

Teaching About Human Sexuality and Sexual Orientation in an Introductory Sociology Class

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The Challenge

- ❖ Human sexuality and sexual orientation are complex and sensitive topics for undergraduate classrooms. However, they are important ones that need to be engaged with in a challenging, yet safe manner.
- ❖ We conducted a lesson study to develop a lesson plan for *The Social World* classes that would help students learn about human sexuality and sexual orientation and how the latter can function as a dimension of inequality.
- ❖ Lesson study goals:
 - Provide students with the analytical tools to better understand human sexuality and sexual orientation.
 - Give students an in-class experience that will help them better appreciate the breadth and depth of homophobia in our society.

Our Approach

- ❖ We had a number of meetings throughout the term to solidify our goals, review teaching materials and potential classroom exercises, and plan the eventual lesson.
- ❖ Our eventual lesson involved:
 - A clear set of analytical tools
 - An exercise examining homophobia
 - A guided visualization exercise
- ❖ The lesson was conducted across two class periods in Adam Driscoll's course with Lisa Kruse sitting in and observing.
- ❖ We had a final meeting to debrief the lesson, review its relative successes and failures, and come up with ideas for future lessons.

The Concepts

- ❖ To give students a clear analytical framework to use in understanding and discussing these topics, we gave a short lecture that explained and distinguished between:
 - **Sexual Orientation** - Who a given person is sexually and/or emotionally attracted to.
 - **Human Sexuality** - All of the socially constructed norms, values, and categories that are associated with sexual behavior in our society.

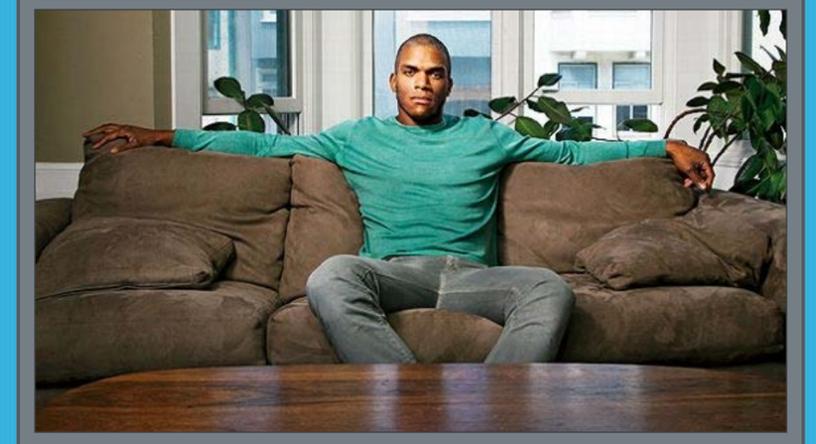
A Relatable Reading

- ❖ To help students understand how homophobia operates in our society, we assigned a popular-press reading.
- ❖ The reading, "Out on the Edge," by Danelle Morton, tells the story of an NFL lineman's experiences as a closeted gay professional athlete.
- ❖ In class, students in small groups of 3-4 discussed where in the reading they saw examples of homophobia.



Experimental Education

- ❖ To further help students appreciate the pervasiveness and subtlety of homophobia in our society, we conducted a guided visualization exercise.
- ❖ This exercise walked students through a fictitious world in which heterosexuals were the minority.
- ❖ Afterward, students did a two-minute free write starting with the prompt, "This exercise made me..." The class was then invited to share any of their thoughts or feelings from the exercise.



Classroom Observations

- ❖ Overall, we were pleased with the lesson and felt it was largely effective.
- ❖ Students seemed highly interested and engaged in both class periods and the discussion was quite lively.
- ❖ As a whole, the students appeared to "buy in" to the guided visualization exercise, aside from a small minority that seemed "checked out."
- ❖ Students participated heavily in the discussion following the guided visualization exercise, and seemed to regard it as a positive learning experience.

Ideas for the Future

- ❖ There should be some graded component to the Morton reading to ensure student participation.
- ❖ We could possibly replace the guided visualization exercise with a video that depicts a similar world to that described in the exercise.