional invisibility as manifest within multiple subordinate group identities (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). This provides rationale for teaching LGBT psychology with an aim of reducing common perceptions such as gay individuals being predominantly White and male-identified (Bérubé, 2001).

Application of intersectional critical liberatory feminist pedagogy

In developing and teaching the two courses described here, each instructor made pedagogical decisions through an intersectional and critical liberatory feminist lens. Black Issues in LGBT Psychology, an undergraduate course at a historically Black university, provided students with LGBT content while connecting identity intersections such as their own racial backgrounds. A graduate-level course at a Hispanic-serving institution, Psychology of Gender, Race, and Sexuality, required students from diverse backgrounds to connect personal identity intersections with LGBT psychology. Reflecting on the student learning successes and obstacles within the two courses, the instructors consider the implications for using intersectional pedagogy for enhancing LGBT psychology courses among marginalised and privileged student populations.

University and sociocultural context

Research documenting the experiences of Black and Hispanic students at historically Black, Hispanic-serving, tribal (developed by and for indigenous peoples in the United States and built on culturally relevant curriculum and pedagogy) and majority of White
universities (numerical majority of the student population is White) emphasise student success rates and call for further investigation of the factors affecting academic achievement (Allen, 1992; Crosnoe, 2005; Cross & Astin, 1981; Kim & Conrad, 2006). Scholars have also called for culturally relevant curricular developments (Cole, 2006) and attention to intersectional perspectives such as Bonner’s (2001) study of gender at historically Black colleges and universities. This research focuses on culturally relevant, intersectional LGBT psychology at a historically Black university and a Hispanic-serving institution.

Winston Salem State University (WSSU) has an active student advocacy organisation which focuses on LGBT and allied concerns that was formed in 2008. The university also includes non-discrimination against sexual minorities in its policy as of 2009; however, at the time of the course offering discussed in this article, WSSU nor any other historically Black university in the United States had offered a course examining LGBT issues from an intersectional approach or otherwise. Due to staunch religiosity within the geographical region and the relative lack of open engagement of LGBT issues within the university and among the area’s Black community, documenting the successes and failures of the pedagogy and content of a Black LGBT focused seminar is significant.

Black Issues in LGBT Psychology, as a cultural study in liberation psychology, developed as an undergraduate liberal learning seminar to teach critical thinking and critical reading within a cultural context of limited open and formal discussion of such issues. The hypothesis was that critical consciousness or conscientisation would be enhanced among the students concerning marginality for same gender loving and gender non-conforming people of African descent.

The University of Houston–Clear Lake (UHCL) adapted the university non-discrimination statement to include sexual orientation in the mid-1990s, but not gender identity. This meant that discrimination based on sexual orientation was banned at the university, protecting LGB students and employees, without the same policy protections for transgender individuals. A student-centred advocacy campaign to add gender identity to that policy passed through shared governance, student council and was eventually approved by the President in 2006. However, the university system denied this policy change and gender identity remains absent from the non-discrimination statement. Although this came as a disappointment to advocates involved, the campus offers several LGBT-affirming programmes and resources. The ‘gay–straight alliances’ student organisation was founded in 1993 and continues to grow. In 2009, the university hired a staff member to coordinate women’s and LGBT resources programming. An active ‘Safe Zone’ programme provides training and safe space posters on office doors. The goal of the programme is to educate campus staff, faculty, administrators and students about the concerns of LGBT students and create a more welcoming educational environment. The programme coordinator also supplies the campus culture with speakers, programmes and displays for National Coming Out Day, the Transgender Day of Remembrance, the Day of Silence and many more annual events. Therefore, the university culture provides many welcoming and affirming cues to LGBT students.

Despite the resources, programmes and Safe Zone success, the curricular landscape continues to face challenges. Although courses with an exclusive focus on sexual orientation, gender identity or a combination of LGBT issues have yet to be taught, several faculty in human sciences, humanities and education incorporate LGBT content into both core and diversity courses. Given that Texas is well-known as a conservative state, legislation often threatens to limit the effectiveness of higher education to raise awareness of LGBT issues. For example, the 2011 state legislature attempted to pass a law limiting each
state university’s ability to fund LGBT resource centres unless they provide equal funding to ‘traditional and family values’ centres.

**Complicating identity assumptions: course pedagogical structure**

**Black Issues in LGBT Psychology**

Principles of critical consciousness and liberation psychology were used in the pedagogy for delivering a liberal learning seminar (Garnett, 2009). The subject matter of the seminar focused on the relative invisibility of Black LGBT people. A goal was to develop students’ critical consciousness regarding LGBT marginalisation within their cultural context. Students were provided access to reading and audio-visual materials and were expected to challenge assumptions, ask questions and express academic freedom in the pursuit of their learning, which was to be free from criticism, intimidation or ridicule from the professor and others in the class (Garnett, 2009). Although critical thinking and critical reading were student learning goals, I (Michele) also expected that conscientisation would be achieved with students via the various assignments.

Students were not to be assessed on their learning of course content, but instead their progress in critical thinking and critical reading using LGBT people of African descent as the focus. The learning outcomes for the Black Issues in LGBT Psychology seminar were assessed by students’ performance on four short reports: (1) the concept of liberation psychology, (2) their analyses of theoretically relevant poetry, narratives and websites, (3) students’ brief campus research studies and (4) designing a short assessment about gender conformity. The students were also expected to demonstrate progress in critical thinking and critical reading via their writing of two major reports after (1) listening to an in-class panel discussion and (2) designing questions based on the content of a 27 minute independent film shown in class. Research has highlighted the relationship between reading comprehension, critical thinking and cognitive ability in first-year students (Farley & Elmore, 1992). Assignments also related to an initial assigned reading about liberation psychology (Moane, 2003). All assignments related to the culture, marginalisation, oppression or invisibility of Black LGBT persons. Table 1 provides a few examples of class exercises.

Fifteen first-year students were enrolled in the semester-long seminar. All of the students racially self-identified as African American, with one of them additionally identifying as African American of Hispanic ethnicity. Of the original students, 14 identified as female and 1 as male. The majority of the students identified as heterosexual women. The four students who did not identify as heterosexual, identified as lesbian, bisexual (female) and gay (male). None of the students identified as transgender. Students enrolled from a diverse range of majors including economics, social work, mass communications, psychology, business, chemistry, rehabilitation studies and exercise science. One female student ceased attending the seminar by mid-semester. The course fulfilled general education requirements for first-year students.

**Psychology of Gender, Race, and Sexuality**

Using a co-intentional education model (Freire, [1970] 2000) to create knowledge, four graduate students and I (Kim) developed a student–faculty collaboration and designed the course to infuse intersectionality throughout the LGBT psychology readings, assignments, activities and assessment process (Case, Miller, & Jackson, in press). At each step of curriculum design, critical liberatory feminist pedagogy (Case et al., 2012) informed reading choices, assignment learning goals and instructions, creation and facilitation of
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading and group skit</td>
<td>Paul Laurence Dunbar’s poem, <em>We Wear the Mask</em> (Dunbar, 1944) was assigned for critical reading, including analysis and development of a skit to convey its meaning; the skits were performed by three groups of five students.</td>
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<td>Reading and guest speaker panel</td>
<td>A journal article on religion and spirituality (Buchanan, Dzelme, Harris, &amp; Hecker, 2001) in lesbians and gays was assigned for reading prior to an in-class panel discussion on the issue; the panel that visited the seminar comprised a Black transman, a Black woman who identified as queer, a Black gay male and two Black persons who identified as allies (one male, one female). The Black male ally was also a local pastor, and the Black queer woman was partnered with the Black transman. After hearing the panelists address questions from the instructor, the students asked questions and/or made comments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quote analysis</td>
<td>Students were asked to interpret a quote from Audre Lorde, ‘When I dare to be powerful, to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid’ as cited in Battle, Cohen, Warren, Fergerson, and Audam (2002); this and other excerpts from the survey report were presented to the students to document their critical thinking during survey interpretation and discussion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical thinking exercise</td>
<td>Students were asked to complete a critical thinking exercise requiring them to interpret what is meant by heterosexism = sexism = classism = racism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video analysis</td>
<td>An 8 minute YouTube video entitled ‘Lesbians Corrective Rape in South Africa’ (<a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vBXBtC-5Eko">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vBXBtC-5Eko</a>), which originally aired via channel 4 news in the United Kingdom, was shown to students as a critical thinking exercise. Following the video, students were asked to offer analysis of the behaviour based on statements made in the video by some of the male perpetrators of the crime.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Film and discussion question assignment</td>
<td>Students viewed <em>Pariah</em> (Rees, 2011), a 27 minute independent film about a Black lesbian teenager who struggles with juggling her multiple identities to avoid being rejected by her family and friends. This was shown as part of a critical thinking assignment in which students had to develop discussion questions based on their viewing the film.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media images data collection activity</td>
<td>Gender non-conformity was assigned as a short research assignment topic. Students collectively selected media images of well-known African Americans (irrespective of sexual identity) in which the same individual publically appeared feminine in appearance or masculine in appearance, irrespective of his or her biological sex. Students found both masculine and feminine images of Prince, Queen Latifah, RuPaul, Da Brat, Sylvester and Caster Semenya. The images were rated by the students as likable or not likable, and the students showed the images to random members of the university community during class period. The students obtained responses from members of the university community regarding likability of the two images for each public figure.</td>
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in-class exercises and assessment of student outcomes. Learning goals included articulating an understanding of the matrix of privilege and oppression, application of intersectional theory to LGBT psychology in real world contexts and facilitation of public education with regard to intersectionality.

The first reading assignment provided a solid foundation for intersectional theory from Dill and Zambrana (2009). Textbooks for the course included:

- *Race, Class, and Gender: An Anthology, 7th edition* (Andersen & Hill Collins, 2010),
- *Colonize This! Young Women of Colour on Today’s Feminism* (Hernandez & Rehman, 2002),
- *As Nature Made Him: The Boy Who Was Raised as a Girl* (Colapinto, 2006) and
- *Global Woman* (Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2002).

In these intersectionally focused texts, students read, for example, an essay titled, ‘brown-girlworld: queergirlofcolour organizing, sistahood, heartbreak’ by Piepzna-Samarasinha (2002) that required critical intersectional analysis during the in-class discussion of LGBT psychology.

Two assignments emphasised learning about intersectionality: a photography project and a public education campaign. For the ‘photovoice’ (Chio & Fandt, 2007; Wang, 1999) assignment, students spent several weeks taking photos that illustrated and helped explain intersectionality as a concept or their personal social identity intersections. The intersectionality project asked students to apply what they learned about intersectionality to raise public awareness of intersectionality in people’s lives. Students could address public education through a variety of creative means such as online videos, facilitating workshops or designing and providing brochures. Both assignments prompted students to educate their classmates and the broader community while applying intersectional theory to their own social locations.

Developing a culture of student engagement came with challenges, given that many students in the class expected to face the front and listen to lectures. However, class exercises were developed to increase student engagement, support a community learning experience and enhance comprehension and application of intersectional theory to LGBT psychology. The activities, as well as explicit expectations of participation and peer support, created a space for co-intentional learning for exploration of LGBT psychology. Class activities and exercises are included in Table 2.

Fourteen Master’s students enrolled in the course as an elective. In terms of racial and ethnic background, students self-identified as Latino, Filipino, African American, biracial (Black and White), White, Italian, Chinese, Native American and unknown (due to her mother’s adoption). Three students identified as male and 11 as female. Although the majority identified as heterosexual, some students identified in class as bisexual (female), lesbian, gay (male), or fluid in their sexuality. The lesbian student also later indicated some identification with the transgender community in terms of perceptions of her as a masculine female. Socio-economic status of the students present ranged from previously homeless to working class to middle- and upper-middle class backgrounds. Of those who disclosed religious identification, students represented Atheist, Jewish and Christian viewpoints. The 14 enrolled students also joined the class from a variety of social science Master’s programmes: general psychology, family therapy, clinical psychology, sociology and cross-cultural studies. Three White female students dropped the course before the mid-semester.
Table 2. Sample activities and assignments from Psychology of Gender, Race, and Sexuality.

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<tr>
<td>Reading and concept brainstorm activity</td>
<td>After reading Dill and Zambrana’s (2009) chapter on intersectional theory, students brainstormed words associated with intersectionality for 60 seconds then spent 5 minutes with a partner explaining the words’ connections with theory. In the end, the entire class wrote the associated words on the board and discussed emerging patterns for deeper comprehension of abstract concepts.</td>
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<tr>
<td>‘Grab bag’ activity</td>
<td>‘Grab Bag’ activity – students reached into a bag and chose one item. Once all students had an object, they took 3 minutes to connect the item and some concept or theory from the assigned readings or specifically intersectional theory. Students then paired up for support from a partner to practise their explanations for the items. For example, when a key was pulled from the bag, the student described its representation of access automatically afforded to privileged groups, such as Whites and heterosexuals, while marginalised groups face locked doors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing cultural backgrounds</td>
<td>Students brought objects to the class that represented their social identities or cultural heritage. Several weeks later, this show-and-tell exercise repeated with food items from each student’s cultural background. A Filipino student provided the class with a batch of rice muffins and a working-class White female brought fried potato cakes. Both activities required students not only to articulate the connection to social identity, but also to explicitly link the item or food to assigned readings and concepts learned in the course.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Film and discussion</td>
<td>After reading As Nature Made Him (Colapinto, 2006), students viewed Sex; Unknown (Cohen &amp; Sweigart, 2001), a film documenting the life of David Reimer, the boy who was raised as a girl. Through discussion of the book and film, students addressed the restrictions of dichotomous gender-conforming norms, gender identity struggles and the oppression faced by transgender people.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Group workshop development exercise</td>
<td>Students participated in a small group activity and developed a workshop to educate the public on intersectional components of LGBT psychology. Each group received a setting and target audience context from the instructor, wrote workshop goals related to course readings and concepts and designed an activity they would facilitate to reach those goals. This group exercise gave them a chance to practice application of theory and course content in the form of public education, also the focus of their final course project.</td>
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Instructor reflections on intersectional LGBT psychology

Student learning goal success

Black LGBT psychology

Conscientisation, to the degree that it was reached, was primarily achieved through the semester-long dialogues about the seminar content (Martin-Baro, 1996). As reported by the students, I (Michele) was able to maintain dialogue and student interest by arranging seating in a circle during each class meeting, whether students were viewing media or responding to questions that I posed. Examples of some degree of critical consciousness...
being reached were that students began the seminar as either neutral regarding Black LGBT
liberation or as open-minded or ‘not bothered’ by LGBT persons. None of the students
initially identified with use of the term ‘ally’, though by the end of the semester (i.e. after
hearing life experiences of two of the panelists) several students embraced usage of this
term to refer to themselves. They were eager to begin using the term to identify themselves,
and several stated that they could envision themselves being activists supporting liberation
for LGBT persons.

The students were enthusiastic and engaged for the skit assignment based on the
Dunbar (1944) poem, *We Wear the Mask*. The expressions of their understanding of the
meaning of the poem reflected successful critical reading and interpretation of the poem’s
meaning regarding the stress of oppression. They performed skits in which they portrayed
the silencing of victims of racism or heterosexism.

When the students were asked to complete a critical thinking exercise requiring them to
interpret what is meant by: Heterosexism = sexism = classism = racism, they were able to
achieve this with prompting, not spontaneously. After prompting them to look at the ‘equal’
symbol among the words, I had expected them to state that the terms were equal due to all
being oppressions. However, as with the reading exercises, we had to dissect and examine
each word individually and separately. This allowed the students to create examples
for each term. They gave the following relevant examples for the terms: someone being
anti-gay marriage (heterosexism); differences among students in disposable income for
non-essential shopping (classism); a person who would feel uncomfortable being treated
by a Black physician (racism) and someone opposing racism but not outraged by domestic
violence against a woman (sexism). Though the students grasped the meaning of the exer-
cise, not all fully accepted a worldview of no hierarchy of oppressions. Specifically, there
were a few students who insisted that racism is to be prioritised above other oppressions
such as sexism, classism or heterosexism. For students who have elected to attend a histor-
ically Black university, the greater significance of race for them may be intuitive. Also, the
students were relatively underexposed to academic discourse on LGBT oppression within
their racial/ethnic cultural context.

**Psychology of Gender, Race, and Sexuality**

Students demonstrated, within their critically reflective response papers and in-class dis-
cussions of the readings, the development of critical consciousness (Freire, [1970] 2000)
with regard not only to LGBT psychology but also to intersections with sex, race, class,
ability, religion and citizenship. For example, a gay African American man in the class
reported that the essay by a gay Asian man (Han, 2010) provided an innovative viewpoint
for him that complicated both heterosexism and racism as systems of oppression. By mak-
ing connections between lived experiences of the oppressed and the content chosen to
promote student learning, students drew upon their own expertise that carved out spaces
for practical application of theory. This pedagogical strategy led to co-intentional educa-
tion in which both faculty and students unveil oppression and create ‘knowledge of reality
through common reflection and action’ (Freire, [1970] 2000, p. 69). The grab bag exercise
positioned each student to think critically about intersectionality, concepts and readings in
ways that would enhance learning for the broader community of learners in the course.
The activity resulted in successful student application of feminist, queer and critical race
theories to the items chosen and the course readings. A student identified the cassette tape
as representative of ways that history gets recorded from the privileged group’s perspec-
tive which Takaki (2010) describes in ‘A Different Mirror’. Another student described the
ball of rubber bands pulled from the bag as a network of social locations within the matrix of oppression, each band imagined as a particular identity category. The class expanded this metaphor to recognise heterosexual and gender-conforming identities as centralised (centre of the ball) and normative versus LGBT identities as marginalised (outer edges of the ball) by systematic privilege and oppression. The class ‘show and tell’ days when students and I (Kim) brought in objects or food representing our own privileged and oppressed identities allowed the group to form a community and establish complex theoretical ties to the real world while analysing meaning through each individual’s cultural heritage.

**Photovoice assignment**

Given Freire’s ‘insistence that the oppressed engage in reflection on their own concrete situation’ (p. 66), students conducted intentional and critical reflection on their own social identities within the matrix of oppression and privilege within the photovoice project. One female student, who identifies as biracial (Black and White), bisexual and tri-cultural (including Latina identification as a result of her neighbourhood growing up), created a crossword puzzle to encompass all of her intersecting identities in one powerful visual aid. This crossword illustrated her realisation that her unique social location allows her to more effectively bridge traditionally separated social groups, such as heterosexuals and LGB people. Choosing to focus on the concept of intersectionality, rather than personal identity, a White female student transformed popular board games into teaching tools. She used Risk, Scrabble, Life and Monopoly to raise awareness of intersections of socially constructed identity categories that influence lived experiences. Another female student presented her identity as a lesbian and masculine female to the class, providing a deconstruction of heteronormativity and gender-conforming norms. Overall, the students reported that the photovoice presentations enabled their own critical analysis of intersections, the matrix of social locations and application of LGBT psychology to individual identity and experience. By systematically reflecting on personal identities and the impact of race, gender, class, gender identity and religion on sexuality (and vice versa), they successfully incorporated an intersectional lens into their own individualised theoretical frameworks for critical analyses.

**Intersectionality public education project**

The major final project challenged students to develop and carry out a strategy for public education. The project would educate others with regard to a specified identity intersection. Nervous at first about how to invent a public education plan, students ultimately created innovative projects and exceeded my expectations as an instructor. The varied public education campaigns and workshops that resulted targeted a wide range of audiences as chosen by each student. For example, a female Filipino student directed a complex video documentary deconstructing media representations of sexuality, race and gender in popular films. A student with a privileged social location created a brand new board game that effectively taught players about oppression, privilege and intersectionality. She then gathered several community groups and facilitated their discussion of the matrix of privilege and oppression as they played. One male student developed a relationship with a non-profit organisation and created workshops for boys in the juvenile justice system on masculinity, homophobia and human trafficking. He facilitated the workshop with juvenile detention officers and then with the boys after our course ended. Through their efforts to take action and educate the public about some aspect of intersectionality, students applied their own learning to
real world problems. This project allowed them to recognise and develop new pathways to create change through empowerment and application of liberatory psychology.

Learning goal challenges and obstacles

**Black LGBT Psychology**

Critical reading as a learning objective was challenging to achieve with this group of first-year students. This was somewhat anticipated. To be proactive, I (Michele) attempted to compensate for this by choosing from a broad variety of disciplinary writings to focus on marginalisation and related social justice issues among people of African descent. This was necessary because the LGBT psychology literature is not yet intersectionally diverse enough to perhaps be viewed as relevant to the group of students in the seminar. The readings were chunked in order to motivate the students to read. Thus, the pre-selected journal articles were not read in their entirety, although this had been the intention when I designed the seminar. Though the students were attentive and engaged for the guest panel discussion, again the accompanying related reading assignment given before the panel was not read in entirety by the students. Excerpts from the article had to be assigned to be read during class as a brief reading period prior to the panel day. Students were, however, able to read in entirety, brief news articles assigned during the semester from the website, Behind the Mask: The Voices of Africa's LGBTI Community (http://www.mask.org.za). Most of the stories from this site are the equivalent of two pages or less.

For first-year students who may be inexperienced with reading longer scholarly articles, it may be necessary to select short pieces or select excerpts only for critical examination and comprehension. It is plausible that the students of the seminar had not had adequate training experiences in scholarly reading comprehension prior to entering the university. All but one of the students in the seminar shared during the course that they perceived their high schools to be academically inadequate. Based on the assignments that were designed for the seminar, future offerings of the seminar should include assessment or knowledge of enrolled students’ reading comprehension levels as well as progressively longer, graded, reading-based assignments, leading up to the longer academic readings. On a related note, the poems used in the seminar were short, so they were more effective for critical reading and critical thinking exercises. These could be built upon in terms of using them for teaching critical thinking. Also, students did less well interpreting a Langston Hughes’ poem, *Democracy* (Hughes, 1949), relative to the Dunbar (1944) poem, *We Wear the Mask*. This may have been a result of differences in the reading comprehension difficulty of the Hughes’ poem. Both poems were short in length.

The independent film exercise was not successful with respect to its intended objective to stimulate critical thinking based in critical consciousness. Though the students were attentive to the film, and they empathised with the oppression of the main character (Black lesbian teen), they were unsuccessful in developing critical thought questions that could be used to guide a discussion group about the film. Using the short film, *Pariah* (Rees, 2011), students were requested to write questions based on the movie; however, the questions were to be written as intended for a fictitious community group of parents. Generally, students were unable to produce questions that reflected critical thought in which they demonstrated the ability to anticipate substantive questions that might be asked by religious parents who are stressed by having a lesbian teenage daughter.

The independent film exercise could likely be more effective with moderated dialogue before asking students to write their questions. In future efforts, I (Michele) would spend one entire class session to show the film and discuss it, then during a second meeting have
students think and write questions prompted by our discussion, while viewing the film a second time (27 minute film). It is likely that a similar explanation applies to the challenges with the film exercise as with the reading exercises, suggesting greater need for cognitive ability enhancement among this group of first-year students (Farley & Elmore, 1992). More focused attention on critical thinking and critical reading assignments that become progressively more challenging may be necessary with first-year students, particularly if they are underprepared from their secondary education. Black Issues in LGBT Psychology as an example of a cultural study in liberation psychology can provide substantive material for teaching general education skills to first-year students. Adequate forethought must be given to progressively challenging graded assignments with regular feedback and ongoing discussion.

Acceptance of gender non-conformity was limited among the students in the Black Issues in LGBT Psychology seminar. This may relate to ‘secondary marginalisation’, which employs rhetoric and blame that is directed at the most stigmatised and vulnerable who exist within the generally marginalised community (in this case, gender non-conforming Black males) of African Americans (Cohen, 1999). Only one student was completely accepting of an imagined gender non-conforming male child to the degree that she would be comfortable, for example, with her young son wearing pink nail polish. When students rated Black male and female images as likable or not likable, most selected the gender-conforming images as more appealing. University community respondents were similar in opinion, such that others in the culture of the university seem to expect gender conformity, particularly for Black males. One exception was in the case of celebrity personality, Prince; students and other members of the community were more accepting of his femininity.

Overall, for the liberatory issue of genderism, much more work is needed. The students were most rejecting of femininity in male-bodied persons, suggesting strong identification with distinct boundaries of Blackness and masculinity for Black men (Cohen, 1999). They also voiced more rejection of bisexual behaviour in men relative to women, which again may be based upon more rigid gender role and expression rules for Black men. It should be noted that the seminar students were overwhelmingly heterosexually-identified women, and thus perhaps for selfish reasons, they could not embrace ideas of potential boyfriends behaving bisexually, or demonstrating feminine characteristics. Such views could also reflect their underexposure to substantive open discussion and experience with the issues.

Psychology of Gender, Race, and Sexuality

Although this is a graduate-level course, only one student had previous exposure to intersectional theory. Therefore, tackling Dill and Zambrana (2009) as the first reading assignment presented challenges to the majority of the students. In fact, they struggled for several weeks to grasp the main tenets of the theory and to comprehend that particular reading. In future iterations of this course, advance preparation of the students before they read Dill and Zambrana (2009) could include advice to take careful notes and to expect some new concepts and perspectives. In addition, re-assigning the reading before the mid-semester followed by a second-class discussion may aid student development. This would also provide the instructor with information as to how the students progressed from week 1 to the mid-semester in their comprehension of intersectional theory.

The small group activity to create a workshop for public education seemed to flounder. Student struggled at each step to articulate goals for the imaginary workshop and to connect the workshop goals and content to course readings, concepts and theories. One way
to improve this in-class activity would be to provide a well-conceived public education workshop with each component clearly explained before they begin considering their own. In addition, the instructor could provide more details in the written scenarios that set up each group’s workshop context.

Another challenge in this class came in the form of three White heterosexual females dropping the course just before the mid-semester exam. These students indicated to peers in the class that the decision to drop the course was based on the fear of getting an A-final grade rather than an A. On the other hand, student resistance to course content and expectations for student performance may also influence student withdrawal from courses addressing LGBT psychology.

Of course, completion of the course did not equate to comprehension of LGBT psychology or intersectional theory. One White, Christian, upper-middle-class female student attended class, completed assignments and participated (with the exception of the day the transgender guest speaker led discussion). Then on the last day of class, she expressed her views that (1) gay individuals should simply ignore discrimination and (2) those who avoid flaunting their sexuality will not face discrimination. These comments created a storm of visibly upset LGBT and ally students in the class, followed by an intense student-led discussion to challenge her views. Although faculty may experience such student resistance as pedagogical failure, these challenges may function as a necessary developmental stage of the learning process (Tatum, 1992).

**Implications for the pedagogy of LGBT psychology**

Although psychology courses typically cover issues of oppression within distinct diversity courses that maintain traditional categorical boundaries between identity groups (Bargad & Hyde, 1991; Chang, 2002; Henderson-King & Kaleta, 2000; Henderson-King & Stewart, 1999; Katz, Swindell, & Farrow, 2004; Kernahan & Davis, 2007; Stake & Hoffman, 2001; Waterman, Reid, Garfield, & Hoy, 2001), teaching the two courses described here benefited from an intersectional framework to supplement and strengthen critical liberatory feminist pedagogy. Teaching and learning about LGBT psychology through an intersectional lens allows students from a variety of backgrounds to connect seemingly irrelevant systems of oppression and privilege to their own social identities and social locations. For traditionally marginalised student populations (e.g. students of colour, poor and working-class students or students identified with non-Christian religions or no religion), approaching LGBT psychology intersectionally promotes application of complex analysis to both privileged and oppressed identities. For example, a heterosexual and gender-conforming Latina student may advance her understanding of LGBT oppression by reading and applying critical liberatory feminist analysis (Case et al., 2012) to the experiences of a Mexican-American bisexual woman describing her daily encounters with racism and heterosexism. At the same time, students with privileged identities benefit from intersectional pedagogy as it aids deconstruction of assumptions about LGBT people and also complicates categorical identities. In other words, privileged and marginalised students apply intersectional analysis to discover that LGBT people of colour exist despite common cognitive schemas of the LGBT community as White (and as middle-class US citizens). By applying this intersectional lens, for example, students with both privileged and oppressed identities learn to deconstruct artificial categorisation of social identity in favour of the matrix of oppression that highlights the infinite complexity of identity.

As psychology programmes infuse more LGBT content across the curriculum, both within diversity courses and across core and additional elective courses (Case et al., 2009;
Neumann, 2005; Waterman et al., 2001), implementation of an intersectional theoretical framework to develop student learning goals, develop assignments and assess student outcomes will strengthen student comprehension of LGBT psychology. This intersectional attention to LGBT inclusion not only expands psychology students’ knowledge of diverse populations but also provides the field of psychology innovative avenues for decreasing marginalisation within both teaching and research (Cole, 2009). Although the use of an intersectional pedagogical approach is particularly relevant when teaching LGBT psychology within colleges and universities that serve large numbers of students of colour, teaching LGBT psychology intersectionally also enhances student learning regardless of student social location. In other words, students from privileged backgrounds with privileged social identities also benefit from intersectional LGBT psychology through increased awareness of the matrix of privilege and oppression.

The infusion of an intersectional theoretical lens into LGBT psychology courses, as well as more common diversity courses in psychology emphasising gender and race, benefits both faculty and students by provided avenues for complicating social identity. As students become more aware of the complex social locations within the matrix of privilege and oppression, intersectional understanding reduces the tendency to generalise stereotypical characterisations to entire social categories and identities (Collins, 1990; Dill, 2009; Dill & Zambrana, 2009). A psychology curriculum enhanced by intersectional theory may also broaden perspectives to include and value structural and institutional components of oppression, as opposed to the field’s emphasis on generalisable findings that often reinforce social identity categorisation.

Notes on contributors
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References


