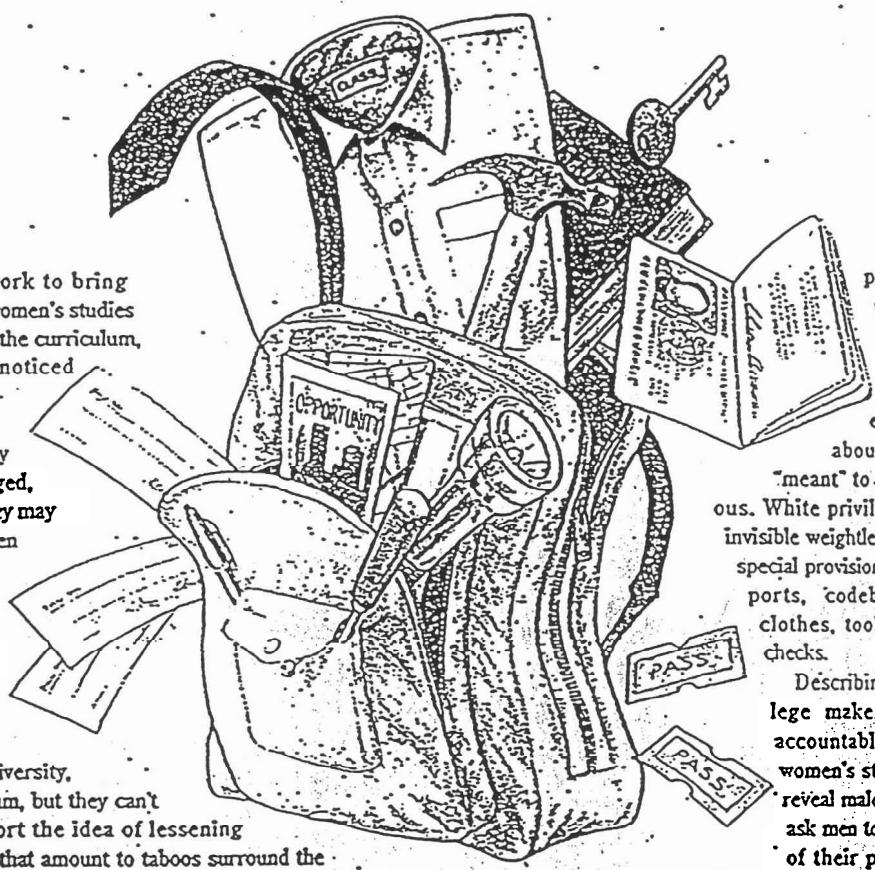
BY PEGGY MCINTOSH

UNPACKING THE INVISIBLE KNAPSACK

White Privilege



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Through work to bring material from women's studies into the rest of the curriculum, I have often noticed men's unwillingness to grant that they are overprivileged, even though they may grant that women are disadvantaged. They may say they will work to improve women's status, in the society, the university, or the curriculum, but they can't or won't support the idea of lessening men's. Denials that amount to taboos surround the subject of advantages that men gain from women's disadvantages. These denials protect male privilege from being fully acknowledged, lessened, or ended.

Thinking through unacknowledged male privilege as a phenomenon, I realized that, since hierarchies in our society are interlocking, there was most likely a phenomenon of white privilege that was similarly denied and protected. As a white person, I realized I had been taught about racism as something that puts others at a disadvantage, but had been taught not to see one of its corollary aspects, white privilege, which puts me at an advantage.

I think whites are carefully taught not to recognize white privilege, as males are taught not to recognize male privilege. So I have begun in an untutored way to ask what it is like to have white privilege. I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was "meant" to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks.

Describing white privilege makes one newly accountable. As we in women's studies work to reveal male privilege and ask men to give up some of their power, so one who writes about having white privilege must ask, "Having described it, what will I do to lessen or end it?"

After I realized the extent to which men work from a base of unacknowledged privilege, I understood that much of their oppressiveness was unconscious. Then I remembered the frequent charges from women of color that white women whom they encounter are oppressive. I began to understand why we are justly seen as oppressive, even when we don't see ourselves that way. I began to count the ways in which I enjoy unearned skin privilege and have been conditioned into oblivion about its existence.

My schooling gave me no training in seeing myself as an oppressor, as an unfairly advantaged person, or as a participant in a damaged culture. I was taught to see myself as an individual

whose moral state depended on her individual moral will. My schooling followed the pattern my colleague Elizabeth Minnich has pointed out: whites are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, normative, and average, and also ideal, so that when we work to benefit others, this is seen as work that will allow "them" to be more like "us."

Daily effects of white privilege

I decided to try to work on myself at least by identifying some of the daily effects of white privilege in my life. I have chosen those conditions that I think in my case attach somewhat more to skin-color privilege than to class, religion, ethnic status, or geographic location, though of course all these other factors are intricately intertwined. As far as I can tell, my African American coworkers, friends, and acquaintances with whom I come into daily or frequent contact in this particular time, place, and line of work cannot count on most of these conditions.

1. I can, if I wish, arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time.

2. If I should need to move, I can be pretty sure of renting or purchasing housing in an area that I can afford and in which I would want to live.

3. I can be pretty sure that my neighbors in such a location will be neutral or pleasant to me.

4. I can go shopping alone most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed.

5. I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely represented.

6. When I am told about our national heritage or about "civilization" I am shown that people of my color made it what it is.

7. I can be sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race.

8. If I want to, I can be pretty sure of finding a publisher for this piece on white privilege.

9. I can go into a music shop and count on finding the music of my race represented, into a supermarket and find the staple foods that fit with my cultural traditions, into a hairdresser's shop and find someone who can deal with my hair.

10. Whether I use checks, credit cards, or cash, I can count on my skin color not to work against the appearance of financial reliability.

11. I can arrange to protect my children most of the time from people who might not like them.

12. I can swear, or dress in second-hand clothes, or not answer letters without having people attribute these choices to the bad morals, the poverty, or the illiteracy of my race.

13. I can speak in public to a powerful male group without putting my race on trial.

14. I can do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to my race.

15. I am never asked to speak for all the people of my racial group.

16. I can remain oblivious of the language and customs of persons of color who constitute the world's majority, without feeling in my culture any penalty for such oblivion.

17. I can criticize our government and talk about how much I fear its policies and behavior without being seen as a cultural outsider.

18. I can be pretty sure that if I ask to talk to the "person in charge" I will be facing a person of my race.

19. If a traffic cop pulls me over, or if the IRS audits my tax return, I can be sure I haven't been singled out because of my race.

20. I can easily buy posters, postcards, picture books, greeting cards, dolls, toys, and children's magazines featuring people of my race.

21. I can go home from most meetings of organizations I belong to feeling somewhat tied in rather than isolated, out of place, outnumbered, unheard, held at a distance, or feared.

22. I can take a job with an affirmative action employer without having coworkers on the job suspect that I got it because of race.

23. I can choose public accommodation without fearing that people of my race cannot get in or will be mistreated in the places I have chosen.

24. I can be sure that if I need legal or medical help my race will not work against me.

25. If my day, week, or year is going badly, I need not ask of each negative episode or situation whether it has racial overtones.

26. I can choose blemish cover or bandages in "flesh" colors that more or less match my skin.

Elusive and fugitive

I repeatedly forgot each of the realizations on this list until I wrote them down. For me white privilege has turned out to be an elusive and fugitive subject. The pressure to avoid it is great, for in facing it I must give up the myth of meritocracy. If these things are true, this is not such a free country; one's life is not what one makes it; many doors open for certain people through no virtues of their own.

In unpacking this invisible knapsack of white privilege, I have listed conditions of daily experience that I once took for granted. Nor did I think of any of these perquisites as bad for the holder. I now think that we need a more finely differentiated taxonomy of privilege, for some of these varieties are only what one would want for everyone in a just society, and others give license to be ignorant, oblivious, arrogant, and destructive.

I see a pattern running through the matrix of white privilege, a pattern of assumptions that were passed on to me as a white person. There was one main piece of cultural turf; it was my own turf, and I was among those who could control the turf. *My skin color was an asset for any move I was educated to want to make.* I could think of myself as belonging in major ways and of making social systems work for me. I could freely disparage, fear, neglect, or be oblivious to anything outside of the dominant cultural forms. Being of the main culture, I could also criticize it fairly freely.

In proportion as my racial group was being made confident, comfortable, and oblivious, other groups were likely being made unconfident, uncomfortable, and alienated. Whiteness protected me from many kinds of hostility, distress, and violence, which I was being subtly trained to visit, in turn, upon people of color.

For this reason, the word "privilege" now seems to me to be misleading. We usually think of privilege as being a favored state, whether earned or conferred by birth or luck. Yet some of the conditions I have described here work systematically to overempower certain groups. Such

privilege simply *confers dominance* because of one's race or sex.

Earned strength, unearned power

I want, then, to distinguish between earned strength and unearned power conferred systemically. Power from unearned privilege can look like strength when it is in fact permission to escape or to dominate. But not all of the privileges on my list are inevitably damaging. Some, like the expectation that neighbors will be decent to you, or that your race will not count against you in court, should be the norm in a just society. Others, like the privilege to ignore less powerful people, destroy the humanity of the holders as well as the ignored group.

We might at least start by distinguishing between positive advantages, which we can work to spread, and negative types of advantage, which unless rejected will always reinforce our present hierarchies. For example, the feeling that one belongs within the human circle, as Native Americans say, should not be seen as privilege for a few. Ideally it is an *unearned entitlement*. At present, since only a few have it, it is an *unearned advantage* for them. This paper results from a process of coming to see that some of the power that I originally saw as attendant on being a human being in the United States consisted in *unearned advantage* and *conferred dominance*.

I have met very few men who are truly distressed about systemic, unearned male advantage and conferred dominance. And so one question for me and others like me is whether we will be like them, or whether we will get truly distressed, even outraged, about unearned race advantage and conferred dominance, and, if so, what we will do to lessen them. In any case, we need to do more work in identifying how they actually affect our daily lives. Many, perhaps most, of our white students in the United States think that racism doesn't affect them because they are not people of color; they do not see "whiteness" as a racial identity. In addition, since race and sex are not the only advantaging systems at work, we need similarly to examine the daily experience of having age advantage, or ethnic advantage, or physical ability, or advantage related to nationality, religion, or sexual orientation.

Difficulties and dangers surrounding the task of finding parallels are many. Since racism, sexism, and heterosexism are not the same, the advantages associated with them should not be seen as the same. In addition, it is hard to disentangle aspects of unearned advantage that rest more on social class, economic class, race, religion, sex, and ethnic identity than on other factors. Still, all of the oppressions are interlocking, as the members of the Combahee River Collective pointed out in their "Black Feminist Statement" of 1977.

One factor seems clear about all of the interlocking oppressions. They take both active forms, which we can see, and embedded forms, which as a member of the dominant group one is taught not to see. In my class and place, I did not see myself as a racist because I was taught to recognize racism only in individual acts of meanness by members of my group, never in invisible systems conferring unsought racial dominance on my group from birth.

Disapproving of the systems won't be enough to change them. I was taught to think that racism could end if white individuals changed their attitudes. But a "white" skin in the United States opens many doors for whites whether or not we approve of the way dominance has been conferred on us. Individual acts can palliate, but cannot end, these problems.

To redesign social systems we need first to acknowledge their colossal unseen dimensions. The silences and denials surrounding privilege are the key political tools here. They keep the thinking about equality or equity incomplete, protecting unearned advantage and conferred dominance by making these subjects taboo. Most talk by whites about equal opportunity seems to me now to be about equal opportunity to try to get into a position of dominance while denying that *systems* of dominance exist.

It seems to me that obliviousness about white advantage, like obliviousness about male advantage, is kept strongly inculturated in the United States so as to maintain the myth of meritocracy, the myth that democratic choice is equally available to all. Keeping most people unaware that freedom of confident action is there for just a small number of people props up those in power and serves to keep power in the hands of the same groups that have most of it already.

Although systemic change takes many decades, there are pressing questions for

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me and, I imagine, for some others like me if we raise our daily consciousness on the perquisites of being light-skinned. What will we do with such knowledge? As we know from watching men, it is an open question whether we will choose to use unearned advantage to weaken hidden systems of advantage, and whether we will use any of our arbitrarily awarded power to try to reconstruct power systems on a broader base.

Peggy McIntosh is Associate Director of the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women. *This essay is excerpted from Working Paper 189, "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming To See Correspondences Through Work in Women's Studies" (1988) by Peggy McIntosh; available for $5.00 from the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women, Wellesley MA 02181. (617) 431-1453. The working paper contains a longer list of privileges.*

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Getting Ready for Benjamin

Preparing Teachers for Sexual Diversity in the Classroom

Edited by Rita M. Kissen

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These seem to be critical questions during a time when even rural schools are confronting gay issues at an accelerating rate. At an anti-homophobia training I facilitated recently for local educators, a local high school teacher discussed a gay male senior who brought a male date to last year's prom and another situation in which he had to break up two girls who were smooching in the hallway and were late for class. An administrator from an isolated rural school discussed her difficulties locating credentialled teachers for her two schools and her fears of parental concerns if she wooed a local unemployed lesbian teacher to come to work for her district. A basketball coach discussed his handling of a conflict that arose when a star player's cheerleader girlfriend discovered her beau was having an affair with a male soccer player.

As my department chair prepares to raise the matter with local educational leaders, the constraints of being a rural state university become clear. We do not have the luxury of a surplus of field placements, as most urban districts have. If we eliminated districts that discriminate against lgb student teachers from inclusion on our list of field placements, we might not have enough placements to run our program. Likewise, it is unclear how local lgb citizens would feel about our department championing this matter. Many local closeted teachers seem to prefer that things remain unstated and unorganized. Urban schools situated in cities with organized gay communities have had to face gay issues head-on when gay political groups screen candidates for school boards on a range of gay-related matters.

As the focus of gay rights battles shifts from the urban gay enclaves I've lived in for twenty years to rural towns like the one in which I am now situated, I am sure the stark contrasts between urban schools and rural schools will create an entire new range of challenges, activist strategies, and, eventually, successes. Rural schools, for the most part, have rarely faced gay activists or others making demands that schools address homophobia and create antidiscrimination policies. At the same time, there are support programs structured on the gay-straight alliance model in three of our area high schools. An openly lesbian professor sits on a local school board. Eureka is home to our county's gay community center, where a support group for lgb youth meets weekly. Progress on gay issues in schools has started to take place, even in isolated, rural parts of our nation. Success will come when we fully welcome lgb students into our teacher preparation programs, support their struggles to manage their sexual identity along with their teacher identity, and ensure that employment discrimination is fully ended in our nation. These are daunting but necessary tasks as we look to the future.

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Teacher Educators and the Multicultural Closet: The Impact of Gay and Lesbian Content on an Undergraduate Teacher Education Seminar

James R. King and Roger Brindley

Current calls for multicultural education and other forms of diversity within education culture often stop short of the gay and lesbian ghetto. Although educating our students about diversity currently occupies a healthy position in most undergraduate teacher education programs, little writing on the issue of gay and lesbian inclusion has appeared in the professional literature (cf. Letts and Sears 2000). This chapter examines the failure of multicultural education to include sexual orientation, and more specifically, teachers' interaction with students who are gay, or who come from a gay or lesbian home life. From our perspectives, there appears little direction for professors who intend to explore gay and lesbian lives in professional education contexts. The two authors of this chapter are professors of elementary education. The first, King, taught the seminar that is examined in this chapter, and is the "I" who appears throughout it. The second author, Brindley, was a professional confidante during the seminar and subsequently translated the events of the seminar into relationships with teacher education literature.

The present emphasis on multicultural education in teacher preparation programs emanates from an increasingly diverse society, where the vast majority of teacher candidates are white, middle class, monolingual, and heterosexual females (Ladson-Billings 1995; Scott 1995). This imbalance has caused enormous tension for teacher educators, many of whom work on the assumption that to understand the "whole child" each teacher must respect the life experiences and worldview that the child brings to the classroom. If we accept that learners construct their own knowledge within sociocultural contexts (Cobb 1994), then it is vital for teachers to help children situate their own learning in personally meaningful and relevant ways. This philosophical

perspective has driven the present multicultural reform in teacher education programs.

The very essence of multicultural education is political. Powerful initiatives have focused on ethnic and racial disparities and the role of education in addressing these inequalities. The work of Banks, McLaren, and Sleeter, among others, reveals a progression from gender bias and equal opportunity within school culture and the wider society, to the role of socioeconomics in the success or failure of the school child, and to the implications for speakers of English as a second and third language. Yet rarely, if ever, has sexual orientation been discussed in the multicultural teacher education literature.

At the same time that multicultural education must object to racism, sexism, and other forms of social intolerance, the multicultural curriculum in our schools continues to focus on holidays and heroes (Banks 1994). In west central Florida in the year 2000, the elementary school multicultural curriculum essentially remains Columbus, Thanksgiving, Martin Luther King, and St. Patrick, or a curriculum of "fun, food, and festivals" (Brice-Heath 2000; Sleeter 1994). This, of course, simply confirms that knowledge is not neutral. The multicultural curriculum is a mirror of the power and social relationships within the larger society (Minnich 1990), and truth is relative to the cultural context and the operative power in the institution (Giroux 1983; McLaren 1989). This phenomenon certainly holds true in teacher education. If teacher educators accept the construct of multiple perspectives, then they must also accept the partiality of knowledge. We each take different meanings based on the "positionality" of our knowledge (McGee-Banks 2000). In light of this sociopolitical milieu, those advocating "equal time" for gay and lesbian perspectives in teacher education invariably find themselves on the outside looking in.

Access is sadly only part of the dilemma. Prospective educators enter programs predisposed toward personal theories of "good" teaching and "good" teachers based on their own life experiences (Bird et al. 1993; Holt-Reynolds 1991), and without having considered issues of cultural inequality (Xu 2000). Yet our preservice teachers *are* insiders, having spent well over twelve years in the educational system where "the reality of their everyday lives continues largely unaffected, as may their beliefs" (Pajares 1992, 232). Teacher educators who want their students to earnestly question their preexisting beliefs must create opportunities for cognitive dissonance (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 1990). Raising the cultural sensitivity of preservice teachers regarding the sexual orientations of their students and their students' families is a considerable challenge (Deering and Stanutz 1995), but culturally relevant pedagogy should be "designed to problematize teaching and encourage teachers to ask about the nature of the student-teacher relationship, the curriculum, schooling and society" (Ladson-Billings 1995, 483).

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of including gay and lesbian content, theme, and materials in a weekly undergraduate seminar. This intention itself constituted a study of what is meant by "gay and lesbian" and how these constructs might be represented to elementary education majors. These twin questions formed the basis of a semester inquiry. Although both authors share the responsibility for this report, much of the narrative of the study is reported in the first person to reflect the first author's experience.

The students who participated in this study were all junior-level elementary education majors at the University of South Florida, a large, urban, Carnegie I, state university. They were on a team, randomly assembled from entrants into elementary education. By virtue of the team structure, this group of thirty students (twenty-eight female, two male) took all their program course work as an intact group and would continue to do so until their final internship, five semesters later. As the faculty mentor for this team, I taught the weekly seminar that accompanied their first field placement, the Level I internship.

ACTIVITIES

I chose a queer perspective as a thematic approach for the team's weekly seminar. This meant a conscious agenda to understand the world of the classroom, including its students' and teachers' lives, as inclusive of gay and lesbian sexualities. The specific activities used to bring gay and lesbian content into the seminar were constructed with several characteristics in mind. The first was the consistency of the activity with elementary education culture, such as the projected experience that the students and the professor imagine that they will have in classrooms with children. A consistent use of these projected experiences comes to constitute a set of "normal" experiences that the undergraduates are accustomed to having as students in methods courses. A second characteristic for selecting particular activity frames was to represent certain "desirable" perspectives on gay and lesbian lives. This intention requires a certain essentializing of what is meant by gay and lesbian lives, similar to any other reduction of cultural themes used as classroom content. It is an agenda ripe for self-interrogation, which occurs later in this chapter. A third aspect of the chosen activities was a staging for comfort. Activities I perceived as "less threatening" were introduced earlier. Finally, the activities were designed to have a "feed forward" effect. That is, experiences and data from previous activities were available as a base of understanding for subsequent activities. The activities are described as they were ordered in the study.

Activity 1: Parent Conference with Lesbian Couple

I had not announced that we would be discussing gay and lesbian issues prior to introducing a mini-case of a parent conference with the two moms of a troubled child. The students in the seminar reported that they would not change their plans for the conference upon realizing that the parents were a lesbian couple. The focus should remain the child. However, nine students expressed reservations that they did not have the counseling expertise to intervene in the family issues that were part of the vignette, and which might have been affecting the troubled student's school work. I wondered if the same reservations would have been present if a heterosexual couple were having relationship struggles. What if the couple were not married? When we examined the different configurations for "couple" as parents of our students, we found some hesitance to "take on" the teacher's role in relation to gay- or lesbian-headed families. Students reported their discomfort, lack of preparation, and lack of experience in working with same-sex couples in parent-teacher conferences. I took this to mean that if a teacher "is not qualified" to talk about adult relationships, then she certainly can't talk about adult gay relationships. Furthermore, the students maintained that their responses would be the same if the student Jason were instead Janice.

In this first activity, I had chosen to focus on issues that affected the children my undergrads would have as students. I figured that the sexuality of parents would be more palatable to my students if it were included as part of a student-centered problem. My undergraduates agreed with my thinking. Yet we, as authors and also teachers, remain troubled by the very belief that I had planned for and hoped to capture. One student wrote: "Their sexual preference has nothing to do with how you teach their child." We now wonder about the clean separation, about the parts of Jason's life that now have no place in the classroom. Students' responses ranged from "Do not talk about relationships. Drop or change the subject" to "They both showed up—they care!" The separation here could be the same distancing that occurred when the team members agreed that they were not trained as family therapists and therefore were not qualified to talk through some of the family issues that were affecting Jason's classroom behavior.

Activity 2: Politically Active Lesbian Colleague

A second mini-case dealt with a teacher who was planning to teach a gay pride unit to her fifth graders. The question to the team was, would/should they help her in efforts to gain permission to teach the unit? Five students in the seminar stated that they would help; eleven explicitly said that they would not. The resistant comments came in two themes: It is okay to be gay, but not to teach about it (N=3), and sexual orientation is not an okay topic for this age (N=8). Other students (N=7) suggested that any decision would depend on factors at the time of the decision. One student wrote, "I would not sign the letter because to me that means that I support the gay issue. This does not mean that I hate gays. I just do not accept what they believe." I wrote in my notes, "Hate the sin, love the sinner." In contrast, another student wrote:

> If no one stood up for women's rights, I would probably be an uneducated, knocked up "sweetie pie." I was great friends with a gay guy and I would support him in *anything* he did. He opened my eyes to a world I was always told was wrong. He taught me just because it's different don't mean it's wrong. Besides kids are more understanding than adults, so children (5th graders) should be aware of the differences in people. That way they don't become a narrow minded adult.

Another student inadvertently brought up the pervasive heterosexual norm. "I don't feel that sexual orientation should be any part of the curriculum in elementary school, no matter homosexual or heterosexual." Of course, the point of bringing up orientation is to introduce the very notion that difference from heterosexuality is a fact in our students' lives, that that difference is simply okay. As teachers we have a professional responsibility to construct that understanding within our students. For me, this was a clear case of teaching for diversity within classrooms.

Activity 3: Children's Literature

On the third meeting of the seminar, I read *Heather Has Two Mommies* (Newman 1989), *Daddy's Roommate* (Willhoite 1990), and *The Library* (Stewart 1995). I had chosen the first two books because of notoriety stemming from their propensity to suffer censorship, not necessarily for their literary merit. The third book seemed to me to be a subtextual portrayal of a lesbian relationship between older women. With this third book, I wanted to make the point that introduction of gay and lesbian themes could be accomplished more subtly. Inadvertently, I added a dimension to the seminar that would follow throughout the study, that of *indirect representation*. I provided each student with an evaluation form based on a 5-point Likert scale

for appropriateness, quality, and usefulness of the three books. The results of the students' post-listening and post-viewing evaluations are presented in the following table:

Students' (N=29) Mean Ratings for Three Children's Books

	Appropriateness	*Quality*	*Use*
Heather	2.51	2.79	1.69
Daddy's	3.62	4.28	3.07
Library	4.34	4.79	4.38

Of those students who chose to write commentary, fourteen thought *Heather* had too much detail, was too graphic, and was too inclusive and technical on information about reproductive anatomy and processes. Four students thought colored pictures would be better. The students had few reactions to *Daddy's*. Four students liked the pictures; three thought the relationships were positive; and two thought the approach was a good one, that it was "gentle on students' minds." Seven students maintained that *Library* was not a lesbian story. Five students liked it because it was not blatant, and three students critiqued its stereotypic depiction of spinsters. When asked if they preferred a direct approach (*Heather, Daddy*) or an indirect approach (*Library*), eighteen of the thirty students chose the indirect approach. Two students preferred the more direct approach. Two students wouldn't use any of the materials because of bias regarding "the lifestyle" and "fear of the parents."

Activity 4: Lessons from the Matthew Shepard Tragedy

Matthew Shepard's murder has afforded diverse groups opportunities to take positions regarding his life and death. Yet this very access may also include judgments that do not accept individuals' rights to their own sexual lives. In this activity, the material facts of the Matthew Shepard story are brought into imagined classroom scenarios. The basic underlying question in the activity is, "How would you conduct such classroom talk?" As background information, I also distributed photocopies of the *Miami Herald*'s coverage on two consecutive days, as well as the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network's (GLSEN) online teaching suggestions for classroom discussions that might be conducted about the Shepard tragedy.

In their written responses and in an intense class discussion, the students agreed that the issue should be discussed but differed in the approaches they would choose. Most of the students in the seminar agreed that talking with their students about Shepard's torture and murder was legitimate. But they

would wait until their students brought it up. Comments that revealed self-preservation ("getting into trouble") as well as concern for their students' welfare ("begin with current events they've heard about") were part of the seminar discussion. I learned that it is not possible to know my students' motivations for what they plan without extended talk with them as individuals. It was humbling to relearn for myself something that I was intending to teach to them: the significance of the individual student. More internally, this caused me to wonder to what degree my own sexual orientation "set me up" to view my students' formulations as not good enough. Similarly, to what degree did my status as the "out gay professor" set me up to feel defensive?

Another perspective sheds light on the undergraduates' thinking about including the Shepard case:

> As far as violence of any type is concerned, I feel it is an issue that should and could be addressed. If the discussion with Matthew Shepard turns to his being gay, I would stop the discussion. I strongly believe this topic [his being gay] does not belong in elementary school. It always involves the discussion of sex and I don't want to ever be placed in that position. That is a topic (sex) that we place ourselves in danger of discussing.

Most students focused on their moral outrage at the inhumanity of the crime and disgust at hate crimes, rather than on Shepard's sexuality. Contrast this perspective with those that emerge from the following response:

> I would first tell the students that it is not right in God's eyes to be gay. However, God loves everyone for who he or she is and no one should be murdered over being gay.

In this response, Shepard's sexual orientation will be part of the classroom discussion, but to what end? And how does a teacher say the foregoing and still show compassion for the child? The authors realize and understand that for some people, including some of these students, variation in sexual orientation is understood through a lens of religious prohibition. As such, same-sex events, be they tragedy or comedy, will be colored for their future students with the prohibition. So a discussion of Matthew Shepard might more likely focus on "the crime" and less likely on "the life." However, we find the use of a religious dodge problematic for at least two reasons. First, including one's personal version of religious valuing as part of teaching is simply not professional. Second, it occurred to me that the use of "the religious" might be a disingenuous hedge against dealing with the central issues of homophobia and gay bashing.

Activity 5: Students' Responses to the Shepard Scenario

The next activity was based on the responses that the team had written in the previous week's class on Matthew Shepard's murder. I selected representative quotes for several of the themes that had emerged in the responses. These were typed and presented to the students. Students were asked to provide a written reaction to each of the quotes and then to meet in a small group to discuss the quotes and their reactions, and to synthesize what the small group had learned from the activity. Each small group synthesized their learning on chart paper and shared it with the other class members. Four of the six quotes elicited a range of divergent responses, either agreeing with the quote, reacting oppositely, or taking on the parts that they could agree with and dismissing the parts they couldn't use. The two exceptions, with largely unanimous responses, were quotes two and three. Quote number two that was originally presented to the class was:

> Yes, I do feel we should convene such talk. First, I would tell the students that it's not right in God's eyes to be gay. However, God loves everyone for who he or she is and no one should be murdered over being gay.

Everyone who chose to respond to quote number two (N=12), did so in the same way, in effect saying that they would not bring their religious beliefs into the classroom. I also believe in the separation of church and state. Yet part of me wanted my students to take on the substance of quote number two. My personal need was to see the illogic of quote number two undone in class. Instead, they all used what seemed to us like a safer gambit of "no religion in the classroom." The other quote with a consistent response set was number three, which follows:

> I would explore the violent aspects of this tragedy, but not the sexual aspects. Sexual preference in the classroom does not need to be discussed at this level.

Students were very comfortable with this reasoning. Many used short, affirmative statements to signal their agreement, such as "I feel exactly this way," "Yes, sexual preference does not belong in class—except health," and, "I agree because violence, not sex, needs to be addressed at the elementary school age." One student wrote what I interpreted as a substantively different response:

> Sexual preference needs to be discussed at every level. That is what caused the violence. People at any age should be accepting of everyone, no matter what their differences are. You can talk about sexual preference without talking about sex.

For the most part, the students on the team were more comfortable when they considered talking with their future students about violence than talking about what they perceived as sex or religion.

A TIME OF INDECISION

The reflexive analysis of the students' comments was completed by mid-semester, but during the week that followed several students asked if we (first author and the team) were going to do anything in seminar "besides the gay stuff." I was hurt. I felt as though the "interesting" and "controversial" approach I had taken to teach about diversity was misunderstood. My students, I thought, had only seen a repetitive, self-serving fixation on my part with my own sexuality.

I talked with a colleague who was also teaching this team, but for a different course. My colleague, Jenifer, explained it this way:

> Well, I think that the students get sick of hearing the "gay stuff." They don't want to be force fed. Just like you probably get sick of hearing my arguments against "process writing." Just like I get sick of political advertisements. Just like we are all sick of Monica Lewinsky. People will listen for awhile, then they say, "OK. Let's change the subject." It's not that they don't get it, or that they are against it. They just don't love it as much as you do.

From my perspective, Jenifer's cautions are about how direct I can be when I teach from an agenda. With a direct approach, I can be seen as teaching myself. The intent to purposefully include gay and lesbian lives as a way to operationalize difference and diversity can also be read by students as self-promotion (King and Schneider 2000). Accordingly, I changed the direction of the course to a less direct one. We began to focus on time management, discipline, parent involvement, things that the students were asking for. And with each, I wondered how to make the application for our work (my work) in the first half of the semester.

TEACHERS ARE FILTERS OR CONDUITS

"Gay," "lesbian," "homosexuality," and, more broadly, "difference" were in part defined by the activities and artifacts I introduced into the seminar. What a teacher chooses (or does not choose), why the choice was made, who the teacher is perceived to be while choosing, all become part of the learning. Although at times I am paralyzed by reflecting on these complexities, I do not

think such reflection is hopeless or futile. Re-viewing what I thought I was doing, what my students thought I was doing, and what we thought about each other while we learned together are all part of the lesson. My choices are not unlike those that my students made and will make.

I first noticed the filtering I was doing when, as part of the seminar, some of my students began contributing their experiences and stories about gay and lesbian friends and acquaintances. I monitored what I thought was permissible content about gay and lesbian lives brought in through my students' stories. I wanted no information to disrupt or threaten the image I was presenting of myself as the gay professor. This was the point at which I began to reflect on what my definitions of "gay and lesbian" were, and how I represented them to my students as exemplars. A second filter, then, is the "gay professor" I constructed for them. I intended to be casual (rather than formal), to be understated (rather than flamboyant), to be approachable and friendly. What is obvious now is that I was doing the same kind of monitoring of my own person as of what I brought into class. I was simply not aware that I was doing so. This monitoring is not unlike the representation of gay and lesbian identities that the media elects to portray every year as exemplars from the annual gay pride march. Although one can accuse the media of hyperbole, sensationalism, and synecdoche in their formulations of gay = drag queens, and lesbian = dykes on bikes, my monitoring was a similar act. The valency of the monitoring does not change the censuring it engenders. As an "out" and somewhat objectified "token" on my campus, I had experienced this uncomfortable self-awareness before. The added dimension in this case was my position as mentor to my team.

TEACHERS ARE PEOPLE IN TEACHER EDUCATION

In choosing how I wanted to be seen by my students, I carefully constructed an assimilationist view of my life as an "out gay man" and as a "gay professor." I brought my partner, Richard, into class with my (favorable) stories. I invited my students to call into my home life with the mention that if Richard answered the phone, they could leave a message. The significance of this strategy is revealed in its banality. It only becomes strategic in my foregrounding of mine as a "gay household." I purposefully represented us as Ozzie and Ozzie (as contrasted with Ozzie and Harriet, and always sans young Ricky!). I contrasted what I believed to be risky teaching (homosexuality) with unusually rich feedback, conversation, availability, and support during my observations of their classroom teaching with elementary students. I repeatedly appealed to the emerging notion of team building and reminded

the students that we would all be together for the next level of internship one year ahead.

THE WIDER IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHER EDUCATION

The preservice teachers' responses to the gay and lesbian content of the team seminar reveal a great deal about how and what they perceive and presume. Although other themes emerged from their verbal and written comments, three have immediate repercussions for teacher educators.

Power and Privilege

The unique culture of each team of preservice teachers needs to be recognized. In this situation, a group of first semester, junior-year undergraduates in elementary education who had just come together as a team were asked to discuss highly emotive concepts that spoke directly to their personal belief systems. Little wonder that many appeared hesitant to respond earnestly or to show their individual identities within the group culture. As soon as instructors make their opinions on any topic known, they are asking the student who wishes to disagree or give another perspective to take a huge leap of faith. If teacher educators want students to engage their personal beliefs and speak their minds, they must consciously create the right conditions in their classrooms. Students are well aware of who assigns their course grade, and failure to allow for unconditional and supportive discourse will simply result in students "playing the college game" (Bird et al. 1993, 266) and saying what they believe the instructor wants to hear.

In this particular study, power is compounded by the fact that I was sharing deeply held personal beliefs. Despite my efforts to create a caring and secure classroom environment, I *am* gay, and so my comments *were* personal. As such, I took the students' responses personally and was hurt by them. Further, the positionality of my knowledge was problematic. Mine was a privileged political act, and my students knew it. In much the same way that the objectivity and intent of an African American instructor speaking to issues of institutional racial bias in America today can be questioned by his or her students, so the perspectives and intentions of a gay male discussing sexual orientation can be second guessed, or worse, dismissed.

The Professional Obligation of the Teacher

Some of the comments of the team were disturbing to the authors, particularly as they reflected attitudes we see in the wider preservice teacher community.

The team members were able to make neat and tidy separations between their own cultural experiences and experiences of which they had little or no knowledge. We tell preservice teachers that they must get to know each child they teach as an individual. They are exhorted to teach the "whole child" and to assist children as they learn new concepts. They are encouraged to plan for personally meaningful and relevant curriculum delivery. Despite this, the team conversations show preservice teachers interweaving their professional obligation to children with their personal beliefs. So we hear of their intentions to tell children from gay and lesbian home lives that "It's not right in God's eyes to be gay," or of their plan to simply avoid the subject altogether. What will these preservice teachers do when they hear two school children yelling "fag" or "homo" or "dyke" at each other? Will they turn a blind eye? Few on the team seemed to realize that prohibiting gay and lesbian information may undermine the child's relationship with his or her homosexual parent(s). Using a personal opinion may place the teacher directly in conflict with the people the child loves and depends upon for nurturing and care. At least some of the team members failed to analyze where their professional obligations lie in this situation. How do we make gay and lesbian studies relevant and meaningful to the vast majority of our preservice teachers?

Perhaps one way to address these questions would be to explode the myths that emerged from this team. Despite a large body of research that children begin to notice differences in each other and start to build classificatory categories before preschool, one student suggested that young students won't create stereotypes until later years. There also seems to be a simplification of sexual orientation to the physical act of sex. Nowhere do these preservice teachers discuss concepts of caring, love, nurturing, sharing, monogamy, and so forth in their constructions of gays and lesbians. Elsewhere in the student discussions, a student asserted that he wouldn't focus on the treatment of gays and lesbians to highlight man's inhumanity. Rather he would consider the Holocaust. Clearly this student doesn't know of the hundreds of thousands of gays and lesbians murdered before and during World War II by the Nazis. But then why should he? If teachers and teacher educators elect to ignore or dismiss the heinous maltreatment of gays, then these students will never know. The message is simple. We have to actively help preservice teachers to embrace multiple perspectives and to appreciate that their professional obligation to children supersedes their personal opinions.

Fear

This final theme was apparent each time the students tried to situate the gay and lesbian conversation of the seminar in their future classrooms. They are

deeply concerned about the ramifications of raising, or even simply responding to, issues about sexual orientation. They fear the parents, they worry about what their principal will say and do, and they are anxious about how their colleagues will respond. In short, they are afraid they will lose their jobs and possibly ruin their careers. We believe there is a message here for teacher educators. We are doing preservice teachers a disservice if we emphasize gay and lesbian perspectives in our coursework without giving them the tools to apply this knowledge in their classrooms. Do we teach them how to seek parental permission before reading *Heather Has Two Mommies*? Do we help them refine and practice their rationale for why they include this content when, as is inevitable, they are asked? Are we there to support them after they graduate and need our professional guidance on these issues? Teacher educators need to realize that within our privileged world we are to some degree safe from censorship. It is too easy to "tell" students what they ought to do from the safety of the ivory tower. If we truly want to encourage preservice teachers to create classrooms respectful of sexual orientation and other cultural identities, we have to assist them as they dare to step out of the shadow of societal norms. After all, we want them to be applauded for their inclusive approach to teaching, rather than watch them become a target for retribution as they put their careers on the line.

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17

Can of Worms: A Queer TA in Teacher Ed.

Karleen Pendleton Jiménez

If you can talk to me in ways that show you understand that your knowledge of me, the world, and "the Right thing to do" will always be partial, interested, and potentially oppressive to others, and if I can do the same, then we can work together on shaping and reshaping alliances for constructing circumstances in which students of difference can thrive.

—Ellsworth, "Why Doesn't This Feel Empowering?" 115

Look Karleen, I'll open up the can of worms in classrooms just like you've asked of me. But you gotta tell me what it is that I'm supposed to do once it's open.

—Rebecca Norman, a teacher candidate

I wanted to convince them by sheer will. I thought if they saw my body enough, if they heard my voice, my jokes, some of my vulnerabilities, my loves, they would have to find me an acceptable human being. There were times when I went out of my way to help students, partly because of the care I felt for them, partly because of the care I wanted them to feel for me. If they spent a year with a real live lesbian instructor and didn't end up hating her, it could just possibly mess up their homophobia on some fundamental level.

This faith came from four years of teaching at San Diego State University. For most of this time I was a lecturer in Chicana/o studies courses such as composition and speech. The bulk of my students were eighteen-year-old Chicana/os from California. I was out to my classes, I included lesbian content in the readings and discussions, and I still received consistent outstanding evaluations. Only one class out of approximately twenty ever attacked me for my sexuality. Their attacks appeared in my written evaluations and in an angry silence I confronted each time I walked in to teach the course. Even