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Girls Get Free Drinks: Undergraduates' Misunderstandings of Heterosexual Privilege

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ABSTRACT

Heterosexual privilege is a challenging concept to teach in undergraduate courses. Using data from self-reflection essays on the first and last days of the semester, we present students' learning and growth in their understanding of heterosexual privilege and their ability to distinguish it from cisgender privilege. The majority of students accurately identified an instance of heterosexual privilege in their lives and discussed the counterpart to privilege: the marginalization and/or disenfranchisement experienced by individuals who hold other sexual identities. This article highlights the two most common misunderstandings of heterosexual privilege that emerged in students' writing. On the first day of class, 18.2% outright denied that heterosexual privilege exists, and 17.6% conflated gender with sexuality. It reduced to 11.9% and 11.3%, respectively, on the last day of class. We saw growth in students' sophistication of perspective even for some students who demonstrated these misunderstandings at the end of the term.

KEYWORDS

Bisexual; cisgender privilege; gay; gender; heterosexual privilege; higher education; lesbian; transgender; and queer/questioning (LGBTQ); undergraduate teaching and learning

A comprehensive understanding of the disadvantage that some groups face requires more than knowledge of the social marginalization and political disenfranchisement those groups experience. It also requires an understanding of privilege, the counterpart to disadvantage. Disadvantage does not exist as an independent social dynamic. It is inextricably paired with privilege because privilege is always garnered at the expense of others (Woods, 2014). When one group experiences disadvantage, another group necessarily experiences privilege (Johnson, 2001). Thus a focus on disadvantage alone in our teaching about the struggles of marginalized groups can allow privilege to remain invisible.

This is as true for heterosexual privilege as it is for other forms of privilege (Johnson, 2001; Kimmel, 2014). Heterosexual privilege includes “both the individual and institutional privileges (unearned advantages, resources, and rights given without any effort on an individual's part) that favor straight persons, relations, marriages, and families over nonstraight ones” (Dean,

2014, p. 26). Although it is critically important to foster students' understanding of the obstacles that the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer/questioning (LGBQ) community face, we must not neglect heterosexual privilege as a key component of those dynamics (Case & Stewart, 2010; Evans & Broido, 2005; Rocco & Gallagher, 2006; Simoni & Walters, 2001).

On many college campuses, faculty and administrations seek more for their students than an understanding of inequality between advantaged and disadvantaged groups. An additional pedagogical goal for some is to encourage students to behave in more socially just ways, in particular that heterosexual and cisgender (those whose gender identities align with the sex they were assigned at birth) students respond to their own privilege by acting as allies to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning (LGBTQ) community (Goldstein & Davis, 2010; Munin & Speight, 2010; Ryan, Broad, Walsh, & Nutter, 2013). Privilege awareness can also lead heterosexual and cisgender students to create more welcoming and inclusive campus climates for LGBTQ students, staff, and faculty (Holmes & Cahill, 2003; Iconis, 2010; Rankin, 2005, 2006; Robbins & McGowan, 2016).

Fostering a more welcoming campus climate was a goal of this project, but we did not exclusively target heterosexual or cisgender students. On our campus, courses on sexuality have been rare. We taught four LGBTQ-themed courses concurrently. This article analyzes our undergraduates' learning on heterosexual privilege. We evaluated their ability to identify instances of heterosexual privilege and to articulate awareness of the disadvantage for others that allows for that privilege to be possible. We focus on students' most common misunderstandings to highlight the challenges in teaching on heterosexual privilege. Students often enter courses with deeply held misconceptions (Grauerholz, 2007) that can persist even when they are directly addressed in the curriculum (Edwards, 2010; Hubbard & De Welde, 2003; Simoni, 1996); thus pedagogy around heterosexual privilege can be difficult.

Privilege is a wider concept with which majority college students struggle, including White privilege, male privilege, and able-bodied privilege (Johnson, 2001; Kafer, 2003; Kimmel & Ferber, 2014; McIntosh, 2011; Watt, 2007; Wise, 2008). One reason that understanding privilege can be elusive is because privilege exists in different degrees in various arenas of a person's life. We are all members of assorted groups, some that carry relative disadvantage, others relative privilege. Thus students' personal histories rarely give them a clear perspective on institutionalized and pervasive forms of it. Heterosexual privilege can be particularly challenging because, unlike race or gender, there is a social expectation of "compulsory heterosexuality" (Rich, 1980), whereby individuals are assumed to be straight unless they reveal themselves otherwise (Nunn & Bolt, 2015). As Dean (2014) articulated, straight individuals enjoy "sexual-gender privilege" because in our current "post-closeted" cultural context, "sexual desire and identity are consolidated

into the master categories of a binary divide: homosexuality and heterosexuality. Sexual desire is now seen as organizing not only one's choice of a partner but a wide range of aspects unrelated to sexual desire, ranging from one's personality and taste in cultural products like clothing styles and grooming habits to leisure activities and occupational pursuits" (p. 30). In the United States cultural context a person who does not conform to gender expectations is typically perceived as signaling an LGBTQ identity (Connell, 2015; Tauches, 2011; Worthen, 2013). Thus it can be difficult for students to disentangle gender expression from sexual identity because they are widely seen as synonymous (Miller & Lucal, 2009).

Of course, gender expression is not equivalent to sexual orientation, nor is sexual orientation confined to the binary categories of heterosexual and homosexual. Nonetheless, this misperception often results in gender nonconforming individuals being targeted by heterosexist and homophobic acts because they are perceived to be gay or lesbian (Haskell & Burtch, 2010; Silverschanz, Cortina, Konik, & Magley, 2008). This misperception further contributes to confusion over transgender individuals,¹ who are often assumed to be gay because their gender identity differs from the gender they were assigned at birth. Following the misguided logic of "gender equals sexuality," transgender people are believed to automatically experience same-sex attraction (Girshick, 2008; Schilt & Westbrook, 2009). In fact, many people who identify as transgender, genderqueer, or gender fluid also identify as heterosexual. Confusion over gender and sexuality, particularly relating to transgender people, can complicate pedagogical work aimed at addressing disadvantages facing different members of the LGBTQ community. As Teich (2012) wrote, mainstream use of the acronym LGBTQ (or LGBT, or GBLT, in its other common configurations) has caught on, but "T is often lost in the shuffle" because "Many people have picked up GLBT as a direct replacement for the phrase gay and lesbian" (p. 14). To be sensitive to this dynamic, we use LGBQ (without the T) when referring to sexual identities.

The gender–sexuality relationship is complex, and it is critical to recognize if we are to understand how heteronormativity, heterosexism, and cisgenderism create a system of simultaneous oppression for the LGBTQ community and privilege for the cisgender and heterosexual communities. Heteronormativity is "the belief that heterosexuality is the natural, normal, and ideal form of sexuality—the way people *should* be. All other forms of sexuality are subordinate and devalued" (Nunn & Bolt, 2015, p. 278). Heteronormativity allows room for alternative forms of sexuality to exist and even to be accepted as legitimate, yet they are viewed as less desirable or less ideal than heterosexuality. Thus heteronormative environments also allow room for heterosexism to flourish. Heterosexism is "an ideology that not only privileges heterosexuality but also actively degrades and punishes any alternative, non-heterosexual constellations of relationships, identities, and behaviors. Heterosexism breeds homophobia, which is the more violent and extreme

expression of heterosexism that targets non-heterosexuality for abuse” (Nunn & Bolt, 2015, p. 278). Importantly, heterosexism in our contemporary U.S. cultural context requires a gender system of two opposite and complementary genders to work (Kimport, 2009; Schilt & Westbrook, 2009). Heterosexism is predicated on the assumption that the superior form of sexuality is one where maleness and femaleness join in pairs not just in sexual union to procreate, but also where masculinity and femininity—which are gender projects—join in pairs to complement each other in everyday social and political life. Further, cisgender individuals are seen as the most legitimate participants in heterosexual unions, which is one of many forms of cisgender privilege (A. H. Johnson, 2015; Robbins & McGowan, 2016). Worthen (2016) described this combination as “hetero-cis-normativity.”

Methods

Our data come from undergraduates enrolled in a sexual diversity cluster of upper-division courses taught by the four authors (see Table 1).

Our university is an independent Roman Catholic institution, which has a history of sometimes supporting the LGBTQ and ally community and other times falling short of support for fear of transgressing official Catholic teachings and offending alumni and potential donors. Few courses focus explicitly on sexual diversity. Ours are the first to measure student learning and attitudes on sexual diversity. Most studies of sexual diversity curricula have been conducted at secular universities. There is a dearth of literature on LGBTQ curricula in religiously affiliated institutions (Rockenbach & Crandall, 2016).

Our student population differs from most secular universities. Approximately 50% of our student body identifies as Roman Catholic, with at least 25% having attended Catholic secondary schools. Many of our Catholic-identified students tell us they are baptized but not confirmed, meaning their relationship with the Church may be somewhat tenuous. Much of our student body leans politically conservative,² has relatively affluent socioeconomic backgrounds, and are aged 18–22. However, the students who self-selected into our courses held largely pro-LGBTQ attitudes. On the first day of class we administered a survey developed by Johnson and Greeley (2007), and approximately 90% agreed that

Table 1. Student participation in the study by percentage enrolled in each course.

Department	Economics	Sociology	Psychological Sciences	Theology & Religious Studies
Course Title	Out of the Closet and into the Business World	Sexuality and Borders	Explorations in Human Sexuality	Homosexuality and Christianity
2013	20 (90.9%)	30 (93.8%)	22 (91.6%)	25 (92.6%)
2015	10 (100%)	20 (90.0%)	21 (80.7%)	32 (100%)
Total	30 (93.8%)	50 (92.6%)	43 (86.0%)	57 (96.6%)

Note. Participation totals are higher than the number of cases we analyzed ($N = 159$) due to 21 participants neglecting to submit one of the two reflections.

LGBTQ people should have the same rights as heterosexual people. Thus students in our cluster were friendly to the LGBTQ community, though our institution historically is not.

We taught the four courses concurrently in 2013 and again in 2015 (see [Table 1](#)). Each course taught discipline-specific LGBTQ content, though they were open to non-majors. We brought the students from all four courses together for four to six co-curricular events such as a transgender guest speaker, a same-sex marriage film screening and discussion, and a walking tour of the local “gayborhood.” One hundred and fifty-nine total students (79% of those enrolled) across the two semesters allowed their coursework to be used for this research.³ Participants included 49 men, 109 women, and one person identifying as “other.” Efforts to include sexual orientation on surveys have received pushback at our university, so we did not systematically collect it; however, 25 students (15.7%) self-disclosed an LGBTQ identity at some point in the course. To gauge students’ learning and growth around heterosexual privilege across the semester, we assigned the same self-reflection essay on the first day of the course before any teaching on the concept of privilege and again on the last day. The prompt was: “Reflect on a time (or an experience or an interaction) when you gained privilege or power due to your sexual orientation and discuss why. What do you think would have been different about that experience if you had held a different sexual orientation?” Our intention was to encourage heterosexual students to identify their own heterosexual privilege and for LGBTQ students to identify whether they experience spaces or interactions that disrupt heterosexual privilege. We anticipated that many LGBTQ students would respond that they do not experience privilege. However, we discovered that the prompt’s phrasing made it difficult for our LGBTQ students to feel confident that they were responding “correctly,” especially if they did not feel comfortable outing themselves in their answer. We took the opportunity to have a teachable moment in each course, discussing the heteronormative bias of the prompt, as it assumes that everyone has experienced heterosexual privilege. We amended it the second time we taught the cluster, so that the prompt read: “Reflect on a time (or an experience or an interaction) when you *or someone you know* gained privilege or power due to *their* sexual orientation. . .” We minimized changes so we could systematically compare responses from both years, though we acknowledge that the second prompt still suffers from having multiple possible interpretations. We assessed the self-reflections on multiple aspects; however, this article presents only heterosexual privilege and the relationship between gender and sexuality.

Results

The overwhelming majority of students (78%) in all four courses in both semesters were able to successfully identify an instance of heterosexual privilege in their reflection essays, and overall we saw growth from the

Table 2. Frequency and percentages of most common misunderstandings of heterosexual privilege.

	Denial that Privilege Exists		Conflation of Gender and Sexuality	
	Start-of-Term	End-of-Term	Start-of-Term	End-of-Term
2013 (<i>N</i> = 88)	22 (25.0%)	14 (15.9%)	14 (15.9%)	6 (6.8%)
2015 (<i>N</i> = 71)	7 (9.9%)	5 (7.0%)	14 (19.7%)	12 (16.9%)
Total (<i>N</i> = 159)	29 (18.2%)	19 (11.9%)	28 (17.6%)	18 (11.3%)

start-of-term reflections to the end-of-term reflections in terms of: use of sensitive and appropriate vocabulary; recognition of the systemic and ubiquitous nature of heterosexual privilege; and use of more complex examples of both heterosexual privilege and disenfranchisement of the LGBTQ community (Sumner, Sgoutas-Emch, Nunn, & Kirkely, [forthcoming](#)). We found no meaningful differences in students' understandings of privilege among the different courses (e.g., economics and sociology). We present the two most common misunderstandings of heterosexual privilege: denial that heterosexual privilege exists, and conflation of gender and sexuality (see [Table 2](#)).

Denial that heterosexual privilege exists

In our classes, 29 start-of-term reflections (18.2%) included outright denials that heterosexual privilege exists. In the end-of-term reflections, it reduces to 19 (11.9%). A typical example of denial that heterosexual privilege exists comes from a start-of-term reflection in 2013:

No experiences or interactions are different because of my sexual preference because it is my personal information. People have thought and assumed, but I let them guess. If a thought of sexual orientation could give me more privilege or power, I just couldn't really grasp that understanding.

This student presents a serious misunderstanding of how privilege is embedded in situations where one is assumed to be heterosexual. The point of not disclosing one's "personal information" is likely to maintain access to heterosexual privilege that is due to heteronormativity. In her end-of-term reflection, this student does not express any greater awareness of how heterosexual privilege is garnered simply by not outing oneself as LGBQ, although she seems to be grappling a bit with these ideas, as evidenced in her opening sentence. She writes:

To my knowledge, I could have gained power by someone assuming my sexual orientation but at the end of the day there wouldn't be a true situation because I don't let people know my sexuality because it is none of their business who I do my business with. If there are signs on the surface of one way or the other, cool, but most likely you'll never know, so there is no way for me to know if I gained any specific privilege or not.

Many of the students who initially denied privilege were able to identify at least one unequivocal example of it by the end of the semester, usually marriage inequality, a heated media topic in 2013 and 2015, or freedom to show heterosexual affection in public without fear.

Not recognizing that the assumption of heterosexuality confers privilege was the most common misunderstanding expressed by privilege deniers; however, various other misconceptions emerged as well. For example, in 2013 a student saw heterosexual privilege as overshadowed by gender inequality in her start-of-term reflection:

I don't necessarily think there is any specific experience in which my sexual orientation put me in a position of power. In fact, sometimes I feel like a victim of my heterosexual female identity. On weekends out at bars or in social settings sometimes I feel targeted by aggressive heterosexual males. At times I've even had to lie about my sexual orientation saying that I'm lesbian in order to try and avoid unwanted attention.

This is a misunderstanding of the intersectional nature of privilege. She fails to acknowledge that eschewing heterosexual privilege in bars might garner temporary protection from "aggressive" men, but it could potentially expose a woman to more threatening danger and violence. In the wider social world, it is not safer to be a lesbian. In her end-of-term reflection this student discussed concrete examples of how she experiences heterosexual privilege:

I think I gain privilege from my heterosexual orientation every day. The fact that I can walk around and hold my boyfriend's hand without worrying about the feelings or perceptions of others is a testament to that. My sexuality is never questioned, nobody asks me why I choose to live this way—as a heterosexual female.

Though this example is not particularly sophisticated, we view this kind of change over the semester as meaningful growth because the student has come to recognize the invisible and unquestioned nature of privilege, something that scholars confirm is a slippery dynamic for undergraduates to readily grasp (A. G. Johnson, 2001; Kimmel & Ferber, 2014).

Additionally, some students wrote a statement that outright denied the existence of heterosexual privilege alongside clear examples of privilege and/or disadvantage for the LGBTQ community. A typical example comes from a student's end-of-term reflection in 2015:

There hasn't been many times where I have seen or experienced advantages for being gay or straight, or seeing people get ahead because of it ... In the business world I think a straight powerful man would have an easier time when it comes to Wall Street and a gay man would have an easier time working in the fashion industry or editorials. This is, again, stereotypical, but in the society we live these are the known advantages so it would be dumb not to take advantage of them ...

there are known advantages and I don't think they are right, or that they even exist, but sometimes the universe just deals you a hand and you have to work with it. I think that I will use some advantages that come with being gay, since now minorities are so protected that you get to have some privileges.

This student expresses ambivalence as he offers examples where he views heterosexual men and gay men each having “advantages” that he does not “think are right or that they even exist.” He also fails to recognize that the fact that LGBTQ individuals are protected by laws is an unequivocal sign that they have been routinely denied opportunities. Protections do not grant privilege—instead, they seek to redress the systemic injustice that itself is the backbone of heterosexual privilege. This student writes it off as “a hand” the universe “deals you,” an individualistic perspective rather than a recognition of privilege’s institutional nature. That this student self-identifies as gay yet still struggles to recognize heterosexual privilege is an indicator that heterosexual students are not the only ones who benefit from teaching and learning on privilege. In his start-of-semester reflection he did not outright deny that heterosexual privilege exists; he wrote on transgender celebrities whom he described as privileged. This illustrates how it comes to be that 29 students (18.2%) denied the existence of heterosexual privilege in their start-of-term reflections, dropping to 19 (11.9%) in end-of-term reflections, but those 19 are not all the same students who were initially privilege deniers at the start of the semester. In fact, only nine students (5.7%) denied the existence of heterosexual privilege at the start and at the end of the term. This means that 20 initial privilege deniers correctly identified instances of privilege at the end of the semester. The remaining 10, such as this one, were cases where content shifted from the first reflection to the second, and denial emerged only in the latter. We view this as evidence that one semester of exposure to sexual diversity curriculum is inadequate to bring all students to the level of awareness and sophisticated thinking of our pedagogical goals. Students such as this one are clearly still in the process of sorting through their ambivalence about privilege and how it operates in social and political life, even on the last day of class.

Conflation of gender and sexuality

The second major misunderstanding that emerged in students’ reflections was confusion between gender and sexuality. Our prompt explicitly uses the word *sexuality*. Yet some students offered examples of gender privilege instead, or a combination of the two where the student did not analytically separate gender from sexuality in ways our curricula explored. There were 28 cases (17.6%) in the start-of-term reflections and 18 (11.3%) in the end-of-term reflections. These numbers include seven cases (4.4%) of the same student expressing conflation in both reflections.

Some were a straightforward conflation of gender and sexuality, as in this student's end-of-term reflection in 2013:

A time when I gained a power or privilege due to my sexual orientation was when I was hired for a job. The job was a carryout at a store. I was given the job over a girl while she got a job being a cashier. If I had been a girl I feel another guy would have got the job ... it was because the boss saw being a carryout as a 'manly' job and being a cashier as a 'girly' job.

We describe this as straightforward because the response confuses the term *sexual orientation* with gender. Such confusion is not entirely unexpected given Dean's concept of gender-sexual privilege, though sexuality is glaringly absent here. Most reflections that we scored as conflation had greater nuance, as illustrated by another student's start-of-term reflection in 2013:

I would say being a young adult female and in college I experience this [power or privilege due to sexuality] quite often. Whether it is at a party or a bar I have noticed it is easy for my friends to get in and even easier to pay for nothing that evening.

This was a common type of response, particularly among women students,⁴ asserting that not paying for drinks, receiving expensive gifts from male suitors, or flirting their way out of a traffic ticket are embodiments of heterosexual privilege. Although gender and sexuality are both at play in such scenarios, this response is typical in that it neglects to articulate how being a "young adult female" is connected to assumptions of heterosexuality when she is offered free drinks by men in exchange for the possibility (real or imagined) of a romantic or sexual encounter to follow. She treats gender dynamics and sexuality dynamics as synonymous. Although they are related in important ways and are intertwined in interactions in social contexts such as parties and bars, we want our students to articulate the relationship between them, rather than mistake them for interchangeable elements. A woman does not need to be heterosexual to be offered drinks or successfully sweet-talk her way out of a ticket. She simply needs to present herself in a gendered way that does not dispel the man's assumption that she finds him romantically or sexually appealing.

In her end-of-term reflection, this same student articulated a more sophisticated awareness of the ways that heteronormative environments affect how safe and comfortable one feels expressing one's sexuality. She wrote:

I would say that every time I go out in public I have power or privilege due to my sexual orientation. I am heterosexual and I never think twice when I kiss or hug my boyfriend in a public place. It is never a concern if someone I know may see me or if a stranger will judge me. Because of this course I have realized how different my daily thoughts are compared to people who identify as homosexual due to our heteronormative society ... I cannot imagine not being able to be proud of the

person I am dating and walk down the street holding their hand just because society labels us as deviant. It would break my heart and probably cause a lot of stress and anxiety in my life.

She does not conflate gender and sexuality in her end-of-term reflection. Although we cannot be confident that her initial confusion is completely resolved since she does not discuss an example of heterosexual privilege that is entwined with gender, we view this as growth over the semester because she so clearly identifies examples of privilege specific to heterosexuality.

Some confluences of gender and sexuality happened when students described examples of transgender individuals being excluded from privilege. Ideally, students would be able to separate cisgender privilege from heterosexual privilege, that is, to discuss the social and political obstacles that transgender individuals face while clarifying that being transgender is entirely separate from sexual orientation. However, not all students achieved this level of understanding. For example, in 2015, a student wrote in her end-of-term reflection:

I have one friend who is transgender . . . She has told me that when she goes out to a club or party she is often verbally abused by women and men. She has been beaten and raped because she does not fit in with what people consider to be normal . . . She has had several boyfriends but all have treated her badly. I believe that if she was born female and if her sexual orientation was different, she would not be undergoing all of the abuse that she is going through now.

The trans woman being described here dates men, and the student mistakes her gender identity (female) combined with her interest in men as homosexuality due to her assigned sex at birth (male). Rather than describing this as an instance when transgender discrimination was more salient than heterosexual privilege, this student treats transgender discrimination and LGBTQ discrimination as though both were direct opposites of heterosexual privilege.

Although this falls short of our goals for student learning, it shows some growth from her start-of-the-semester reflection where this student described the same trans woman as, “a family friend with GID [gender identity disorder]” and gave an example where her trans friend was arrested “for fighting in a club” but was treated more gently by the police than the other, presumably cisgender, women they arrested:

I am not sure if the police officers treating her more kindly than the other girls counts as her being privileged because of her sexual orientation, but they did admit to her that they were trying to be more mindful of people like her.

Rather than focusing on the more common scenario the trans woman faced at the hands of police, which the student describes as “other times where she has been arrested for fighting police officers were very aggressive with her and would call her names,” the student chooses to discuss this

instance of unprecedented kindness from the police. She makes a tentative claim that her friend's transgender identity garnered privilege in this situation. She goes on to lament her friend's special treatment as unfair to others:

I am glad the police officers treated her with respect. I just wish they would have treated all of the girls the same and would have been kinder to the other girls who were not transgender . . . if she was treated nicely because of her sexual orientation the other girls should have too because treating someone nicely should not be based upon sexual orientation.

There is a lot to unpack here, and we will focus on a few salient elements. The student clearly confuses gender identity with sexual orientation in both reflections. Yet taken together they show growth across the semester. First, she uses a more sensitive and up-to-date term when describing her friend. She originally refers to gender identity disorder, a controversial diagnosable medical disorder (Knudson, De Cuypere, & Bockting, 2010), which has been renamed "gender dysphoria" in the *DSM-5*. At the end of the semester, she exclusively uses the term *transgender*, which is embraced by many individuals who identify as such (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011; Girshick, 2008; Stryker & Aizura, 2013). Second, at the end of the semester she discusses the enduring and routine lack of privilege experienced by her friend due to her membership in the transgender community rather than mistaking a moment of relative civility in a larger set of abusive experiences for privilege.

This same student wraps up her end-of-term reflection this way:

This course really opened my eyes, before I just used to listen to her stories and comfort her. Now I am more aware of the social issues, proper vocabulary, the role of intersectionality, etc. Now I don't just want to comfort her, I want to do something about it. She and everyone who does not fit the "norm" should be treated with respect and equality regardless of their sexual orientation because we are all human.

This statement of feeling called to action was not an explicit goal of our course; however, it is a cornerstone of some LGBTQ-themed higher education courses (Goldstein & Davis, 2010; Munin & Speight, 2010; Ryan et al., 2013), and it is something we saw regularly in the end-of-term reflections.

As mentioned above, seven out of the 28 students who conflated gender and sexuality in their start-of-term reflection also confused the two in the end-of-term reflection, including the student with the trans woman friend. As there were 18 cases (11.3%) of gender conflation in the end-of-term reflections, this means that 11 students (6.9%) who did not conflate gender and sexuality initially did so at the end of the semester. Often, this was due to the student taking up an example of a transgender individual in the end-of-term reflection but falling short of explicitly disentangling sexuality from gender. Still, in many of those cases we view the pair of reflections as demonstrating growth because the student entered a more complicated

realm of gender-sexual privilege rather than relying on more easily recognizable examples of heterosexual privilege such as (then) marriage inequality.

In another 2015 example, a student denies the existence of heterosexual privilege at the start of the semester and conflates gender and sexuality at the end of the semester. Yet he still manages to demonstrate meaningful growth. He writes:

My girlfriend's roommate my sophomore year was bisexual ... her actions and comments sometimes came off as condescending ... I can't say that this type of behavior was strictly due to the fact that she is bisexual but it seems as though it is. She acted like she was just more knowledgeable and worldlier [sic]. I think she thought that she has experienced more intimate moments with both sexes and that opened her eyes to more worldviews ... it seems like this fact gave her more privilege to commenting on certain political issues, historical issues, or social issues. She knew she was different ... and she thought she was a more complete human being because of it.

Like the student who argued her transgender friend experienced privilege when the police were kind to her, we view this response as a failure to recognize the systemic social marginalization and political disenfranchisement that LGBTQ individuals face in daily life. This student was offended by the bisexual roommate because she did not take his views as seriously as her own, which indicates he is not used to having his perspective discounted due to his sexuality. Yet in his reflection there is a complete absence of acknowledgment of his own heterosexual privilege. Similar examples include a student who felt that her cross-dressing gay coworker was favored by the management of the clothing store where they both were employed. Another student felt slighted that her grandmother favored her gay cousin over the other grandchildren, herself included. Such claims might sound immature or self-indulgent, but it is important to recognize these examples as part of the process of discovering how privilege works. Such students must unlearn the misconception that privilege lies in exceptional moments of seeming favoritism that marginalized groups enjoy. Then they can begin to tackle a more comprehensive understanding of their own everyday privilege.

This seems to have happened for the student who was offended by his girlfriend's bisexual roommate. At the end of the semester he offers a more complicated view of the ways that heterosexual privilege and gender are intertwined. He writes:

My high school was an all boys Catholic high school. It was very sports centered ... There were definitely instances where some of my friends gained privilege by being heterosexual. They would just assume that girls wanted to be with them and were very aggressive with that notion ... They felt their athletic ability and heterosexual identity meant that they were normal and entitled to the normal life that is portrayed in the media ... lots of sex with attractive women. I think that if their sexual orientation were different, if they identified as LGBTQ, they would have

been scared to show their true identity and cover it up by acting heterosexual . . . It takes a lot of courage to be out.

This response conflates gender and sexuality to some degree, but in appropriate ways, according to Dean's concept of gender-sexual privilege. We view it as growth in this student's comprehension of sexual privilege across the semester, even though we scored it as conflation because the response ties masculine athleticism automatically with heterosexuality without acknowledging that such masculinity can also be salient in LGBQ identities.

Discussion

Pedagogy around heterosexual and cisgender privilege is challenging. Our findings highlight some students' resistance to recognizing privilege and others' deep-seated misunderstandings of the relationship between gender and sexuality. As Robbins and McGowan (2016) reminded us, "students bring their understandings of themselves and of gender to college environments . . . college environments also reflect gendered assumptions that reflect the larger society" (pp. 73–74). The same is true regarding students' understandings of sexuality. Enrolling in an LGBTQ-themed course is some students' first exposure to concepts that challenge their misconceptions. Thus LGBTQ-inclusive curricula is critically important if we hope for more socially just campuses and society (Miller & Lucal, 2009; Norton & Herek, 2013; Worthen, 2013).

Our study offers insight into pedagogical challenges at a politically conservative, religious institution, where tolerance for the LGBTQ community cannot be taken for granted. Overall, we found that most of our students' ability to accurately discuss heterosexual privilege, as distinct from cisgender privilege, improved after a one-semester course. However, for some students, learning was not straightforward; they ended the semester conflating gender and sexuality or denying privilege in new ways.

A limitation of our study is the prompt's wording, which had a heterosexual bias and multiple interpretations. Future research could resolve that issue and could also compare students across secular, religious, liberal, and conservative campuses. The insights from our study suggest that undergraduates would benefit from more than one course incorporating LGBTQ curricula, which has been shown to be true for diversity courses more broadly (Chang, 2002; Whitt, Edison, Pascarella, Terenzini, & Nora, 2001). Ideally, LGBTQ education would start earlier in undergraduates' lives.

Our findings also suggest that in LGBTQ-inclusive courses, an explicit focus on disentangling gender and sexuality is needed. This can be accomplished through targeted lectures and discussions; assigning texts such as Dean (2014) or Schilt and Westbrook (2009); and experiential learning assignments that

confront the intersection of gender and sexuality, followed by debriefing, such as Edwards's (2010) nail polish activity or Nunn and Bolt's (2015) rainbow bumper sticker activity. Students need opportunities to explore their own gender identities and sexual identities within the curriculum to better understand the dynamics of privilege that pervade U.S. society and their own lives.

Notes

1. Bisexual individuals also face misunderstandings, as they are not easily categorized in the binary.
2. In 2015, 38% of students surveyed identified themselves as politically conservative, compared to 23% liberal on the Diverse Learning Environment survey developed by the Higher Education Research Institute.
3. For more detailed information on recruitment, sampling, data collection, and so on, please contact the authors.
4. We ran *t* tests and found no significant differences across gender with regard to denial of privilege or gender conflation.

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