Rosen et al., *Cogent Education* (2019), 6: 1633104
https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2019.1633104

cogent education

TEACHER EDUCATION & DEVELOPMENT | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Learning about sexual minorities in school and at home: How critical pedagogy can challenge heterosexism

Nicole L. Rosen[1*], Robert L. Peralta[2] and Monica Merrill[3]

Received: 04 August 2017
Accepted: 13 June 2019
First Published: 18 June 2019

[*]Corresponding author: Nicole L. Rosen, The Ingenuity Project, Baltimore Polytechnic Institute, Baltimore, MD, USA
E-mail: rosen@ingenuityproject.org

Reviewing editor:
John Lee, HongKong Institute of Education, HongKong

Additional information is available at the end of the article

Abstract: College students, as a relatively privileged demographic, are in a unique position to reinforce or challenge stereotypes of sexual minorities. While much research has explored the social impact of heterosexism (e.g. hate crimes and bullying), few studies have sought to explore how heterosexuals form antigay attitudes. This study aims to fill that gap by examining how college students learn and make sense of messages about sexual minorities. Qualitative data for this study were derived from interviews with college students at a Midwest University in the United States. In three main findings, we report that, despite what may have been good intentions, messages learned from formal education and family may have been misinterpreted. Encouragingly, we found that students relied on information from formal education and intergroup contact more than messages from media. Drawing from critical pedagogy, we conclude with suggestions for promoting critical thinking in the college classroom in order to promote a greater understanding and empathy for sexual diversity.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr.Nicole L. Rosen is the Research Coordinator for The Ingenuity Project at Baltimore Polytechnic Institute, where she teaches research and oversees students' independent research projects. Dr. Rosen's research examines how gender and sex inequalities are influenced by different social contexts, such as traditions, bullying, and interpersonal relationships. Dr. Robert Peralta teaches courses pertaining to social inequalities, deviance, victimization, and crime. Dr. Peralta's research examines sources and correlates of substance use behavior, interpersonal violence, and other forms of criminal behavior. As Assistant Professor in the Department of Criminal Justice and Forensic Sciences at Youngstown State University, Dr. Monica Merrill teaches courses on inequalities in the criminal justice system and more broadly in society. Currently, she is assessing pedagogical techniques used for teaching inequalities.
The current research reported in this paper sheds light on how antigay attitudes are formed and how such thinking may be dissuaded by educators embracing critical pedagogy in their classrooms.

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

As a marginalized group, sexual minorities (lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and transgender individuals) are often the focus of research studies, which seek to understand how they cope with being stigmatized and how they respond to antigay attitudes. However, less information is available regarding how antigay attitudes are first formed and later influence behavior. Antigay attitudes create a culture in which sexual minorities are discriminated and harassed, thereby giving rise to hate crimes. This study aims to uncover how heterosexual college students first learn about sexual minorities and how they interpreted the information. Understanding how family, peers, and media influence one's understanding of sexual minorities can help us conceptualize how such messages may be reassessed to promote acceptance for sexual diversity. We propose that educators can achieve this by adapting a teaching philosophy (critical pedagogy) that embraces open discussion, promotes critical thinking, and strives to create positive social change.

Subjects: Gay & Lesbian Studies; Sexuality; Gender Studies - Soc Sci; Teaching & Learning

Keywords: gay; lesbian; bisexual; college students; education; heterosexism; critical pedagogy

According to the Pew Research Center, most Americans (63%) believe that gay and lesbian individuals should be accepted by society, with only 28% believing they should be discouraged (Fingerhut, 2016). While these statistics are encouraging, national opinion surveys suggest otherwise, noting that an overwhelming amount of Americans have negative attitudes toward sexual minorities (Herek, 2002; Norton & Herek, 2013). We are also faced with the uncomfortable truth that 37.8% of lesbian, gays, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT[1]) students felt unsafe at school based on their gender expression and over half felt unsafe based on their sexual orientation (Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014). Among all hate motivated crimes in 2012, 11% of victims reported sexual orientation as the motivating factor (Wilson, 2014). One of the deadliest mass shootings in US history was carried out at a gay club in Orlando, Florida suggesting the violence was motivated by condemnation of, and hatred against, the LGBT community (Alvarez, Perez-Pena, & Hauser, 2016). Indeed, after the 2016 US presidential election, reports of hate crimes have been on the increase in general (McCauley, 2017). In this paper, we aim to shed light on where college students obtain their information about sexual minorities and how they interpret those messages. We rely on critical pedagogy (see Friere, 1970; hooks, 1994) as our theoretical framework to inform our paper, analysis, and conclusions.

Before we explore these conflicting messages and attitudes towards sexual minorities, we must first define and understand key concepts. Though often interchanged, the terms sex and gender have different meanings. Sex refers to the biological differences between males and females (e.g. hormones, sexual organs, and chromosomes), whereas gender refers to the characteristics that society and culture attribute to each sex (e.g. women must be feminine and men must be masculine) (see Lorber, 1994). Gender expression is how a person presents her- or himself as a woman or man (e.g. women dressing in a feminine manner). This is distinguished from gender identity, which refers to one's internal sense of feeling like a woman or man (see Lorber, 1994). Finally, when a person's sex aligns with their gender identity, they are considered cisgender (e.g. a man presenting himself in a masculine manner). If a person's gender identity does not correspond to their biological sex, they may identify as transgender (e.g. a person who has the biological sex of a female though feels intrinsically a man).

In regard to sexual orientation, heterosexuality is the sexual, emotional, and/or physical attraction between persons of the opposite sex or gender and is widely regarded as the dominant sexual orientation in most societies (Lorber, 1994). Other sexual orientations include lesbians (attraction between two women), homosexuals or gay men (attraction between two men), and bisexuals (attraction to both women and men) (LGB). There is a " ... shared knowledge about homosexuality's devalued status relative to heterosexuality" and as a result, LGB people are considered sexual *minorities* (Herek, 2009, p. 67). LGB individuals often experience heterosexism, which is defined as "an ideological system that denies, denigrates, and stigmatizes any nonheterosexual form of behavior, identity, relationship, or community" (Herek, 1990, p. 316; see also Szymanski & Mikorski, 2016).

As an influential social structure, schools play an especially important role in contributing to forming attitudes towards sexual minorities[2] (Rankin, Weber, Blumenfeld, & Frazer, 2010; see also Meyer, 2009). Multiculturalism has been celebrated in schools in the recent past and as a result many schools have made a concerted effort to use teaching methods and lessons that are inclusive of racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity (for example see Gay, 2002). However, these social movements have been neither uniform nor widespread. Less than half of LGBT students were able to find LGBT related information in their school library and less than 20% reported that they

received positive messages and lessons about LGBT history, events, and people (Kosciw et al., 2014). As a result, LGBT students are often confronted with heterosexism in schools which their heterosexual peers are not faced with (Kosciw et al., 2014; Munoz-Plaza, Quinn, & Rounds, 2002). LGBT students are placed into marginalized and disadvantaged positions within the US educational social structure.

Decreasing heterosexism is likely to occur by increasing public awareness of sexual difference, empathy toward what is seemingly different in terms of sexual behavior (Avery et al., 2007), and intergroup contact with sexual minorities (Herek & McLemore, 2013). While some adults perceive a growing acceptance for sexual diversity, people who identify as LGBT are still reporting high rates of victimization and discrimination (see Kosciw et al., 2014). Therefore, to promote acceptance and deter harmful interactions between students who identify as heterosexual and LGBT, it is paramount that we understand how heterosexism evolves into antigay attitudes.

Within higher education in particular, heterosexism is widespread and sexual minorities are routinely faced with prejudice, micro-aggressions, and discrimination (Rankin et al., 2010; Szymanski & Mikorski, 2016; Woodford, Chonody, Kulick, Brennan, & Renn, 2015). However, college offers students with interactions and education that may facilitate increasing acceptance of sexual minorities. College educated people constitute about 44% of the US population and are a relatively privileged population in that they have access to the opportunities and tools necessary to become higher-level critical thinkers. Specifically, a liberal arts education teaches students how to learn, exposing them to a variety of perspectives, thus putting them in a position to use their newfound knowledge to either support or challenge mechanisms of inequality. As educators, it is our pedagogical and social responsibility to teach students in such a way that our lessons are transferable to other dimensions of students' lives. Adopting such an outlook would enable educators to embrace critical pedagogy as a means of dismantling power imbalances and encouraging students to be active in their learning experiences. Educators could also inspire students to utilize their privileged position in such a way that they can spread knowledge throughout their social circles.

This study was guided by two questions. First, what messages about sexual minorities do college students receive from their family, peers, school, and media? And second, how is this information interpreted? Answers to these questions are crucial in understanding how heterosexism emerges and what may be done to address antigay attitudes toward sexual minorities (Kitsuse, 2011) in the context of higher education. As a result, we are able to consider various strategies that might help dissuade stereotypes and prejudices and instead promote acceptance and understanding. Specifically, we focus on the impactful role that schools and colleges play in offering young adults new experiences that will shape their attitudes about sexual minorities. While much of the literature has focused on the individual needs of LGBT youth in the classroom (i.e. safety in coming out and teaching to diverse audiences), here we focus on what heterosexual students perceive as truth, where they have learned their truths, and how negative stereotypes and inaccurate information might be challenged through formal education. Below, we review how agents of socialization influence and shape one's views of sexuality before providing an overview of critical pedagogy which is the conceptual framework that guides this paper (see Friere, 1970; hooks, 1994).

1. Sources of information on sexualities and perceptions of credibility

Many students' understanding of sexual minorities intersect with messages they have received from influential agents of socialization (e.g., media, family, and previous schooling) as well as personal experiences with friends, roommates, and siblings (for examples see Bowen & Bourgeois, 2001; Hans, Kersey, & Kimberly, 2012). An important concern is that some messages are not always grounded in empirical evidence and therefore individuals may support and possibly reinforce sexual stigmas by relying on hearsay, misinformation, incorrect information, or information that is intentionally meant to paint sexual minorities as problematic or dangerous. This is a growing concern, as the phrase "alternative facts" has just recently become part of America's

lexicon. The phrase originated in response to conflicting reports regarding attendance to the 2017 inauguration. Now, the phrase "alternative facts" is recognized as being " … synonymous with a willingness to persevere with a particular belief either in complete ignorance or, or with a total disregard for, reality" (Strong, 2017, p.137).

By identifying how college students interpret messages about sexual minorities from various agents of socialization, we are able to consider various strategies that might help dissuade harmful and or false stereotypes in order to promote acceptance and understanding of sexual difference within higher educational structures. Attitudes formed during adolescence often carry over into early adulthood. Thus, if adolescents are receiving messages that reinforce heterosexism, they may likely begin college with antigay attitudes (Holland, Matthews, & Schott, 2013). Therefore, we focus our attention on the influential social structures during adolescence and early education, which include peers and primary education, media, and college.

1.1. Peers and primary education

Although parents play a particularly important role as primary agents of socialization during childhood (see Allport, 1954; Degner & Dalege, 2013), a substantial amount of research has shown that peer behavior represents a significant social context that is especially important during adolescence (for examples see Calzo & Ward, 2009). As a result, peer socialization greatly influences attitudes and behaviors toward sexual minorities (Brechwald & Prinstein, 2011; Calzo & Ward, 2009). Peer interaction is likely to take place within schools, given the significant amount of time that adolescents spend at school and school related activities.

Heterosexist name-calling has been documented as a common form of victimization within schools (Kosciw et al., 2014) and plays a role in girls' and boys' gender socialization (Birkett & Espelage, 2015; Pascoe, 2013, 2007). Birkett and Espelage (2015) demonstrated the important role adolescent peers play in influencing the use of heterosexist-name calling. Their analysis confirmed that peer groups who enacted heterosexist behavior influenced their long-term heterosexist behavior across time, controlling for an individual's original behavior. Additionally, these authors found that if left unchecked, heterosexist name-calling can evolve into negative associations (e.g. antigay attitudes) with stigmatized sexualities (Birkett & Espelage, 2015; see also Szymanski & Mikorski, 2016). Such associations can then carry over into young adulthood and into higher education institutions.

In general, heterosexism is widespread in high schools (see Pascoe, 2007, 2013) and therefore upon entering college, many students may harbor antigay attitudes (Holland et al., 2013). To dissuade antigay attitudes and bullying in schools, it is critical that schools foster acceptance, confront sexual prejudices (such as heterosexist name-calling), and become a safe-space for LGBT students. LGBT students who attend schools that have inclusive curriculum reported lower rates of experiencing sexual prejudices, including exposure to heterosexist remarks and negative comments about gender expression. They also reported feeling safer when compared to LGBT students who attend schools without an inclusive curriculum (Kosciw et al., 2014). Inclusive curriculum is designed to include information about groups of people (e.g. international students, racial and ethnic minorities, disabled persons, and LGBT) that are often excluded from tertiary education (see Crone, 1997; Grauerholz & Scuteri, 1989; Kosciw et al., 2014). Similarly, if antigay comments and actions are not adequately addressed and if an inclusive curriculum is not followed colleges and universities are likely to indirectly foster heterosexism (Kosciw et al., 2014; see also Rankin et al., 2010; Meyer, 2009).

1.2. Heterosexism and the college experience

College serves as a pivotal point where students interact with different people and are exposed to experiences that may conflict with their previously held ideas and values. For many students, college may be the first time they *knowingly* interact with LGBT individuals, or it may be their first interaction with *out* LGBT individuals (Bowen & Bourgeois, 2001). Despite what students are exposed to in college, some students may have ingrained and rigid beliefs about

marginalized groups, including sexual minorities (see Hubbard & De Welde, 2003). College students are exposed to new perspectives and various gender/sexual/political/economic orientations upon entering college, exposure that, in and of itself, plays a role in challenging heterosexism (Holland et al., 2013).

Studies suggest that heterosexuals have more favorable attitudes toward sexual minorities when they have more intergroup contact experiences with individuals identifying as LGBT (Hans et al., 2012; Herek & McLemore, 2013; as cited in Holland et al., 2013). Other researchers considered how classroom interventions such as a classroom panel discussion (Cotton-Huston & Waite, 2000), providing a human rights perspective (Ellis, Kitzinger, & Wilkinson, 2002), membership in fraternities and sororities (Hinrichs & Rosenberg, 2002), and rigid beliefs about gender (Kite & Whitley, 1996; LaMar & Kite, 1998) may influence attitudes toward individuals identifying as LGBT.

As students' progress through college, observers have documented a trend of increasing student empathy towards their LGBT peers compared to when heterosexual students first began college (Kardia, 1998). This is especially important since it is common for LGBT individuals to come out during their college years (Holland et al., 2013). If many heterosexuals embrace negative attitudes towards sexual minorities, it is likely to impact the identity development of LGBT students, which can have adverse effects on LGBT individuals' overall development (Bowen & Bourgeois, 2001) and their communities' integration into society.

1.3. Media

Media, including television and film, news sources, advertisements, print media (e.g. magazines), radio, as well as the Internet (e.g. social media sites and news sources), is a powerful mechanism that affords people access to information (factual and or otherwise) on sexual minorities, a population which may have otherwise been invisible to youth (Ayoub & Garretson, 2014). Based on Rideout, Foehr, and Roberts (2010) national study in 2005, the average amount of time youths spent with media per day was 6 hours and 21 minutes. The average time spent with media rose to 7 hours and 8 minutes per day in 2010. The content of this media has been evolving as well. Representations of sexually stigmatized populations increased to 7.5% of prime-time shows having some sexual minority in 2001 (Raley & Lucas, 2006) and increased to 15% in 2003 (Fisher, Hill, Grube, & Gruber, 2007). The increase in visibility of sexual minorities can be both positive and negative, depending on the reliance of stereotypes.

Scholars have suggested that sexual minorities in the media are portrayed in exceedingly stereotypical ways (Fisher et al., 2007). There is conflicting research on the significance of stereotypical appearances of sexually stigmatized groups. One camp suggests that TV shows in particular, reinforce heterosexism by portraying stereotypical representations of the LGBT population (Battles & Hilton-Morrow, 2002), whereas others argue that stereotypical representations do not matter as long as sexually stigmatized groups are represented (Ayoub & Garretson, 2014). Another aspect of the literature suggests that positive portrayals of sexual minorities invoke positive attitudes in participants while negative portrayals invoke negative attitudes (Bonds-Raacke, Cady, Schlegel, Harris, & Firebaugh, 2007). One point the literature *does* seem to agree on is that media representation of marginalized groups is important since it provides sexually stigmatized populations public exposure (Ayoub & Garretson, 2014; Igartua, 2010; Ortiz & Harwood, 2007).

When asked, college students have reported that the media is a major source of knowledge (Ballard & Morris, 1998), especially when it comes to topics such as sexuality (Calzo & Ward, 2009; Ward, 2003). In fact, college students report that most of their information about sexualities comes from media and they receive the least amount of sexuality-related information from their parents (Calzo & Ward, 2009). This may be explained by the fact that much of the information college students obtain from their parents regarding sex involves sexual intercourse, sexually transmitted infections, and pregnancy (Calzo & Ward, 2009). Therefore, college students may resort to finding additional information about sex and sexualities from media outlets (Ayoub &

Garretson, 2014; Calzo & Ward, 2009). However, it is unclear as to how college students assess information from social media, TV shows, movies, news, and other forms of media. This study aims to contribute to the body of work in this area.

1.4. Conceptual framework: Critical pedagogy

Though college can serve as an opportunity for students to learn more about heterosexism and how it impacts social interaction, many argue that there must be concerted effort to re-educate students (address the education they come into college with, reassess it, and critically examine their perspectives/information sources). In other words, we cannot assume that attending college alone will help dissuade heterosexist attitudes. Instead, intentional steps must be taken to promote critical thinking and acceptance of diversity. One way to achieve this is by adapting a critical pedagogy approach to teaching and learning (Friere, 1970; hooks, 1994, 2003).

Whereas colleges and universities have been designed to teach students how to find, understand, analyze, and interpret information with a critical voice, primary and secondary education processes generally treat students as empty vessels who await teachers to fill their heads with information (Friere, 1970). Friere (1970) referred to this process as "banking" an education. This process results in students being passive in their pursuit to learn and dissuades critical thinking. Some argue that the goal of educators should be to see students as sources of knowledge and to cultivate their abilities to critically think and examine the world around them (see Friere, 1970; hooks, 1994). Therefore, traditional approaches to education must be liberated. Liberating education would entail the realization that it is not the teacher's role to merely reinstate ideals of class-biased education, but to instead use education as a means to empower oppressed groups of people (Friere, 1970; Giroux, 1988; Luke & Grove, 1992). From this ideology, Friere (1970) argues that educators should utilize critical pedagogy as a means of giving oppressed groups a voice and power, in hopes of transforming education (see also Giroux, 1988; hooks, 2003; Luke & Grove, 1992; Weiler, 1991).

Rooted in feminism, anarchism, radical democracy, and other social justice movements, critical pedagogy is a philosophy of education that is student-driven and focuses on social change and consciousness-raising in an effort to challenge Western hegemonic educational ideologies (Crabtree, Sapp, & Licona, 2009; Giroux, 1988; Luke, 1992; Luke & Grove, 1992). The adherence to this teaching philosophy is not only reflected in an instructor's teaching objectives, but in her or his classroom practices and instructional relationships. Educators have adapted aspects of critical pedagogy in hopes of transforming the classroom into an arena that harbors critical thinking, celebrates diverse voices and experiences, and promotes social change (for examples see hooks, 1994, 2003). Relying on insight from critical pedagogy is a salient way to encourage students to critically think about various inequalities, such as the status of sexual minorities.

If the goal of teaching college students moves beyond "vocational-skill-training" and into the development of an enlightened mind, it would be helpful for college educators to be cognizant of what understandings, worldviews, and "truths" students enter the classroom with. An understanding of student's knowledge base allows educators to be more apt to ensure that when students leave their classes, they have a grounded understanding and skill set to question their own and other's "truths" and to seek alternative perspectives when so moved. Our study taps into undergraduate student's knowledge of sexual diversity (i.e., their "truths") and their interpretations thereof.

2. The current study

Previous studies have offered insight into how college students' current attitudes toward sexual minorities are influenced by various interactions and situations (see Ballard & Morris, 1998; Cotton-Huston & Waite, 2000). These studies have primarily relied on quantitative methods and provided a general overview of how these attitudes are shaped.

Lacking from the extant research, however, are in-depth narratives that examine how heterosexual students learn about sexual minorities, which may influence their likelihood to enact

harmful sexual prejudices versus acceptance when interacting with fellow students who happen to be LGBT. Lemert (1972) suggested that "the objective nature of the [deviant] act interacts with the situational context to produce a unique interpretation of deviance." Guided by this classic sociological perspective, we looked for patterns in the social process of marginalization. In particular, we wanted to learn how sexual stigma was discussed and from where stereotypes emerged. We studied the unfolding nature of deviance categorization as identifiable only in relation to the interpretational and interactional processes through which acts and actors are socially defined as deviant (Orcutt, 1975). Our research fills a gap in the literature by qualitatively tapping into college students' knowledge of sexual minorities, the foundations of that knowledge, and how much value they place on messages they receive from different social structures.

Specifically, we focus on the impactful role that schools and colleges play in offering young adults new experiences that will shape their attitudes about LGB people. While much of the literature has focused on the individual needs of LGB youth in the classroom (e.g. safety in coming out and teaching to diverse audiences), here we focus on what heterosexual students perceive as truth, where they have learned their truths, and how heterosexism might be challenged through formal education.

To examine these research questions, undergraduate students were interviewed on the topic of perceptions of sexual minorities. For the purpose of this article, we focus primarily on an analysis of heterosexual students' knowledge of the LGB[3] population and how their worldview was shaped and interpreted by media, family and peers, and formal education.

3. Methodology

3.1. Design

A research team composed of scholars all trained in qualitative analysis and the sociology of deviance scholarship (Matza, 1969) participated in the project. The theoretical structure utilized for this qualitative project was grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Using this methodological framework to guide our coding procedures, trends and associations found within the qualitative analysis, we analyzed open-ended responses from one-on-one interviews with college students to better understand how heterosexism and antigay attitudes and stereotypes emerge.

We used several probing questions in an effort to better understand the meanings and social processes associated with labeling. These questions include: 1) Where students draw their knowledge from (and hence their power); 2) How students create or reinforce social norms by applying (or not applying) deviant labels; 3) The presumed behaviors and characteristics associated with LGBT individuals; 4) The underlying social norms and values that contribute to assumptions of and reactions toward deviant/criminal behavior and deviant statuses 5) The process of defining individuals as the "other" or "different," and finally; 6) The relevance of group membership (e.g., political activism, community work, church involvement, and or student group participation) to the development and maintenance of deviant labeling. Using structured interviews as part of an inductive qualitative design, we explicitly investigated the process behind the development, maintenance, and use of stigmatic labels associated with sexually marginalized individuals. The inductive analytical procedures to be used on these data (i.e., grounded theory, see Glaser, 1995; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) will provide insight into the process of deviant labeling (e.g., condemnation).

3.2. Participants

Participants for this study were undergraduate students (n = 30) from a Midwest University in the United States. Sample size was determined by saturation, which was reached at approximately the 28th interview. Students were recruited through class announcements, fliers, and email announcements, all of which were distributed within the Department of Sociology during the Fall 2011 and Spring 2012 semesters. Upon agreeing to participate in the study, students were given pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. Participants were also given both confidentiality and informed

consent statements in accordance with the request of the University's Institutional Review Board. The sample was split evenly by sex (15 female and 15 male participants). Participants were given the opportunity to identify by sex category (female or male) and gender identity; all participants were cis-gender. All of the participants identified as being heterosexual (see Tables 1 and 2 for descriptive statistics). The majority of the sample identified as White (60%), 37% identified as Black and 3% self-identified as Hispanic. The age of participants ranged from 18–37[4] with a median age of 20.5 (a minority of our sample (3 participants) were over the age of 25). Regardless of age, students' enrollment at a university puts them in a position of privilege relative to their peers who are unable to attend college, thus all students' interviews were included in the analysis.

3.3. Materials

A semi-structured interview guide was used and developed in a series of meetings with the research team. The guide was constructed to tap into the mechanisms, process, and knowledge source(s) of deviant labeling. Mechanisms refer to the mechanics of labeling (e.g., labeling as verbal, physical, social). Process refers to the sociological movement between learning and using knowledge to form and act upon behavioral or physical social categories. Questions pertaining to "knowledge sources" are directly concerned with where knowledge is obtained and which knowledge sources are the most influential (e.g., peers, school, family, or media). Additionally, the interview guide was used as a tool to uncover the strategies and techniques used by participants to impugn meaning. We specifically explored how individuals rendered people "different" and the verbal, behavioral, and social techniques involved in that process (e.g., active avoidance, shaming, degradation). Grounded theory approaches place emphasis on the expertise of those being questioned and not on the researcher. Due to our grounded theory design, the inductive approach, and exploratory nature of this study, the interview guide was slightly adjusted for the expertise/experiences of the research participants as the study progressed.

3.4. Analytic procedures

Data collection consisted of the efforts of two graduate students and the PI of the study, an associate professor, all of whom engaged in the interview process. Data were collected in the form of semi-structured interviews. Each interview was approximately one hour long and was conducted by a research team member in a private office on campus. Interviews were recorded and the three researchers transcribed the interviews.

A research team, consisting of the PI and the two co-authors (each holding a PhD in sociology) of this study, engaged in data analysis and manuscript development. Each member of the research team were trained on the data via meetings designed to discuss the project, the interview guide, the interviews, and the transcriptions. Once training on the project was completed, the research team individually coded the data using a systematic line-by-line coding process (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to develop an initial coding system. The coding process was then refined: checks for internal

Table 1. Participant demographics (Median age = 20.5)

	%	n
Males	50	15
Females	50	15
White	60	18
Black	37	11
Hispanic	3	1
Christian	47	14
Catholic	10	14
Other Religion	30	9
No Religion	10	3

Table 2. Characteristics of interviewees

Pseudonym	Sex	Age	Race	Religion
Tasha	Female	22	White	Non-practicing Eastern Orthodox
Elizabeth	Female	32	Black	Christian
Tracy	Female	37	White	None
Tina	Female	18	White	Lutheran
Megan	Female	22	White	None
Amy	Female	20	White	Christian
Paul	Male	22	White	Christian
Mike	Male	19	White	Christian
Dan	Male	18	African American	Orthodox
Roman	Male	20	Romanian	Orthodox
Shawn	Male	21	African American	Christian
Kyle	Male	23	Hispanic-Puerto Rican	Christian
Emma	Female	25	White	None
Ryan	Male	20	White	Catholic
Chris	Male	21	African American	Catholic
Katie	Female	18	Black	Pentecostal
Nicole	Female	19	African American	Christian
Rachel	Female	20	White	Methodist-Christian
Angela	Female	18	African American	Seventh Adventist
John	Male	24	African American	Christian
Tony	Male	18	African American	Agnostic
Jamie	Female	21	White	Christian
Bev	Female	23	African American	Christian
Mark	Male	20	White	Methodist
Joe	Male	32	White	"Was Catholic … haven't been to church in quite some time"
Sam	Male	20	White	None
Allison	Female	19	Black African American	Christian
Justin	Male	19	African American	Christina
Carl	Male	20	White	Agnostic
Marissa	Female	19	White	Catholic

consistency were made by discuss themes found among all three researchers. Themes that were not agreed upon by all three researchers were discarded. The research team met periodically to ensure that there was agreement in the interpretation of data and code development to ensure inter-coder reliability. Codes that were similar across all three researchers were collapsed into more inclusive themes. The three researchers met one final time for the purposes of coding in order to agree on the final codes and to select the use of mutually agreed upon quotes to be used as illustrations of data and findings.

Using a relativistic framework (Matza, 1969), in contrast to structural analysis, we examined the process of negative reaction to behavior and group membership. In any examination of process, a systematic understanding of meaning and social interaction inevitably emerges as part of

grounded theory approaches to research. Grounded theory approaches reverse the traditional direction of research (i.e., hypothesis formation → hypothesis testing via data collection and analysis). Using a grounded theory orientation, we gathered empirical data for the purpose of theory and hypothesis development for future empirical testing. Such a technique is critical for informed, data driven theory, hypothesis exploration, and concept development.

3.5. Researchers positionality

We pause here to reflect on our own role in the formation and interpretation of these findings. Our situated identities are important to this study in that they may have influenced our overall study design, the interview process, the analysis, and the interpretation of findings. At the time of this writing, the lead researcher is a gay Latino male, 45 years old, and a tenured professor. The other members of the research team include a 39-year-old white lesbian and a 36-year-old white heterosexual woman, both working in academia. To safe guard any potential biases, the research team relied on member checks during the interview process, audit trails and memoing during the analysis phase, and peer debriefing with colleagues unfamiliar with the study (Mertens, 2005; Patton, 2002). Peer debriefing offered us a more objective opinion in our analysis and write-up stages.

4. Findings

Two overarching goals of this study were to examine *where* heterosexual college students received their information about sexual minorities and how they *interpret* these messages. Three key themes emerged from the data; "TV Shows and Movies as Knowledge Sources," "Intergroup Contact as a Knowledge Source," and "Schools as a Knowledge Source." Within each theme, participants discussed what they learned, as well as how they imbued value to these messages. After deeper analysis, we found that some students consumed these messages at face value and did not question the validity of such messages. Meanwhile, other students showed individual agency and were conscious consumers of such messages; they demonstrated critical thinking when interpreting messages and forming their opinions about sexual minorities.

4.1. TV shows and movies as knowledge sources

Participants who cited media as a source of information about sexual minorities were included in this theme. Participants referred to media in general terms, though often specified TV shows and movies as especially influential outlets that informed their understandings of sexual minorities. The high rate of media consumption and value placed on media is illustrated in the following quotes. One participant, Tracy (37),[5] spoke about valuing media in general as a knowledge source over peers, "I think the media [has the most impact] because, you know, friends change, things like that. But I mean the media is kinda always there in one form or another."

Other participants reflected on TV being the first place they learned about sexual minorities. Paul (22) described media offering information that his family did not, "Growing up sexuality is not really discussed with family because it's almost like- it's kind of expected for males to like females. But then when you see the media and they have two gay guys on TV or something … " Tasha (22) also explained how TV shows first informed her opinions about sexual minorities:

> TV shows- Primarily the ones that are on MTV. It always seems to be that on any of the reality shows they have one person who is "different". They seem to like to display the people who have openly come out and had sex changes, things like that. And because of that they will start talking to their roommates or whoever and start talking about their decisions.

As a result of seeing sexual minorities portrayed on TV shows, Tasha found such images "normal," "Like, it's not weird for me to turn on the TV and see an African-American overweight guy in heels talking about a hair show. To me, it's like, 'oh, no big deal'." Although increased portrayals of sexual minorities may help "normalize" their presence in media, stereotypical portrays may do little to combat sexual stigmas (for examples see Ayoub & Garretson, 2014; Fisher et al., 2007). For example, here Tasha is conflating gender expression with sexual orientation. This may be common

among individuals who lack foundational knowledge about gender and sexual orientation and are reliant on the media to provide that knowledge.

When prompted to describe how sexuality was portrayed in the media, there were mixed responses. For example, Megan (22) explains, "Um, I would say both [positively and negatively] depending on what the movie is." Also, Chris (21) stated, "The media portrays them [homosexuals] negatively like it's not okay to be homosexual." He reinforces this statement using a sitcom as a reference:

> I think it was *Spin City* with the African-American male, it was the episode when he came out cause he got hired to work with the mayor and after he was hired and he came out it was a problem and it was like, you can't work with the mayor.

Not only did Chris note that media portrays homosexuals in a negative light, he recalled specific details of a show that supported this belief. Despite "Spin City" being an older show, its impact is undeniable for Chris's understanding of homosexuals. Such recall sheds light on the influential and memorable role media plays in some student's lives. Another student, Mark (20), noted that despite an increase of positive portrays of sexual minorities in media, overwhelmingly, homosexuals are portrayed in a negative tone:

> I guess more and more homosexuality is in the media as acceptable but it's still looked down upon I would think. Just because, they're not feminine or they're not masculine when they're homosexual I guess. Like when they're portrayed in the media, if they're homosexual men they're feminine and if they're homosexual women then they're masculine.

Another participant, Tasha (22), recognized a shift in the way the media has portrayed homosexuals in the past and how they are represented in the present:

> I think that people … I would say the media used to portray men as being girls because their interests were a little more girly. I think that our society now, in the media, A) either tries to avoid it, or B) tries to act accepting and put on a front … but more often than not I think the media, the news and everything, just tries to act more accepting and be more politically correct. I think we've come to realize that more and more people are feeling safe enough to publicly admit their orientation. I think some people have gotten kind of a rude awakening as far as people they know that practice certain orientations and sexualities and what not.

Here, Tasha is engaging in conscious consumption of the media. She recognizes shifts in the portrayal of homosexuality over time and questions the intent of these portrayals. Underlying this, however, she also recognizes that homosexuality is still not accepted in all aspects of society as she cites a "rude awakening" to people learning the true orientations of those close to them.

Given their frequent use and easy access to media, some participants placed a greater trust in messages from media in comparison to messages they received from school or peers. Despite relying on and trusting in messages from media, many students noted that much of these messages offer conflicting portrays of sexual minorities; therefore, such messages are not consistent and greatly open for interpretation. This provides another opportunity for educators to utilize critical pedagogy in their teaching, which may foster discussion regarding how accurate some messages from media are.

4.2. Intergroup contact as a knowledge source

This theme is comprised of participants who discussed learning about sexual minorities through messages and conversations they had with their peers and family. As the primary agent of socialization, it is not surprising that participants learned about sexual minorities from their immediate family. However, such lessons were not always positive. Unique to this theme, are participants' exercising individual agency and rejecting heterosexist messages based on their personal interactions and experiences with sexual minorities. Aligning with tenants of critical pedagogy, offering students

alternative examples (e.g. both sides of an argument), enables them to critically think about the topic and ultimately form an educated opinion. Also, valuing students' lived experiences as valid sources of knowledge can influence their overall learning experience (Giroux, 1998).

For instance, in reference to her sister who identifies as a lesbian, Allison (19) noted that her family had some concerns. When asked how her mother felt about her lesbian sister, Allison answered, "She feels as though it is a phase still, that she'll snap out of it. But, I mean, they've [her sister and her girlfriend] been together for almost two years, so I don't know." While Allison appears to be accepting of her lesbian sister, she hints at some hesitancy since her views are in conflict with her mother's. In contrast, another student, Chris (21), received a broader lesson about discrimination from his mother;

> My mom always told me [that] there [are] people out there that are going to like people of the same sex and you shouldn't hate them … Because what's the difference between people hating you cause you're black? We're all different but we are all Americans, we're all people.

Chris summarizes the overarching lesson from his mom by explaining, "Right well, you discriminate against them but how do you feel when people discriminate against you because you're black?" Important to consider though, is that while participants gained information from their family and peers, interactions with friends and acquaintances of the LGB community further expanded their understandings and overall acceptance of sexual minorities.

Participants often explained that being exposed to people of different sexualities impacted their understandings of sexual minorities. Katie (18) explained that despite messages she received from her family and religion, her overall opinion of sexual minorities was influenced by her peer group;

> I would have to say my environment because I grew up in a church so I know that homosexuality is wrong but, I don't believe that I should judge them, or am more open to it because, like, I have a diverse group of people I hang out with, it makes me more open to their preferences.

If one's peers are accepting of sexual diversity, it is likely to impact one's own views of sexual minorities (Birkett & Espelage, 2015; Bowen & Bourgeois, 2001; Brechwald & Prinstein, 2011). It follows, then, that peers' negative attitudes also impact individual beliefs. Mike (19), for example, notes "Um, I wouldn't say my sources are very good, just because the people that I'm around are against it also. So I would, of course, be against it."

When asked where he got his knowledge about sexuality, Shawn (21) echoed a common sentiment, explaining;

> Straight from my own experience. I have a gay friend, she's really cool actually, so she tells me about like, her gay stories. And then I have a bi friend that I work with, he's actually pretty funny, whatever. So different people.

Sam (20) reinforces this idea in his response to the prompt "why do you consider homosexuals normal?";

> Um, I think it's just because I come in contact with it a lot. I mean, I meet a bunch of different people every day it seems like. They're all still the same people as like a straight person or a gay person or anything, so it's just normal.

Other participants noted that hearing or reading about sexual minorities wasn't as impactful as actually seeing and interacting with people who are gay. When asked what was most influential in forming his attitudes towards sexual minorities, Ryan (20) explained;

> I will say peers. I don't think if I read the newspaper I believe it. I think I need to see it to believe it or see it to support it … I want to do some research and talk to other people and see what they think before I can make a big decision.

Whereas some participants received conflicting messages from other sources of knowledge (e.g. family), many relied on their own experiences with friends and acquaintances who identify as LGB. Specifically, intergroup contact experiences greatly influenced how participants felt about sexual minorities. Such insight is supported in previous studies (see Cotton-Huston & Waite, 2000; Herek & McLemore, 2013) and can help inform current efforts of those aiming to deter heterosexism and instead promote acceptance of sexual diversity.

4.3. Formal education as a knowledge source

This theme includes participants who explained that lessons and messages they received in formal education settings informed their understandings of sexual minorities. Education received in formal schooling is often valued as a knowledge source for college students in our sample. School offered opportunities for intergroup contact, unbiased content, and broader lessons on acceptance. For instance, Paul (22) discussed how his interactions in school impacted his attitudes towards sexual minorities; "I think, maybe school … like seeing the people. Like seeing another student like that [gay]. Sometimes when you see it in the media it doesn't seem real, but when you see it in real life … " Similarly, John (24) explained that school "really opened my eyes" because it exposed him to " … different things that I was ignorant to before coming to the class." He goes on to explain the overarching lessons he learned in school;

> I learned in the class, you don't just judge nobody from how they look, you gotta really get to know them. You can't just say, you know, 'he's gay because he's walking like that or talking like that' … Maybe he just, you know, was born that way and he's not gay, he just has those traits. He's straight, you know.

School provided these participants with exposure to different people and points of view that they did not receive elsewhere.

Such lessons were only amplified in college. Kyle (23) reflects on what source has the biggest impact on his impressions of sexuality; "It used to be the media, but now since I've been taking higher level courses … the courses are giving me a more, broader definition of [sexuality]." Similarly, Tasha (22) expands on how college classes have impacted her worldview;

> So I think that when you come to college you get a more broader knowledge and you really learn how the world is and you really get exposed to classes that teach you about the unfairness in certain parts of the world and society and you start to really think about how my actions affected someone else. And it makes people realize that, 'maybe I shouldn't think this way or act this way' or maybe I'm better off than I thought I was. That type of thing.

This value of education stretched beyond just course content and into direct action taken by educational institutions seemingly aimed at providing students with practical knowledge about sexual minorities. Roman (20) explained,

> … I think school more. I learned more from it. TV was more like, oh … one side thinks this, the other side thinks that. It was more biased. So I think I learned more from, like, the school, like different sides. I can probably relate to why homosexuals, like it wasn't always biased, like you're thinking bad about one side and good about the other. You know, like be in that person's shoes, like what I learned. Like we had a show, or whatever where a homosexual came in, a gay guy, he was talking about why he was gay and why he was attracted and stuff like that. And you could kind of see, like, 'oh, I understand how you were raised' and stuff. Whereas in the news they could say, 'oh, that guy's gay and everyone hates him'.

As explained by Roman, media often offers conflicting messages about homosexuals; some positive, some negative. Since these messages are not consistent, Roman and other participants have questioned the validity of such messages and instead have put more trust in the messages they receive from formal education.

The perceived neutrality of the education system regarding teaching lessons about sexuality (whether direct or indirect) was a common topic for several participants. Although there was some recognition that media was a more constant source of knowledge than school, education was still valued for its perceived objective representations. Amy (20) stated,

> I guess I got more of it [knowledge] from the media source than I got from school but I would take school more seriously because you're supposed to be learning educational things and the media is not always trusted and exaggerated and you don't know where the information is from.

Responses revealed that students rely on formal education to present unbiased views of content, which reinforces the value they place on this knowledge. It is also worth noting that although many participants cite media as an information source, many also acknowledge that media is biased and schools serve as a source to receive non-biased information. Educators can capitalize on this awareness and provide critically-based information, as well as teach students how to be conscious consumers of media.

4.4. Discussion

Previous studies note the influence of major agents of socialization on shaping youth's attitudes toward sexual minorities (Calzo & Ward, 2009; Holland et al., 2013; Pascoe, 2007, 2013). This study extends on previous works by offering qualitative insight into how college students have not only learned about sexual minorities, but also how much value they place on these lessons and messages. Despite previous studies noting the overwhelming tendency of media to portray sexual stereotypes, findings from this study show that some college students do not put an overwhelming trust in media. Instead, many participants in this study considered lessons from formal educations as being "unbiased," whereas messages from media were considered stereotypical and unreliable.

Similarly, some participants did not share the same values towards sexual minorities as their families did, and as a result, they were cautious when interpreting messages from their parents. Instead, participants put more weight on their personal experiences and interactions with LGB friends and acquaintances. We should note that while these findings are not meant to be generalizable to the general college population given our research design, our results are important for establishing a data-grounded understanding of the origins and sources of information about LGB and to generate discussion about how educators might embrace their influential role to help challenge the creation and reinforcement of heterosexism. Further, documenting and analyzing sources of deviant labeling may assist with developing critical thinking skills among students in educational settings.

Teaching in a way that exposes students to different perspectives and values may foster critical thinking so that antigay attitudes are exchanged for understanding and appreciation of difference. Identifying how primary and secondary schooling influence students' understandings of sexual minorities is crucial, as such lessons may be readdressed in higher education. Additionally, college marks an important transition for students: the experience introduces many students to new values, ideas, and perspectives. College instructors play an especially vital role in this process, as they are able to help students critically evaluate various "truths" that they enter college with, as well as foster the critical thinking necessary for challenging hegemonic modes of understanding that exist outside the college classroom. Below we offer concrete ways that college educators can enrich students' awareness about sexual minorities and promote critical thinking when consuming messages from various sources of knowledge.

4.5. Critical pedagogy as a tool to maintain educational credibility with respect to sexuality

Adapting a critical pedagogy teaching philosophy could enable educators to foster a rich learning environment for their students, which aims to promote critical thinking, acceptance of sexual diversity, and changes in attitudes. To achieve this, we may refer to the three general themes that critical pedagogy advocates for, which include: addressing the instrumental role of the instructor; valuing personal experiences and voices; and promoting diversity through the inclusion of voices from various classes, cultures, and races (Weiler, 1991). Such tenants can be applied to "righting" various "wrongs" that serve to perpetuate heterosexism.

First, in a traditional classroom, the teacher is typically viewed as an authority figure, based on her or his advanced education and experience. Despite any inherent expectations of authority in the classroom, based on critical pedagogy, the teacher is recognized as a learner *with* the students (Giroux, 1988; Luke & Grove, 1992; Weiler, 1991). This will enable educators to avoid talking *at* students and instead talk *with* students. For instance, whereas parents might have an authoritative approach to teaching their children life lessons, educators may position themselves as equals with students to build rapport that can foster honest discussion and contemplation. The teacher therefore serves more as a facilitator than an "expert" of knowledge (see Jakubowski, 2001). College educators can foster candid dialogue to discern the basis of knowledge that their students enter the classroom with and alter their lessons accordingly (Jakubowski, 2001). With an understanding of their knowledge base, educators are more apt to ensure that when students leave their classes, they have a grounded understanding and skill set to question their and others' "truths" and to seek other perspectives when so moved.

Second, achieving true equality can be gained through recognizing that students are "knowers" whose feelings and experiences reveal a "deeper truth" than that offered through conventional education (Weiler, 1991, p. 463). In other words, whereas conventional education relies strictly on empirical evidence, proponents of critical pedagogy argue that students are great sources of knowledge themselves. As evident in the findings of this study, students gain much of their information from their schooling and personal interactions. However, much of these sources contributed in forming heterosexist attitudes. As a result, an educator may find her or himself in a delicate situation when embracing critical pedagogy; how does a teacher value a student's knowledge, even if that knowledge supports antigay values, while simultaneously moving the student to embrace a well-rounded education, which may counteract heterosexist thoughts? An educator who embraces critical pedagogy must remind themselves that their role is not to *tell* students what is right and wrong, but instead to *facilitate* a discussion which enables students to reassess their worldview and be open to considering alternative ideas from various sources of knowledge (Jakubowski, 2001). Furthermore, it is not the role of the teacher to dismiss or overlook students' lived experiences, but instead to offer students strategies that will enrich their learning experience and as a result, cultivate a robust worldview.

For instance, instead of overlooking personal accounts that may embrace antigay attitudes, educators might facilitate an open and honest discussion to first establish the student's baseline of information. The teacher may suggest alternative accounts that complement or challenge the student's understandings. For instance, if students harbor heterosexist thoughts, the teacher could generate a discussion which allows students to consider how they formed their thoughts and if such sources are reliable or accurate. Following, students may consider the relationship between basing attitudes on personal feelings as opposed to actual facts. As a result, students may start forming their opinions based on information that is acquired through more reliable sources.

Furthermore, given that media is a salient form of information for many adolescents and young adults (Ayoub & Garretson, 2014; Calzo & Ward, 2009; Rideout et al., 2010; Ward, 2003), educators might consider addressing the production of media to promote critical media literacy (e.g. power, ownership, and control of mass media). This could offer students new insight that may call into question their reliance on media as an adequate source of knowledge (see King, 2000). Specifically,

educators can teach students how to "[read] a film sociologically" (for examples see Sutherland & Feltey, 2013, p. 4; King, 2000). By becoming conscious consumers of media, students may reassess the validity of various "truths" and "alternative facts" they obtained from media.

Lastly, *difference* is a central tenant of critical pedagogy (Giroux, 1988; hooks, 2003; Weiler, 1991). Since college serves as a pivotal point in many students' lives, where they interact with people different then themselves, educators can promote and facilitate these interactions to ensure prejudices are avoided. In an attempt to provide students with an experience that would help uncover antigay attitudes, educators may consider having their heterosexual students partake in various activities that encourage self-reflection.

For example, heterosexual students can wear a pink triangle so they might have a first-hand experience of being perceived as a sexual minority (see Chesler & Zuniga, 1991), write a coming-out letter to consider the experiences of lesbians and gays (see Hubbard & De Welde, 2003), or participate in written role-taking exercises (see Grauerholz & Scuteri, 1989). Given the somewhat sensitive topic of gay rights, critically thinking about this topic might be acquired through panel debates (for examples see Crone, 1997). Enabling students to debate gay rights may allow them to consider alternative points of view. Inviting members of LGBT groups from the school or university can enrich panel discussions (see Cotton-Huston & Waite, 2000). Also, by encouraging students to ground their statements in empirical evidence, students may learn how to ground their opinions in fact.

Activities that encourage students to experience difference from a marginalized perspective may help negate various messages they have previously received that support sexual stigmas. Utilizing tenants of critical pedagogy has the potential to break down students' preconceived notions about sexual minorities while simultaneously engaging them in active learning that may surpass the classroom. As a result, educators may increase tolerance and empathic acceptance for LGB people as human beings, therefore deterring heterosexism and hate crimes.

4.6. Limitations

Our study is not without some shortcomings. First, data for this study were collected in 2014. In the three years since data collection, there have been drastic changes (e.g. the legalization of same sex marriage) and events (e.g. antigay administration and the Orlando night club attack) that have involved sexual minorities. While this is a limitation, we note that our data provide a snapshot of views and stereotypes of the LGB population from a Midwest population. That said, our findings that students view education and intergroup contact as an accurate and non-biased sources of information is something that may remain stable over time. These findings can be used as a foundation to bolster the importance of relying on facts and relaying them in a critically informed manner.

Secondly, we were limited in speaking with cisgender heterosexual college students who were attending a Midwest University. However, it is important to note that we were seeking to understand the views of the dominant population, which, in this case are heterosexuals. Future research would benefit from seeking perspectives not only from heterosexual students, but also from gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender college students and from different regions of the nation.

Lastly, transgender status did not arise as a topic of discussion throughout the interviews. Examining attitudes pertaining to the transgender community is crucial if we are to reject heterosexism and embrace gender and sexual diversity. Also, as a qualitative study, we were able to gather in-depth accounts from our participants, although such findings are not meant to be generalizable. By expanding the study to other regions using probability sampling techniques, research could offer insight into understanding how attitudes might be region bound while offering findings generalizable by design. Results from such a study may offer salient suggestions on how to eradicate harmful biases and promote acceptance of sexual diversity at the national level. Nevertheless, by focusing exclusively on college students, our study helps to address an important gap in the literature by shedding light on various values that college students have acquired about sexual minorities and where they obtained

their knowledge. It is also important to note that there are several agents of socialization which may impact one's attitudes and understandings of sexual minorities. While this study examined primarily school and peers, future studies may consider exploring how sports, religion, and workplace also impact one's understandings of sexual minorities.

5. Conclusion

While the LGBT community is gaining ground in terms of social and legal acceptance, widespread acceptance of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender individuals remains a challenge for society in general and for colleges and universities as institutions (Renn, 2010). As a result, many individuals who identify as LGBT are at grave risk of psychological concerns, including suicide (see Kosciw et al., 2014; Meyer, 2009) and hate crime victimization (see Wilson, 2014). The national tragedy surrounding the events of 8 June 2016 are a reminder that sexual minorities continue to be a target of hate, discrimination, aggression and lethal violence. We have shown that the education system is a viable route to provide factual information about sexuality and to dismantle some of the harmful stereotypes associated with stigmatized sexualities. Faculty and staff have important roles to play in the dismantling of stereotypes as well (see Few-Demo, Humble, Curran, & Lloyd, 2016). Promoting awareness and acceptance of individuals who identify as LGBT has the potential to reverse some of the hardships they might experience at the individual level. Also, because those in power often set the agenda that best suits their needs (see Collins, 1990; Johnson, 2005), educating students about sexual minorities may further promote societal-wide acceptance and less fear of human difference and diversity. LGBT resources centers also have potential for educating the university community (see Self, 2015 for a critical analysis of queer resource centers as both resisting and reproducing interlocking forms of oppression). This in turn can eliminate many of the causes that both drive aggression against LGBT individuals, and LGBT individuals into depression and suicide. In other words, just as those in power have the means to construct and reinforce heterosexism, they too have the power to deconstruct this label and advance toward empathic and inclusive definitions that are no longer synonymous with "stigma." Understanding the biases of heterosexual college students may inform educators on how to best remedy their "truths" in hopes of promoting acceptance. One salient way to achieve this begins with teaching students how to critically think and question previously held "truths."

Acknowledgements
Funding Provided by a Faculty Research Grant (FRG) # 1735 ("Unraveling the Embodied Meaning of Crime and Deviance Categorization: A Qualitative Study of Attributions Toward and Characterizations of Discredited Behavior and Identities."); The University of Akron, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs (Principal Investigator Robert L. Peralta). We thank Drs. Dani Jauk and Lia Chervenak-Wiley for assistance with interviews and transcription.

Funding
This work was supported by Faculty Research Grant [1735].

Author details
Nicole L. Rosen[1]
E-mail: rosen@ingenuityproject.org
Robert L. Peralta[2]
E-mail: rp32@uakron.edu
Monica Merrill[3]
E-mail: mmmerrill@ysu.edu
[1] The Ingenuity Project, Baltimore Polytechnic Institute, Baltimore, MD, USA.
[2] University of Akron, Akron, OH, USA.
[3] Youngstown State University, Youngstown, OH, USA.

Citation information
Cite this article as: Learning about sexual minorities in school and at home: How critical pedagogy can challenge heterosexism, Nicole L. Rosen, Robert L. Peralta & Monica Merrill, *Cogent Education* (2019), 6: 1633104.

Notes

1. LGBT and LGB are used separately throughout the literature review based on the population focused on in each respective study.
2. Although LGB refers to *sexuality* and transgender refers to *gender identity*, both groups are often combined as LGBT, given the marginalization each group faces. Therefore, the following literature review includes studies pertaining to sexual minorities that include LGBT individuals, though our study is specific to those who are LGB.
3. The interview guide asked specific questions about lesbians, gays, and bisexuals. Missing from the questions were topics pertaining to transgender individuals. As a result, participants largely omitted discussing transgender people. However, topics regarding transgender individuals are included in the literature review.
4. Despite the range of participants' ages, responses did not differ based on age. Non-traditional students were kept in our sample because they satisfied our inclusive criteria as 'college students'.
5. Pseudonyms are used to protect the confidentiality of participants.

References

Allport, G. W. (1954). *The nature of prejudice*. Cambridge, MA: Addison Wesley.

Alvarez, L., Perez-Pena, R., & Hauser, C. (2016, June 13). Orlando gunman was 'Cool and calm' after massacre, police say. New York Times. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/14/us/orlando-shooting.html?_r=0

Avery, A., Chase, J., Johannsson, L., Litvak, S., Montero, D., & Wydra, M. (2007). America's changing attitudes toward homosexuality, civil unions, and same-gender marriage: 1977-2004. National Association of Social Workers. CCC Code: 0037-8046/07 doi:10.1094/PDIS-91-4-0467B

Ayoub, P. M., & Garretson, J. (2014). Getting the message out: Media context and global changes in attitudes toward homosexuality. American Political Science Association Annual Meeting, Washington, DC.

Ballard, S. M., & Morris, M. L. (1998). Sources of sexuality information for university students. *Journal of Sex Education and Therapy*, *23*(4), 278–287. doi:10.1080/01614576.1998.11074263

Battles, K., & Hilton-Morrow, W. (2002). Gay characters in conventional spaces: Will and Grace and the situation comedy genre. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, *19*(1), 87. doi:10.1080/07393180216553

Birkett, M., & Espelage, D. L. (2015). Homophobic name-calling, peer-groups, and masculinity: The socialization of homophobic behavior in adolescents. *Social Development*, *24*(1), 184–205. doi:10.1111/sode.12085

Bonds-Raacke, J. M., Cady, E. T., Schlegel, R., Harris, R. J., & Firebaugh, L. (2007). Remembering gay/lesbian media characters: Can Ellen and Will improve attitudes toward homosexuals? *Journal of Homosexuality*, *53*(3), 19–34. doi:10.1300/J082v53n03_03

Bowen, A. M., & Bourgeois, M. J. (2001). Attitudes toward lesbian, gay, and bisexual college students: The contribution of pluralistic ignorance, dynamic social impact, and contact theories. *Journal of American College Health*, *50*(2), 91–96. doi:10.1080/07448480109596012

Brechwald, W. A., & Prinstein, M. J. (2011). Beyond homophily: A decade of advances in understanding peer influence processes. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, *21*, 166–179. doi:10.1111/j.1532-7795.2010.00721.x

Calzo, J. P., & Ward, L. M. (2009). Contributions of parents, peers, and media to attitudes toward homosexuality: Investigating sex and ethnic differences. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *56*(8), 1101–1116. doi:10.1080/00918360903279338

Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing grounded theory*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Chesler, M. A., & Zuniga, X. (1991). Dealing with prejudice and conflict in the classroom: The pink triangle exercise. *Teaching Sociology*, *19*(2), 173–181. doi:10.2307/1317848

Collins, P. H. (1990). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Cotton-Huston, A. L., & Waite, B. M. (2000). Anti-homosexual attitudes in college students: Predictors and classroom interventions. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *38*, 117–133. doi:10.1300/J082v38n03_07

Crabtree, R. D., Sapp, D. A., & Licona, A. C. (2009). *Feminist pedagogy: Looking back to move forward*. Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins University Press.

Crone, J. A. (1997). Using panel debates to increase student involvement in the introductory sociology class. *Teaching Sociology*, *25*(3), 214–218. doi:10.2307/1319397

Degner, J., & Dalege, J. (2013). The apple does not fall far from the tree, or does it? A meta-analysis of parent–Child similarity in intergroup attitudes. *Psychological Bulletin*, *139*(6), 1270–1304. doi:10.1037/a0031436

Ellis, S. J., Kitzinger, C., & Wilkinson, S. (2002). Attitudes towards lesbians and gay men and support for lesbian and gay human rights among psychology students. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *44*, 121–138. doi:10.1300/J082v44n01_07

Few-Demo, A. L., Humble, A. M., Curran, M. A., & Lloyd, S. A. (2016). Queer theory, intersectionality, and LGBT-parent families: Transformative critical pedagogy in family theory. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, *8*(1), 74–94. doi:10.1111/jftr.12127

Fingerhut, H. (2016). Support steady for same-sex marriage and acceptance of homosexuality. Pew Research Center. Retrieved from http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/05/12/support-steady-for-same-sex-marriage-and-acceptance-of-homosexuality/

Fisher, D. A., Hill, D. L., Grube, J. W., & Gruber, E. L. (2007). Gay, lesbian, and bisexual content on television: A quantitative analysis across two seasons. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *52*(3–4), 167–188. doi:10.1300/J082v52n03_08

Friere, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York, NY: Continuum International.

Gay, G. (2002). Preparing for culturally responsive teaching. *Journal of Teacher Education*, *53*(2), 106–116. doi:10.1177/0022487102053002003

Giroux, H. A. (1988). *Teachers as intellectuals: Toward a critical pedagogy of learning*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc.

Glaser, B. G. (1995). *Grounded theory 1984-1994: A reader*. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology.

Grauerholz, E., & Scuteri, G. M. (1989). Learning to role-take: A teaching technique to enhance awareness of the 'other'. *Teaching Sociology*, *17*, 480–483. doi:10.2307/1318427

Hans, J. D., Kersey, M., & Kimberly, C. (2012). Self-perceived origins of attitudes toward homosexuality. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *59*, 4–17. doi:10.1080/00918369.2012.638547

Herek, G. M. (1990). The context of anti-gay violence; Notes on cultural and psychological heterosexism. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, *5*(3), 316–333. doi:10.1177/088626090005003006

Herek, G. M. (2002). Heterosexuals' attitudes toward bisexual men and women in the United States. *The Journal of Sex Research*, *39*(4), 264–274. doi:10.1080/00224490209552150

Herek, G. M. (2009). Hate crimes and stigma-related experiences among sexual minority adults in the United States. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, *24*(1), 54–74. doi:10.1177/0886260508316477

Herek, G. M., & McLemore, K. A. (2013). Sexual prejudice. *Annual Review Psychology*, *64*, 309–333. doi:10.1146/annurev-psych-113011-143826

Hinrichs, D. W., & Rosenberg, P. J. (2002). Attitudes toward gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons among heterosexual liberal arts college students. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *43*(1), 61–84. doi:10.1300/J082v43n01_04

Holland, L., Matthews, T. L., & Schott, M. R. (2013). 'That's so gay!' Exploring college students' attitudes toward the LGBT population. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *60*(4), 575–595. doi:10.1080/00918369.2013.760321

hooks, B. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. New York, NY: Routledge.

hooks, B. (2003). *Teaching community: A pedagogy of hope*. New York, NY: Routledge.
Hubbard, E., & De Welde, K. (2003). 'I'm glad I'm not gay!': Heterosexual students' emotional experience in the college classroom with a 'coming out' assignment. *Teaching Sociology*, *31*(1), 73–84. doi:10.2307/3211426
Igartua, J. J. (2010). Identification with characters and narrative persuasion through fictional feature films. *Communications*, *35*, 347–373. doi:10.1515/comm.2010.019
Jakubowski, L. M. (2001). Teaching uncomfortable topics: An action-oriented strategy for addressing racism and related forms of difference. *Teaching Sociology*, *29*(1), 62–79. doi:10.2307/1318783
Johnson, A. G. (2005). *The gender knot: Unraveling our patriarchal legacy*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
Kardia, D. (1998). Student attitudes toward gay and lesbian issues: The impact of college. Diversity Digest. Retrieved from http://www.diversityweb.org/digest/sm98/attitudes.html
King, D. L. (2000). Using videos to teach mass media and society from a critical perspective. *Teaching Sociology*, *28*, 232–240. doi:10.2307/1318992
Kite, M. E., & Whitley, B. E., Jr. (1996). Sex differences in attitudes toward homosexual person, behavior, and civil rights: A meta-analysis. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *22*(4), 336–353. doi:10.1177/0146167296224002
Kitsuse, J. (2011). Social reaction to deviant behavior: Problem of theory and method. *Social Problems*, *9*(3), 247–256. doi:10.2307/799235
Kosciw, J. G., Greytak, E. A., Palmer, N. A., & Boesen, M. J. (2014). *The 2013 national school climate survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth in our nation's schools*. New York: GLSEN.
LaMar, L., & Kite, M. (1998). Sex differences in attitudes toward gay men and lesbians: A multidimensional perspective. *The Journal of Sex Research*, *35*(2), 189–196. doi:10.1080/00224499809551932
Lemert, E. M. (1972). *Human deviance, social problems, and social control* (2nd ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
Lorber, J. (1994). *Paradoxes of gender*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
Luke, C. (1992). Feminist politics in radical pedagogy. In C. Luke & J. Grove (Eds.), *Feminisms and critical pedagogy* (pp. 25–53). New York, NY: Routledge Press.
Luke, C., & Grove, J. (1992). *Feminisms and critical pedagogy*. New York, NY: Routledge Press.
Matza, D. (1969). *Becoming deviant*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
McCauley, L. (2017, March 17). Trump administration urged to investigate wave of attacks as hate crimes. Common Dreams news source. Retrieved from http://www.commondreams.org/news/2017/03/02/trump-administration-urged-investigate-wave-attacks-hate-crimes
Mertens, D. (2005). *Research and evaluation in education and psychology: Integrating diversity with quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
Meyer, E. J. (2009). *Gender, bullying, and harassment: Strategies to end sexism and homophobia in schools*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
Munoz-Plaza, C., Quinn, S. C., & Rounds, K. A. (2002). Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students: Perceived social support in the high school environment. *High School Journal*, *85*(4), 52–64. doi:10.1353/hsj.2002.0011
Norton, A. T., & Herek, G. M. (2013). Heterosexuals' attitudes toward transgender people: Findings from a national probability sample of U.S. adults. *Sex Roles*, *68*, 309–333. doi:10.1007/s11199-011-0110-6
Orcutt, J. D. (1975). Deviance as a situated phenomenon: Variations in the social interpretation of marijuana and alcohol use. *Social Problems*, *22*(3), 346–356. doi:10.2307/799815
Ortiz, M., & Harwood, J. (2007). A social cognitive theory approach to the effects of mediated intergroup contact on intergroup attitudes. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, *51*, 615–631. doi:10.1080/08838150701626487
Pascoe, C. J. (2007). *Dude you're a fag: Masculinity and sexuality in high school*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
Pascoe, C. J. (2013). Notes on a sociology of bullying: Young men's homophobia as gender socialization. *QED: A Journal in GLBTQ Worldmaking, Inaugural Issue*, 87–104.
Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
Raley, A. B., & Lucas, J. L. (2006). Stereotype or success? Prime-time television's portrayals of gay male, lesbian, and bisexual characters. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *51*(2), 19–38. doi:10.1300/J082v51n02_02
Rankin, S., Weber, G., Blumenfeld, W., & Frazer, S. (2010). *2010 state of higher education for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people*. Charlotte, NC: Campus Pride.
Renn, K. A. (2010). LGBT and queer research in higher education: The state and status of the field. *Educational Researcher*, *39*(2), 132–141. doi:10.3102/0013189X10362579
Rideout, V. J., Foehr, U. G., & Roberts, D. F. (2010). *Generation M [superscript 2]: Media in the lives of 8-to 18-year-olds*. ERIC Clearinghouse.
Self, J. M. (2015). Queering center: A critical discourse analysis of university LGBT center theoretical foundations. *Journal of Critical Thought and Praxis*, *4*(2), 2. doi:10.31274/jctp-180810-48
Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
Strong, S. I. (2017). Alternative facts and the post-truth society: Meeting the challenge. *University of Pennsylvania Law Review Online*, *165*(137), 139–146.
Sutherland, J. A., & Feltey, K. (2013). *Cinematic sociology: Social life in film* (2nd ed.). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
Szymanski, D. M., & Mikorski, R. (2016). External and internalized heterosexism, meaning in life, and psychological distress. *Journal of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*, *3*(3), 265–274. doi:10.1037/sgd0000182
Ward, L. M. (2003). Understanding the role of entertainment media in the sexual socialization of American youth: A review of empirical research. *Developmental Review*, *23*(3), 347–388. doi:10.1016/S0273-2297(03)00013-3
Weiler, K. (1991). Freire and a feminist pedagogy of difference. *Harvard Educational Review*, *61*(4), 449–474. doi:10.17763/haer.61.4.a102265jl68rju84
Wilson, M. M. (2014). Hate crime victimization, 2004-2012 – Statistical tables. Bureau of Justice Studies (BJS). Retrieved from http://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbdetail&iid=4883 doi:10.3310/hta19030
Woodford, M. R., Chonody, J. M., Kulick, A., Brennan, D. J., & Renn, K. (2015). The LGBQ microaggressions on campus scale: A scale development and validation study. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *62*(12), 1660–1687. doi:10.1080/00918369.2015.1078205

Cogent Education **(ISSN: 2331-186X) is published by Cogent OA, part of Taylor & Francis Group.**