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Panel: LGBT Issues in Higher Education Labor Relations - Campus Climate Issues for Gender & Sexual Minority Faculty: Making the Private Public

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CAMPUS CLIMATE ISSUES FOR GENDER & SEXUAL MINORITY FACULTY: MAKING THE PRIVATE PUBLIC

Sean Robinson
Morgan State University

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This research was funded in part by a research grant by the Provost's Office at Morgan State University.
DISCLOSURES & DISCLAIMERS

• I am a Queer, Gay, White, Male with a Working Class/Blue Collar background – this frames my entire world view, including the why, what, where, who and how of this study

• There is little objectivity in this study – this research is about subjectivities, positions, and individual meaning-making – theirs, mine, and yours

• I offer few interpretations of individuals’ lived experiences; instead I offer a series of presentations, re-presentations, and representations that capture pieces of the storied lives of my participants; the ultimate interpretation, and to some degree, the “so what,” is left up to you
Prior Literature

• Coming out in the classroom (Pryal, 2010)

• Specific Disciplines
  • Education (Sears, 2002)
  • Engineering (Bilimoria & Stewart, 2008)
  • Social Work (LaSala et al., 2008)

• Campus Climate (McNaron, 1997; Rankin et al., 2010; Tiemey, 1997; Vaccaro, 2012)

• Ethnography (Talburt, 2001)

• Individual Personal Narratives
  • Working class queers (Oldfield & Johnson, 2008)
  • Lesbians (Garber, 1994; Mintz & Rothblum, 1997)

• Limitations:
  • Often confined only to those who identify as gay or lesbian
  • Often include only full-time, and often only tenure track faculty
PARTICIPANTS

60 Faculty Interviews, averaged 90 minutes each

37 Female-identified
22 Male-identified
1 Trans* identified

Claimed Sexual Identities:
Gay, Hetero-Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Pansexual, Queer, Queer Gay, Queer Bisexual, Queer Lesbian, Queer Fem, Trans*, and Gender Queer
PARTICIPANTS

Faculty Rank/Position:

Adjunct/Part time – 2

Full time, Non-Tenure track (i.e., Visiting, Clinical, Professor of Practice, or Lecturer) -- 19

Assistant Professor (Tenure Track) -- 14

Associate Professor (Tenured) -- 11

Professor (Tenured) – 14 (includes 1 recently retired)
PARTICIPANTS

Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania
Boston University
Bowling Green State University (3)
California State University-Long Beach
Clemson University
Drake University
Elon University
Georgia Regents University
Grand Valley State University (2)
Indiana University
Iowa State University
James Madison University
Keiser University (FL)
Lehigh University
Merrimack College
New York University (2)
North Carolina State University
Northern Arizona University
Northwestern University
Oakland University
Ohio University
San Diego State University (2)
San Francisco State University (3)
Spring Hill College
SUNY- New Paltz
Syracuse University
Texas A&M
University of Alabama
University of Delaware
University of Denver (2)
University of Kansas
University of Kentucky
University of Maryland
University of Michigan
University of Missouri
University of North Carolina- Greensboro (4)
University of Puget Sound
University of Rhode Island
University of San Francisco
University of Southern Mississippi
University of Texas-San Antonio
University of Wisconsin-Madison
University of Washington
Washington College
Western Michigan University
PARTICIPANTS

Anthropology (3)
Apparel Design & Merchandising
Biology/Genetics (2)
Communication/Media/ Rhetoric Studies (3)
Dance
Educational Research
Educational Theatre
Educational/Sociocultural Foundations (2)
English Composition & Writing
English Literature (2)
Geological and Atmospheric Sciences
Health Education
Higher Education (9)
History
Human Development & Family Studies
Human Service and Public Health Studies
Journalism
Language & Literacy Education
Library Sciences
Literacy Education
Nursing (8)
Philosophy of Education
Physical Education Teacher Education
Physical Therapy
Political Science (2)
Professions in Deafness Programs
Psychology
Social Work (2)
Sociology
Sports Psychology
Teacher Education (3)
Theatre
Women’s Studies (2 primary; 4 as secondary)
OBSERVATIONS & CONCLUSIONS

• Even though many (but not all) of the “out” faculty in this study were able to negotiate within, outside of, and around “the closet” to build successful, productive academic careers, most acknowledged that it was a very hard thing to do.

• Those that were not “out”, or “in the closet with the door open” maintained a lot of time and energy to maintain separate identities.

• A few were very successful because of their identities --
  • Their service, research, scholarship, and teaching were all a direct result of their identity as an LGBQ individual.
  • Their narratives represent an ideology of the personal as political, and the political as personal.
OBSERVATIONS & CONCLUSIONS

Challenges

• Coming out and self-disclosure
• Managing micro-aggressions
• Confronting/challenging heteronormative policies and practices
• Finding research collaborators
• Limited on-campus support networks or mentoring
• Avoiding tokenism
OBSERVATIONS & CONCLUSIONS

Challenges

• Being labeled as an activist or trouble maker due to the incorporation of LGBTQ issues in research, service or teaching activities
• Having research being challenged as not credible or relevant, particularly for those without tenure
• Being fired or not being promoted because of sexuality
• Negative teaching evaluations when sexuality is brought into the classroom
• Overburdened with service to students or the campus by being seen as the token LGBQ faculty
OBSERVATIONS & CONCLUSIONS

Opportunities

• Engaging in research/service/teaching activities that were personally meaningful

• Working to combat heterosexism, and other types of “-isms” on campus, furthering social justice issues on campus or the larger community

• Contributing in substantial ways to scholarship on LGBTQ topics

• Forming cross-institutional collaborations

• Working across disciplinary lines of both teaching and research.
OBSERVATIONS & CONCLUSIONS

Opportunities

• Being a role model or mentor for students and other LGBTQ faculty

• Seeing the positive shifts and changes in policy and practice around sexual orientation, gender expression, as well as other social justice issues

• Living a more authentic life as an open LGBTQ faculty.
OBSERVATIONS & CONCLUSIONS

Cultural change will only happen when campuses shift:

Processes              Language

Policies               Structures
OBSERVATIONS & CONCLUSIONS

Hermeneutic Circle Approach
Parts to Whole to Parts
Start small, in 1 area of campus
Ask, Where else might this work?
Repeat elsewhere
Take it to a higher level

Decentering, destabilizing, engaging fluidity
Recognizing the “norm” isn’t necessarily “normal”
CAVEATS & CAUTIONS

While some of the larger meta-narratives are presented here, there are multiple stories to be told by each of the participants in this study.

Most of the institutions represented are public, so further understanding about private institutional cultures should be explored; likewise HBCUs, MSIs, and community colleges are absent from this study.

Only 3 Jesuit institutions are represented; other denominations should be explored.

Most of the participants in this study are white, which does not allow for a deeper understanding of the intersections of race with sexuality.