Chapter 43
Strategic Action in Hot Moments

Lee Warren

Most of us, when hot moments occur, simply react. Our minds stop working. We revert to our oldest fallback behaviors, usually some version of either fight or flight. Some of us lash out and say things that we later regret. Others retreat, check out, and take themselves and their ideas out of play. The objective, instead, is to be strategic — to get one's mind working again and to devise a response or an intervention that is effective.

Hot Moment Scenarios

In a political science class, the teacher was discussing with students why a nation might go to war. All of the usual reasons surfaced early: to protect itself, to maintain borders, to provide safety to citizens. He asked a number of questions to take the discussion further, finally asking, “Well, what about genocide? What about the Holocaust? If we had known it was happening, would that have been a reason to go to war?” When no one answered, he called on his most vocal student, an African American woman. She said, “No.” “Why?” he asked. She answered, “I’m not sure it happened like they said it did, and if it did maybe they had their reasons.”

The teacher’s mind stopped; he could think of no response to this, and three years later, when I interviewed him, he was still uncertain how he might have responded. At the time, he retreated from the moment and addressed neither the issues nor the student.

A choral director recently led a dress rehearsal of a very complicated piece of music that involved four pianos, six percussionists, four soloists, and an amateur chorus of 100. Things did not fall into place easily; the man was intent on a good or nearly perfect performance, and he became increasingly frustrated with the chorus. Not all mem-

bers were as well prepared as they should have been, and many were still stuck in the music, rather than being free enough to look up at the director.

The director got more and more frustrated. His mind stopped. He remained enmeshed in his feelings. Instead of getting some perspective on the moment and thinking strategically about how to pull the thing together, he ended up yelling at the chorus, frequently and at length.

The central task is to maintain some distance from the loaded situation, and by so doing to think more clearly in order to see how to use the moment to enhance the learning of the students or of the group.

These things are of course, much more easily said than done. This essay will suggest some techniques for achieving this goal, while also recognizing how difficult this process is and how long and through what painful experiences it takes to learn such techniques. As a bumper sticker I saw on a car parked outside a therapists’ office read: “Oh no, not another learning opportunity!!” Opportunities to do this work lie all around us all the time, ready for the taking.

Tips for Being Strategic

1. Stop!!

When a hot moment arrives, and we realize that our mind has ceased functioning, the first thing to do is simply to stop. Pause for as long as you need to, in order to get up and running again. Breathe deeply, from the center, and get your breath moving again. When we are under stress, our breath becomes shallow, which leads in a circular fashion to increasing feelings of stress. So our objective here is to calm ourselves through deep breathing, and thus to get our minds functioning again.

Once we are breathing deeply, we need to Hold Steady. To be still and at one with ourselves. To be centered. If we can hold ourselves steady, we have a shot at holding the group steady and thus enabling it to do some work. If, on the other hand, we seem to be flustered or off our center, the group will be unlikely to learn together from the experience.

2. Get up on the Balcony

In order to gain the distance necessary to be strategic, get up on the balcony and off the dance floor, and observe carefully. Most of the time we are on the dance floor, in the thick of things, dancing with our partners, moving with the music, bumping into people from time to time. And we can see very little while on the dance floor — just the few people who are near us. So we need to get up on the balcony, to see what the patterns are: who is dancing with whom, what are the groupings or factions, whether the music is working for everyone or only for a few, and who is not dancing.

If the teacher in the political science class had been able to get up on the balcony and out of the confusion of his own personal reaction to the student’s remarks about the holocaust, he would have been more likely to have found a way to turn his remarks into an important learning experience for all the students. Likewise, if the choral director had been able to get up on the balcony and off the dance floor of his own emotions, he might have been able to devise a strategy for leading the group through the difficult music.

Once on the balcony, we need to listen for the song beneath the words: who is saying what, who gets to speak, and what is the subtext. Often students are unable to say things clearly, as they are just beginning to be able to articulate their thoughts and feelings. So listening carefully for what they are really saying can help us deal with the real issues, not with the clumsily stated issues. And of course, sometimes people in groups deliberately hide their true agenda. Listening for it can, again, help to develop an effective strategy. Who knows what the student in the political science class was really thinking, or how figuring that out might have led to a more productive follow-up conversation in the class?

Only when we are sure we know what is going on should we make a move, and even then we need to check carefully on our timing, our tone, and our word choice. Acting too fast, moving in without careful planning when things are hot, can often make things worse, whereas a carefully timed and worded intervention can often turn the situation around.

- A faculty member, who is known for barging in at faculty meetings and stating her views up front and then wondering why no one ever follows her lead, tried a new strategy recently.

Her department was meeting to decide who to hire for a joint appointment between their department and the women’s studies program. Going into the meeting, her agenda was to see if there might be a way to get both of the top two candidates. But instead of speaking right up with her agenda, she stopped and she listened. What she heard was lots of bashing of the number two candidate, even though that person was a very strong candidate.

After some time, she stood up, walked to the door, and said, “I have to leave; students are waiting for me. But before I go, I have something to say. I notice that we have been bashing the number two person for some time now.” And she stopped, after her simple, descriptive sentence. The group stopped and was astonished to recognize that this was true. And then she said, “And if we continue to do this, we might close doors that we would like to leave open in the future. For example, we might at some time wish to have both of these women on our faculty.” At this plainly stated, non-aggressive, suggestion, the group made this idea its agenda item and discussed it for the next three hours, and for the next three months.

Her timing, her word choice, and her tone were perfectly chosen for this situation, and meant that her agenda indeed became the agenda of the group.

3. Don’t Personalize!

Personalizing hinders us from seeing the situation clearly and thinking strategically about what to do. Yet most of us tend to personalize situations and we do this in several ways.

A. Self vs. Role

One of the ways we personalize is that we do not clearly enough distinguish self from role. So when someone attacks us in personal terms, we take it personally. But almost always, the attack is REALLY about us in a specific role and/or about the issues we represent. As the teacher, for example, we are the authority in the room and represent authority to students. Or we represent something else in our role to any particular student or group of students. So an attack is likely not about us as individuals, no matter how personal it sounds, but about us in role. Usually the attack is more about the attacker and his or her preoccupations than about us.

- I was once teaching a class with a famous professor, a man who was senior in rank to me. We taught the class together, both sitting in the
front of the room. About half way through the semester, it became evident to me that half the women in the room thought I walked on water, and that every word I said was a pearl. The other half thought I was the worst possible example of how women work with men, a devastating criticism.

After considerable thought, I realized that the women who liked what I said were women in their 30s and 40s, with considerable work experience, who were able to hear what I was saying. The women who thought I was terrible were young women in their early 20s, who had little or no work experience, and who were terrified of how they were going to interact with men in the workplace.

So the reactions of these women to me had more to do with them, and who they were and at what life stage, than with me personally. There was certainly room for reflection in the criticism, but although it sounded personal, interpreting it in personal terms would have inhibited me in the classroom and would have prevented a discussion of the topic. Interpreting it as a role issue made it possible to discuss it openly and for all of us to learn from it.

Sometimes we are attacked because we represent a particular issue, faction, or perspective that the attacker does not like. He or she attacks personally and very effectively takes the attention of both the individual and of the group off the issue. Because the attack disttracts the group, the issue is not dealt with, or the perspective is lost. Taking the attack personally keeps the focus on the individual rather than on the issues.

☐ A woman who was the Head of Environmental Affairs at the state level received a phone call one day from the leader of the state senate. He inexplicably started yelling at her, so loudly that people down the hall from him thought he was having a heart attack, so loudly she could not hold the phone to her ear. She had no idea why he was doing this, and afterwards consulted with others and tried to find allies, in vain. The Senate leader repeated this many times, and blocked her at every point. The only reason she could find for his actions was that she was a “new girl” and he was an “old boy” who did not want women in state government. Her hands were tied; she was unable to accomplish much in the following three years of her tenure.

Several years later, during a debriefing, she was asked what issues were on the table that might have made him so angry and so determined to block her way. She had never asked the question and had no answer. After about 20 minutes of questioning, she was astonished to remember that there had been an issue: it had to do with park fees for handicapped people. The senate leader had a nephew with a handicap.

It would have been much easier to deal with that issue than to have taken it personally, attributed the problem to gender (about which she could do nothing), and be immobilized for the next three years. It is almost always easier to be strategic about issues than about the personal.

B. Psychologizing

A second way we personalize is when someone else behaves badly. When they are immoral, destructive, self-aggrandizing, and preventing the group from getting work done, we get caught up in judging their character. Often, we psychologize. We meet our friends at lunch or over coffee and analyze the personality of the person at length and with great pleasure; we conclude that the person is obsessive, or manic, or borderline, or had a lousy childhood. Or they are simply unethical human beings, bad people. We go on and on with the analysis, sometimes believing that we are being especially insightful or even kind in our understanding.

But psychologizing in this way, while lots of fun, is not useful. It does not advance the work we are doing, or move us towards our purpose. It is far more important to pay attention to the issues. Almost always, such people represent an issue, a faction, or a perspective we do not want to think about or acknowledge. By focusing on his or her character, we avoid the issue. We forget that it is much easier to deal with issues than with character. We cannot change another’s psychology; we can think strategically about issues.

Sometimes in the classroom, when a student acts out or seems to have an agenda of his or her own, or makes an outrageous or off-topic comment, it is easy to get caught up thinking about the student’s personality, rather than thinking about what issues he or she is raising that need to be aired in order to have a full range of perspectives on a topic, or in order to know how students are reacting to the course or the classroom dynamics.

☐ I once worked in an organization in which a woman came to work who just did not fit in. She never seemed to grasp the environment in which we were working and would consistently blunder, to the detriment of our department, which was already a little fragile in its hold on the institution. She would stay home on Tuesdays to write poetry. She did not pull her weight. She did not work well with her peers. We were a group where people brought an idea to the table,
everyone worked it over, and then the person who proposed the idea left with a better fleshed-out plan of action. This woman would bring her idea, we would all discuss it, and she would say, “You don’t trust me.” She was trouble.

We reacted by psychologizing about her. We diagnosed her psychological and her moral character. The situation escalated, to the point where one colleague changed the locks on her door. We scapegoated her. And finally, we drove her out.

In retrospect, I think she probably was not a good fit for the organization. And she was, I am sure, a borderline personality. But I am ashamed of our collective scapegoating behavior, and I believe that by focusing on her character, we avoided the issues that she represented. This was an organization where the rules for working and the rules for success were very unclear: What exactly was the job? How did you get the boss’ approval? How was success defined? Was this a nine to five job, or a job that was defined by the task? How many tasks were expected, and how hard did you have to work?

These are serious questions, and this woman, by her behavior, represented these issues. We scapegoated her; consequently, we never dealt with the issues. The personal was much too juicy and much too seductive, and the issues were much too difficult. The result was that we practiced a common form of work avoidance.

C. Internalizing

A third way we personalize is by taking others’ behavior personally. When someone else behaves badly, we react emotionally by internalizing their behavior. We get mad or depressed, or we let their behavior beat us down, and we give up. Here again we lose sight of our purpose and get locked into emotions that lead nowhere. The other’s behavior has been successful at keeping us from our agenda.

A professor who is the only woman in her department has a long history of reacting energetically to the bad behavior of some of her colleagues. When one of them does or says something she considers unfair or immoral, she explodes. She goes directly into flight mode, moves immediately to the extreme position, and threatens a trip to the dean at the drop of a hat. As a result, she has no allies in the department meetings, as it is not safe to ally with her publicly, although people do in private.

One day recently, she told me that now she “gets it.” When someone behaves badly, she doesn’t react at all. She notices their behavior and begins immediately to think about how to achieve her purpose despite this behavior. She begins to think strategically: Can she go around him, over him, through him? How can she get the job done, knowing that this person is likely to continue to behave badly? Her dispassion allows her to move forward effectively.

In an Afro Am class, close to the end of the semester, the group was discussing Louis Farrakhan. Near the end of the discussion, a Jewish woman said that she could see how Farrakhan appealed to many black men, but that she was certain he would not appeal to educated black men. In the class were six African American men. They turned on her, attacking her verbally. At the end of the class, she fled down the hall, in tears.

The teacher was an African American man. He could have taken the woman’s comments personally — it would have been easy to do. Instead, he ran down the hall after the woman, and said to her, “Rachel, if you are going to get it about African American life in the 21st century, you are going to have to really listen to what those guys have to say and think about why they are saying it.” And then he went back into the room, where the six men were still talking, and said, “Guys, if you are going to get it about life in the 21st century, you are going to have to really listen to what Rachel is saying, and think about why she is saying it.”

By not taking Rachel’s comments personally, this teacher managed to turn a very hot moment into a tremendous learning opportunity.

4. Prepare!!

One of the best ways to keep one’s mind in action when a hot moment arrives is to prepare oneself beforehand — in several ways. It is when we are blindsided by the unexpected that our minds most often stop.

A. Predict

The most obvious form of preparation is to think ahead, to see what could possibly arise, given the topic at hand. Some topics easily lead to hot confrontations, and part of the preparation for the class can be thinking through what might come up and what one would do or say in the event. Some classrooms, regardless of the topic, are known to be more difficult for some students: the sciences are often unfriendly to women and minorities, for example, in part because of insensitivities of some of the young men in the room. A teacher intent upon keeping all students in the room, will foresee this and prepare strategies for dealing with it.
B. Know Yourself

One of the best, and least addressed, ways to prepare for teaching is to know yourself. For hot moments, it is important to know what pushes your buttons, what biases you have, and what kinds of things said or done can make your mind stop. Knowing these things allows you to devise strategies for handling hot moments in advance. Simply recognizing such a moment and your familiar reaction to it is a first step. The next step is to have strategies such as the following in mind in advance:

- Stop and take a breath
- Acknowledge the moment, name the elephant on the table
- Check that you have heard and/or understood correctly — restate, or ask the other to restate
- Model respectful listening and engagement
- Take the issue off the individual; make it a general one
- Ask students to get up on the balcony and think about what they have learned from the moment
- Use the moment as an opportunity to discuss the learning environment in the group
- Have partners to debrief with afterwards
- Defer — tell students you will deal with the issue, but deal with it later — in order to gather your wits and make a plan that will be effective

C. Know Your Purpose

In addition to knowing oneself, it is very important to have a clear idea of what your purpose is as you enter a classroom or a meeting — your purpose for the course overall and your purpose for that specific session. This is easier said than done but is critical to success in hot moments.

Most of us enter the classroom with a general sense of what we hope to accomplish, for example, a discussion about Napoleon’s march on Moscow or about some aspect of micro-economics. But what specifically do we want students to learn, to walk away with at the end of the hour? What is the big takeaway?

Knowing your purpose, and keeping your eye on it, will enable you to turn the hot moment into a learning opportunity that is on target with the topic of the day. It will enable you to look for the part in the hot moment that reflects your overall game plan.

D. Know your Students

It is also critical to know your students, if you are to effectively manage them in hot moments and help them to deep learning. This means knowing both how the group works as a group and knowing the students individually. Knowing the group will help you know how to handle the group, what tone to take, what boundaries to draw, and what strategies might be more or less effective in the moment. Knowing students as individuals will help you know how best to help them learn from the moment. Failure to know your students can lead to a missed opportunity, or worse, to damage and misconceptions.

Some prepare their students for the hard places by addressing easier issues first, coaching them, in skills for intergroup dialogue, and modeling such behaviors as respectful listening, holding steady, learning from the moment, asking questions, and not personalizing the issue. We rarely think that it is our job in the college classroom to teach social skills, but in fact that is one of the most important things that students do learn, mostly by watching the professor and learning how to debate and contribute and disagree and challenge productively. Coaching explicitly and consciously could only enhance this process. Our purpose here is to help students to have constructive, cross-racial dialogue.

E. Have Allies and Confidants

It is always important to have allies when we are heading into unknown or hot territory, people who can support us, give us advice, sympathize, tell us what we have done wrong or right without animus or judgment. This is especially true when working across race, class, or gender lines, when it can be lifesaving to have people of the other group to help us understand and manage the situation in the most effective ways. We all need help getting out of our own heads and our own, by definition, limited perceptions, to see the larger picture and to understand what is really going on in any loaded situation. We all need help in thinking about how to handle the tough places. Doing this kind of work alone can be an invitation for disaster and martyrdom.

We also need confidants, people who are usually outside the workplace and who are on our team no matter what, who care more about us than about the issues at hand. They are the people we can vent with, cry with, to whom
we can say the most awful things about the situation, and who will tell us how wrong we have been or how wonderful we are, because they care about us.

Do not confuse allies with confidants. Allies are people who are with us on particular issues, and not with us on others. Allies are critically important, but it is also critically important to remember the limits of the alliance. Do not tell allies everything; use confidants for that purpose.

Conclusion

These suggestions are not easy to accomplish. They are very hard and, for many of us, take a lifetime of practice – many trials, many errors. It is important to remember that we do not have to be perfect when we approach the hard places; we never will be. Having some ideas of different ways of approaching mind-stopping moments, however, can help us begin to turn the corner toward effective and even, finally, pleasurable strategic responses to hot moments. This surely is the goal: to take away the terror many experience in the face of a hot moment, and to increase the chances of turning it into a learning opportunity.

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Chapter 44

Inclusive Teaching for Our Queer Students: A Workshop

Michele DiPietro

"The first question is: Can learning take place if in fact it silences the voices of people it is supposed to teach? And the answer is: Yes. People learn that they don’t count."

—H. Giroux, 1992, p. 16

This is not a generic workshop on heterosexism and homophobia. Rather, it challenges participants to understand the issues queer students face and how they impact their classroom performance and to develop attitudes and behaviors to make their classes inclusive. The workshop balances cognitive and affective components, starting with identity development models as means of understanding their students and continuing with a guided journey to bring relevant emotions out on the table. In keeping with the Marchesani-Adams model, participants then reconsider their teaching methods and content through video-clips, brainstorming and student quotes, and generate strategies.

Picture the following scenario. A class is discussing Tennessee Williams’s “Cat on a Hot Tin Roof” in small groups. One group has a very productive discussion, using the gay undertones in the play to delve into the complexities of the main character Brick. In the second group, one imposing and vociferous student hijacks the discussion, dominating on the other students with his homophobic jokes about the characters in the play. Most students look uncomfortable, but laugh lukewarmly— all but one, that is. A diminutive student at the table tentatively tries to focus the discussion back on the play, to no avail. Under the barrage of derogatory comments this student becomes progressively withdrawn, in speech and body language. The instructor comes by to check on the group, and the student looks up hopefully for vindication, but the professor laughs wholeheartedly at the jokes. Defeated, the student has shrunk into his chair and is looking down dejectedly, hurt painted on his face. This is a
Introduction and Terminology

This chapter describes a module I developed and offer at Carnegie Mellon as a diversity seminar in the graduate student teaching seminar series, but it is suitable for faculty as well. Because there is no agreement on the terminology to use, I need to define the terms I will use throughout.

I use “gay” and “lesbian” to indicate male and female same-sex orientation, respectively. I use “transgendered” as an umbrella term for all the gender-crossing and gender-bending identities, including transsexual and transvestite. In order to be inclusive of all sexual minorities I use the acronym LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered). The only exception to this is the title, where I use “queer” simply to avoid using an acronym without defining it first. I rarely use “homosexual” because its negative clinical connotations can be offensive to some; however, this term was more popular in the past and therefore is present in some of the classic literature on the subject which I reference. This is more than a lexicon exercise, because some of these words are loaded and can impact people in unpredictable ways. For instance, the first time I ran the workshop, two graduate coordinators took issue with the word “queer” and did not want to advertise the seminar in their departments, because they felt it could be offensive to some of the students. In fact, “queer” seems to be the preferred word in academia (there are many queer studies departments and queer theory professors and textbooks), and this was a chance to start important conversations with those departments, but faculty developers should be aware of potential implications of their choices.

This seminar is not a generic workshop on heterosexism and homophobia; rather, it specifically addresses LGBT issues in the classroom, as they pertain to learning theory and motivation.

The objectives for the workshop follow three vectors:

- To introduce a rationale for inclusive teaching strategies that acknowledge and welcome lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) students.
- To understand the development of social identities (for example, LGBT identities as compared to heterosexual ones) and how they can impact the learning experiences of students.
- To discuss proactive teaching behaviors that create an inclusive learning environment and bring marginalized perspectives to the center of the classroom.

As with all other diversity seminars, I find it very useful to frame this one according to the four dimensions of the Marchesani-Adams (1992) model: know oneself, the students, what we teach, and how we teach.

Know yourself/know your students

The first half of the quote which opens this chapter is also used to open the workshop. Students are usually tempted to reply in the negative, and the second half of the quote already gets them thinking about implications of non-inclusive teaching. I acknowledge up front that the theme of the workshop can evoke feelings of hurt, anger, or fear, and that I want this to be a safe environment. Therefore, I always start with ground rules about participation, which include voluntary sharing of information, confidentiality of what is shared in the session, and respect of all opinions. As an ice-breaker I ask them to volunteer their name and department, to tell one thing LGBT students can’t do that straight students can, and to share anything else they feel appropriate. They start to get to know each other and usually come up with a very thoughtful list, which I use to introduce the concept of privilege. This is a non-threatening way of introducing a difficult but central topic in diversity, but by examining the legal inequities that face the LGBT population the concept of privilege becomes evident. After this discussion, students are more responsive to racial and other forms of privilege in other seminars.

I also show some statistics to highlight the importance of inclusive teaching for LGBT students. From the study of LGBT students by Brown University Faculty Committee on the Status of Sexual Minorities (1989) we know that 66% feared harassment or discrimination by classmates; 40% feared harassment or discrimination by professors; 60% did not feel safe being open about their sexual orientation in class; and 53% censored their academic speech, writing, or actions in order to avoid anti-gay harassment or discrimination. Even the more recent study by Rhoads (1995) found that 100% of the LGBT students surveyed reported living “in constant fear.” (p.A56)
I then introduce theoretical models to frame the discussion. Of the several available, I prefer the Cass (1979) model of Homosexual Identity Formation, because it combines psychological and social aspects, and because there is some statistical evidence in favor of it (Cass, 1984). The model hypothesizes six stages in the development of one’s identity:

1. Confusion. In this stage, thoughts and feelings that are incongruent with one’s taken-for-granted heterosexuality create conflict that can either be repressed or lead to the next stage.

2. Comparison. In this stage, individuals gather information on homosexuality through media or contact with LGBT people. Such information may resolve the internal conflict (“Who am I?”) but it creates external conflict (“Should I tell people or try to hide?”). This new conflict forces further development.

3. Tolerance. People in this stage have increased contact with the LGBT community, leading to stronger identification of themselves as gay, but keep putting forth a heterosexual persona, at least in the heterosexual world, leading to more conflict.

4. Acceptance. At this stage the conflict is at its peak and either leads to resignation to spend one’s life trying to conform, or propels the individual into the coming out process. LGBT identity is disclosed to selected individuals only. Some people manage the conflict effectively at this level.

5. Pride. The LGBT identity and community are embraced as a good lifestyle. At the same time, people at this stage distance themselves from the heterosexual world, which is seen as the source of discrimination, hatred and bigotry.

6. Synthesis. People who get to this stage resolve the dichotomy by realizing that sexuality is only one part of their identity and that they don’t need to direct their anger at heterosexual society as a whole. This stage is facilitated by positive interactions with heterosexual individuals.

Competing models as well as models specific to the formation of lesbian and bisexual identities are reviewed in Levine and Evans (1991). For theories of transgendered identity, see Bornstein (1994).

I present the Cass model and then prompt participants to start thinking about what stages their students are likely to be in and the degree of conflict they carry around, and how these variables can impact their learning experience. I also briefly go through the Hardiman-Jackson (1992) model of Social Identity Development to show that heterosexual people also go through stages of developing an identity as members of the dominant heterosexual group and the assumptions that go with it. The model starts with a naïveté stage, with no awareness of sexual orientation, much less judgment of it. For example, young boys often think nothing of holding hands until they are socialized not to do so. The socialization brings about the second stage, acceptance, where heterosexist norms are internalized. This process can happen passively (people pitying LGBT individuals as sick) or actively if people feel the need to act on their beliefs (for example, hate crimes). Eye-opening encounters with LGBT people can bring about the next stage, resistance. This process too can be passive, leading to feelings of injustice but powerlessness to stop heterosexism, or active, if people are willing to work on their own as well as societal homophobia. The third stage, redefinition, happens as people struggle to define their identity as heterosexual individuals as a positive one now that they understand how heterosexism, of which they have been part, oppresses other people. The final stage, internalization, marks the integration of the new values acquired in this trajectory in all aspects of life. The person now has a positive self-perception as a heterosexual individual who recognizes that everybody gains from ending heterosexism and who works to that end. College students are likely to be in stages two or three, so the conversation at this point moves on to what kind of attitudes such students bring to our classes, and one can start anticipating what problems can arise and what strategies might be effective.

Part of our Center’s philosophy is always to attend to both the cognitive and affective aspects of a topic, especially with such emotional topics. Emotions are already in the room, so it’s best to explore them fully, whether these emotions include our own fear of the other, our hurt at being marginalized, or our frustration at not understanding what differences we have with each other. A useful instrument for this is the “Guided Journey” exercise described in Wall et al. (2000). During this activity, the facilitator prompts the participants to write down on index cards things or people of great significance in their life (for example, a best friend growing up, a favorite memory from college, a dream for the future). The facilitator then reads episodes from the story of a gay man who lost all such things because of his homosexuality. One by one, at the right time, the facilitator collects the appropriate index cards and rips them in half (this short description doesn’t do justice to this very powerful exercise). In the subsequent debriefing, participants have a chance to process their emotions. For many of them, this is the first time they put themselves in the shoes of an LGBT person and tried to empathize with the hurt, anger, or hopelessness LGBT people often experience. The main point I try to drive home with this activity is that an issue specific to LGBT people is that of “grieving loss of membership in the dominant heterosexist culture and entry into a permanently stigmatized status” (Dillon, 1986). Several graduate students single this activity out in the seminar evaluations as the most effective segment of the workshop.
What we teach/how we teach

This is the challenging part of the workshop because it aims to change behavior. Even the best-intentioned participants acknowledge that they want to be receptive to these ideas but that it is hard to do so in the classroom ("What does chemistry have to do with all of this?"). I approach it from Connolly’s (2000) continuum of classroom experiences, from marginalization to centralization, both explicit and implicit.

- **Explicit Marginalization.** In this classroom, homophobic or heterosexist comments are overt, from the instructor, other students, readings, or other instructional material, and they are never challenged.

- **Implicit Marginalization.** Messages in this classroom are not overt, but they are still being sent in a subtle way, for instance through systematic exclusion of the LGBT perspective and use of non-inclusive language.

- **Implicit Centralization.** In this classroom, the messages sent are positive, but still subtle. The instructor might challenge a homophobic student comment, or tackle an LGBT issue when prompted by a student. But the nature of these contributions is haphazard and unplanned, signaling that a systemic change has not occurred yet.

- **Explicit Centralization.** This environment sends an unequivocal message that LGBT students and their perspectives are valued and central to the course, and that homophobic behaviors are not accepted. This happens in a systematic way through explicit discussion of ground rules for participation, explicit statement in the syllabus, choice of topics or perspectives represented, inclusive language, and so forth.

Several points come up during the discussion of this framework. Students realize most of their behaviors are not in the first and most oppressive stage, but that they might still send some implicit non-inclusive signals. They also realize that even when they think they are supportive, their support arises from the serendipity of the moment, because usually none of them are in the final stage. While many TAs do not have final control over the syllabus, this discussion prompts them to think of other ways they can make their support more explicit. I make sure the discussion includes learning issues as well by introducing Renn’s (1998) considerations of how the experiences of LGBT individuals can affect the four pillars of learning theory: involvement, motivation, emotions, and construction of meaning.

- **Involvement.** The atmosphere of intolerance or support affects involvement. LGBT students facing the daily possibility of harassment have less energy to devote to class. For instance, if a student is always monitoring her comments for fear of betraying her orientation, she won’t be as likely to contribute meaningfully in classroom discussions. On the other hand, the process of coming out might unleash new energies, especially in a supportive classroom environment.

- **Motivation.** According to one motivational framework, motivation is influenced by students’ needs and their expectations of success. Students’ needs usually include self-actualization, achievement, competence, self-worth and personal goals. Unfortunately, societal messages negatively influence the sense of competence and self-worth of LGBT students, which in turn can influence their expectations about future achievement. Coupled with negative reinforcement in the classroom environment, these societal messages can lead to a cycle of learned helplessness. On the other hand, some LGBT students can take refuge in academic achievement as the only source of self-worth. Such students are quite successful, but the knowledge they generate can be very detached from the self.

- **Emotions.** Some emotions – surprise, excitement, pride, anger, embarrassment, fear, anxiety and grief – are central to the learning process. Fear of harassment can interfere with learning, and anxiety and alienation are very common among closeted students, who experience a public-private dichotomy. On the other hand, supportive instructors who include LGBT experiences in the curriculum can provide a sense of empowerment, along with excitement, pride, and other positive emotions.

- **Construction of Meaning.** An essential part of learning is the unlearning of misconceptions and inadequate paradigms and connecting new information to prior knowledge. Depending on their developmental stage, some LGBT students may already have needed to do significant unlearning and relearning in their personal life, so they can capitalize on the experience. At the same time, students who are trying to make meaning of new material in terms of their own LGBT identity might be discouraged to do so by their instructors, impeding the construction of “meaningful” personal knowledge.

This discussion of learning leads directly to strategies instructors can employ to foster a safe environment. To make the concepts more concrete, I anchor the discussion to the three minute video-clip with the Tennessee Williams vignette I described in the beginning of this essay. Careful facilitation of what has happened in the two groups is needed to help seminar participants begin to recognize and respond to issues in the classroom with which they perhaps have had no personal experience. For instance it is easy to make the assumption that the withdrawn student is gay, but this is not necessarily the case. Maybe the reason he’s withdrawing is because he has a gay sibling. Maybe the homophobic student is himself gay and self-loathing. As usual in diversity work, we need to check our own assumptions at the door. Many participants feel sorry for the
student, and argue that the instructor should have nipped the disruption in the bud. True enough, but many also don’t realize that the whole group is suffering. In this case, the joke creates an environment that does not allow anyone in that group to genuinely engage with the full scope of the material. The analysis can move to inclusive teaching strategies such as using appropriate language, avoiding tokenism, setting ground rules, and being an ally (Washington & Evans, 1991; Broido, 2000). After talking about teaching methods, I briefly discuss what a curriculum that explicitly includes the LGBT perspective might look like in various domains (see Appendix I).

As a final point of the workshop, I introduce Harro’s (2000) cycle of socialization. The circular diagram illustrates the various steps through which we are socialized into the existing biased culture. The diagram is especially powerful because it shows that we are part of the culture and, without taking further steps, we can’t help but reinforce it and transmit it, inertia being the operative principle. Only by actively interrupting the cycle, educating ourselves, and taking a stand can we induce any change. As an immediate way of interrupting the cycle, I suggest participants get involved in the SafeZone program on campus. SafeZone (present on many campuses nationally) is a network of allies committed to providing a safe and affirming environment for anyone dealing with issues of sexual orientation and gender identity. I invite the associate dean of student affairs and the coordinator for LGBT concerns to the seminar to illustrate the role of allies and to describe the related resources available on campus. I recommend faculty developers to partner with these student service providers to maximize their impact. In this specific case, representatives from student affairs helped to broaden conversation to include support to students outside the classroom (for example, advising) and seminar participants made contact with the right point persons so that if issues arise in their classrooms in the future they can contact them for help. Concluding the workshop in this way also leaves participants with a sense of efficacy and some very concrete strategies they can implement immediately.

Conclusion

As faculty developers, we have the potential to bring to the forefront a topic that is central to education but too often stays invisible. The impact we can have is significant in terms of outcomes and behaviors. Several participants shared in their evaluation comments that they think of the Center’s workshop as an oasis, one of the very few places on campus where important issues in the classroom can be discussed. Moreover, other participants have acknowledged the sense of empowerment that comes from learning the language to talk about these issues and acquiring tools to promote inclusiveness or deal effectively with potentially hurtful situations in class. Several of the workshop participants took the SafeZone training, and one participant commented that the things they learn in the Center’s workshops not only make them better instructors, but more importantly better people.

References


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Appendix I

“Queering” the Curriculum: A Starting Point

While some disciplines (for example, English, history, religion) seem more easily open to the incorporation of LGBT concerns and to surfacing homophobic and heterosexist assumptions, the “obvious” disciplines are not the only ones that merit such attention. The ultimate judgment is left to those who are experts in their own field.

Accounting

Accountants can be trained to effectively respond to the needs of gay clients, particularly couples. Such couples do not have the right to file taxes jointly, and will probably need advice on how to navigate the system. Also, they might need to be counseled about joint accounts and joint ownership of property. They might also be looking for politically correct funds in which to invest their money.

Art

Both classic and modern art incorporates LGBT themes or undertones, lending itself to various levels of analysis, from artistic to social to moral.

Architecture

Classes like Urbanism or American Neighborhoods can incorporate a unit about gay neighborhoods, why they are present in most major American cities, why they developed in specific locations, how this phenomenon influences the life in those cities, and so forth.

Biology

There is some research demonstrating that the shape of the brain differs slightly from straight to gay males. These findings give credit to the theory that homosexuality is at least in part induced by our chromosomes rather than by the environment, and reopens the “nature vs. nurture” debate. Ethical issues in “gene therapy” or “genetic counseling” can be addressed as well.

Criminology

Assaults against LGBT people are one of the most common forms of hate crimes. A unit on this topic could include nationwide statistics over time, the problem with unreported/misclassified crimes, the current ways of pros-
executing such crimes, the status of hate crime legislation across different States, which minorities are included in different laws, political and historical reasons for discrepancies, and other related issues.

**Demography**

The general public is rather ignorant about the demography of the LGBT population. Queers are assumed to cluster in the big cities, yet the 2000 Census shows that there are gay couples sharing households in every county of the U.S., even the most rural (with the exception of a handful). Related topics are: level of education, income, and all other demographic indicators.

**Geography**

For such classes as Human or Social Geography, see Architecture.

**Law**

Queer unmarried couples are not afforded several basic rights that heterosexual couples have. Such couples need legal advice on how to bypass the law (in terms of wills, power of attorney, and so forth). Basic training for lawyers should enable them to advise such couples in the steps they need to take for their financial security. Family law classes should include discussions of Vermont same-sex unions, the rights they grant and the ones they don’t.

**Marketing**

Many firms today are trying to enter the gay market in their effort to diversify, because most gay couples are DINK (Double Income No Kids). Gay money does not come cheap, however, as it appears that gay customers are quite discriminating about where they rest their loyalties. Gay market consultants have developed guidelines for firms wishing to position themselves in this market; among other things, they advise the firms to at least offer domestic partner benefits to their own employees. Such techniques easily constitute a unit on market strategies.

**Modern Languages**

For more advanced classes, where the course covers both language and culture, some instructors have introduced units about the gay culture in foreign countries in terms of gay life abroad or famous queer personages from specific countries.

**Nursing/Medicine**

Sensitivity training for people working with LGBT patients is in order, especially those with HIV/AIDS (and even heterosexual patients at that). It is very common to hear complaints from patients claiming to have been mistreated and even blamed for the disease they carry.

**ROTC**

The leadership classes are especially suitable to an honest analysis of the “Don’t ask, don’t tell, don’t pursue” policy regarding gays in the military, its meaning, its significance, the way it is currently applied, and the genuine way the Clinton administration envisioned its enforcement.

**SDS**

An instructor in the Social and Decision Sciences taught for a number of years a class called “Applied Social and Policy Theory: The case of AIDS.” The class was built around understanding how risk perception and decision theory can explain the spread of the epidemic and what policies would be in treating it. While AIDS is not an LGBT disease, including this course in the curriculum might address the concerns of queer students who find themselves in a statistically high-risk group. Also, courses on human rights (habitually offered in the department) could incorporate a unit on the gay rights movement.

**Statistics**

There are many surveys dealing with LGBT issues that could be used in class to illustrate various statistical points. I use the study on gay teen suicides as reported by some magazines to illustrate how the media misinterpret statistics and propagate false notions. The Kinsey study itself can be used to illustrate sampling bias, as he did not use a random sample but recruited many participants from gay bars. The problem of estimating the percentage of queers in the population is an open research problem, because many people will lie and say they are heterosexual, thereby providing a biased estimate. Ways to correct the bias are methodologically very interesting and can definitely be illustrated in class as a hands-on activity.

**Zoology**

Several animal species practice homosexuality, habitually or in view of special circumstances, for sexual or social purposes. This gives a new meaning to “natural” sexual behavior, and could easily be incorporated in the curriculum.