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Levels Of Homophobia Among Students Attending A Comprehensive Midwestern University

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This research is a product of the graduate program in [Counseling and Student Development](#) at Eastern Illinois University. [Find out more](#) about the program.

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Levels of Homophobia Among Students Attending

A Comprehensive Midwestern University

(TITLE)

BY

Amy J. Baumgart

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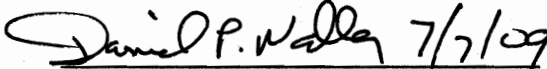
Master of Science in College Student Affairs

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

August 2009


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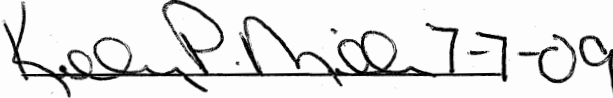
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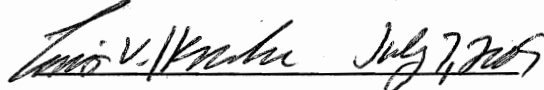
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ABSTRACT

This study looks at past research completed on the topic of homosexuality in the United States, including the history of acceptance of homosexual individuals and perceptions of homosexuality in the perspectives of religion, gender, and the law. In addition, the research looks at how the college experience tends to liberalize students. Putting these two ideas together, the study uses the Homosexual Attitude Scale and other demographic information gathering questions to determine the factors that contribute most prominently to homophobia in college students. The sample of students being studied are all undergraduates attending a public, Midwestern, comprehensive university. As a general overview, the results show that the students participating in this study tend to be more accepting than not of homosexuals. There are trends that suggest that gender and religion could be the two leading determining factors of homophobia. The discussion of results includes a glimpse at how colleges and universities can encourage a welcoming and accepting atmosphere to all walks of life.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Acting as an environment for change, the college experience is typically a transformational period of time for students. Regardless of the specific institutional mission, whether it is public, private, religiously affiliated, single gender, etc., the higher educational setting lays the groundwork for allowing students to discover more about themselves and society, both of the college and at large. Even to an experienced student, the college environment is sure to introduce each individual to new ideas and perspectives. Providing both formal and informal opportunities to explore different cultures, including racial, religious, sexual orientation, and so on, institutions of higher education promote learning both in and outside of the classroom. Of course, the student population of colleges can be determined by the mission of the college, which can act as natural selection to specific groups such as historically black colleges and universities, conservative Christian colleges, and single sex institutions. However, the educational transition from high school to college is naturally one of change and personal development, no matter at what point in life or route taken (e.g. community college, transferring between institutions, traditional four year experience).

A common saying is that you are a product of the rooms in which you have lived. Many students, especially traditional students attending college for the first time right out of high school, are the product of the rooms in which their families have permitted them to live and experience, or have merely not been given a chance to branch out and experience cultures much different than the ones in which they were raised (Schwartz &

Lindley, 2005). These experiences can be bound by geographic location, cultural boundaries, race, religious affiliation, and so on. Each of these factors can have an impact on the development of student attitudes on many subjects. For example, the Bible Belt, or section of the United States including the South and Midwest, is known for its prominently conservative stance on social issues and religious beliefs (Hastie, 2007). If a child is raised in this environment with little or no exposure to alternative or additional beliefs and ways of life, that child will most likely adopt the conservative perspective. On the other hand, if a child is brought up in a culture of exploration, free thinking, and acceptance, that child is more likely to not only tolerate but truly appreciate and embrace multiple lifestyles and concepts. This broad example illustrates how geography and religion can play a role in social conceptualization. Next is a narrower theory that is more controversial.

Homosexuality is a subject that was once largely taboo to society, but has become a topic of more discussion and wider acceptance in the past few decades. Generationally, it seems that homophobia is not as prominent a issue now as it has been historically (Ellis, 2002). However, there are still many recently documented instances of hate crimes and outward acts of disrespect, including hate speech, violence, and segregation toward homosexual individuals and groups (Rosik & Cruz, 2007). Recently, also, with the debate and legislation around constitutionalizing gay marriage, a fresh battle wound for both sides of the argument has appeared.

Even though specific groups and individuals might hold prejudices against people who identify themselves as homosexual, the typical college/university environment is more supportive of all lifestyles (Lance, 2008), providing equal opportunities for social

and educational groups such as the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Society (GLBT). In addition, classrooms and residence halls do not segregate students by sexual orientation. In fact, many schools support education on sexual orientation through offering guest speakers on hot topics and programs such as Gender Bender Balls in which students attend a school sponsored dance dressed as the opposite sex to learn about gender stereotypes and the transgender process. With general institutional acceptance and support, students attending college, especially in public schools, it is often likely for heterosexual students to at least be acquainted with a homosexual, if not to befriend someone of the opposite sexual orientation. An increased level of awareness paired with the liberal education offered in the college setting could have an impact on the levels of homophobia present in college students (Finlay & Walther, 2003).

The present research focuses on how levels of homophobia at the college level are affected by these characteristics and demographic features. It is hypothesized that students from more populated areas are affiliated with homosexual individuals or are homosexual themselves, have spent more time in college (living independently), and those not affiliated with a traditionally conservative religion will display lower levels of homophobia than is displayed among their counterparts.

CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

College as a Liberating Experience

The academic college experience, in a broad view for any school of study, is one that encourages students to take that developmental leap from accepting answers and reasoning as truth from authority figures to taking initiative on issues and developing personal opinions based on evidence and reasoning gathered through research. For many students, college is the first experience they have had in which they encounter first hand some of the moral issues in which they may have only heard, read, or discussed either casually or in a classroom setting. According to studies completed by Newcomb and colleagues, college students become more liberalized through their college years (Newcomb, 1957; Newcomb, Koenig, Flacks, & Warwick, 1967; Alwin, Cohen, & Newcomb, 1991; Hastie, 2007). Although this is not a new concept, Hastie explained that, as a general rule, college students will become less conservative as a result of further education, especially in socially related topics including prejudice toward minority groups and perceptions and attitudes toward change (2007). There are a number of factors that play into this liberalization including student socialization, newfound independence in thought inspired by the push to think critically, and increased first-hand experience approaching moral issues in academic and social environments. This being said, it seems reasonable to conclude that as students work through their college years, they tend to become more open minded, tolerant, and accepting of alternative lifestyles that have not always been fully embraced by the general society.

History of Homosexuality

An important factor when studying homosexuality is to remember that within the past four decades, in 1973, homosexuality was removed from the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM), finally claiming that homosexuality was not a mental illness (Smith & Pukall, 2008). Until then, homosexuality was a completely taboo subject and those individuals who were homosexual were considered mentally ill and shunned by society, as they did not act within the expected norm (Smith & Pukall, 2008). In the years following the removal of homosexuality from the DSM, homosexual individuals were not simply accepted widely by society because they were no longer considered to be mental health cases. Hate crimes, violence, and disrespect for homosexual individuals and groups were common. Since the 1970s there have been drastic measures for improvement in laws supporting gay rights, but nothing has eliminated homophobia that can still be detected in some groups and individuals (Lance, 2008).

Homophobia Defined

Weinberg (1972) defined the term homophobia as "a heterosexual person's dread of being in close proximity to homosexual men and women" (pp. 12). In years since, the researchers suggest that perhaps a new word for the term homophobia would be more closely defined as sexual prejudice, but with the same general connotation. No matter the label given to the aversion to homosexuals, research has shown that the fear in many Americans to homosexual individuals is a "persistent and irrational fear;" (pp. 10) it is a phobia (Lance, 2008).

Same sex sexual prejudice can be detected not only in everyday disrespectful language and segregation based on sexual orientation, but also in hate crimes targeted specifically at homosexuals because of their sexual identity (Lance, 2008). Homophobia is a blatant fear and aversion to homosexuals. There can be a distinct difference, however, between tolerance and acceptance of homosexuality. Tolerating sexually alternative lifestyles is much different than accepting individuals no matter their sexual identity, in that toleration suggests a judgment or condescending air. In short, there are many reactions to homosexuality, and anything short of acceptance of the lifestyle can be perceived negatively by homosexuals or those who are accepting.

A case in point of a hate crime targeted at an individual for his sexual orientation was the torture and murder of Matthew Shepard in 1998. He was a homosexual student of the University of Wyoming, who was taken by two men, tied to a fence, beaten into unconsciousness, and left to die. Though the case of his death was not resolved in court specifically as a hate crime, Matthew Shepard's body was not hidden after the crime; rather, it was left on display, perhaps to make a statement (O'Driscoll, 1999). It was out of hatred that his funeral was picketed by a fundamentalist Christian church, displaying signs reading "God Hates Fags" and other derogatory comments toward homosexuals (Wilkinson, 2004). With all of the publicity and media coverage, Matthew Shepard immediately became an icon for being victimized by hate crime, especially to college students (O'Driscoll, 1999).

It is safe to say that the media is the reason that the name Matthew Shepard would ring a bell as a household name. Matthew was not famous for the life he led, but because of the nature of his death. With the 'hate crime' label highlighted, newspapers, television

stations, and magazines were consumed by the story. The National Broadcasting Company (NBC) produced a made for TV movie, *The Matthew Shepard Story*, and the Home Box Office (HBO) came out with *The Laramie Project*, both of which followed an aspect of the story, the hate crime, the trial, and the outcome of the case (Al-Solaylee, 2002). However, not all instances of hate crime are so obvious or are given prominent attention. Homophobia and hate are not always portrayed as such belligerent acts. In fact, most cases are more subtle, and the source of this hate is worth researching.

Research completed by Kite and Whitley (1996) has shown that there are three major themes leading to negative feelings toward homosexuality. The three broad categories include: heterosexual discomfort/unease of being near or thinking of homosexual individuals and lifestyles; believing that homosexuality is a morally deviant lifestyle; and the fact that constitutional law does not support, but reinforces prejudice against homosexual relationships. Kite and Whitley's research findings can be used in correlation with the work of others previously discussed on multiple levels.

Gender and Homophobia

The emerging themes seem to be fitting in respect to gender differences playing a role in homophobia as men tend to report greater levels of negative feelings toward homosexuality than do women, with their negative feelings often being expressed as discomfort and unease in close proximity to homosexual individuals (Swank & Raiz, 2007; Kite & Whitley, 1996). Findings also show that men are more likely than women to report negative feelings, most likely due to the societal expectations of men to uphold the strong "manly man" stereotype, which would be thought to be soiled if men

supported homosexual behavior as acceptable (Kite & Whitley, 1996). A study by Davies (2004), took the research by Kite and Whitley even further, as the results of the research show that not only are men more likely to have negative feelings toward homosexuals, especially gay men, but they are also more likely to have negative feelings toward feminism. The conclusion drawn from this research is that men are more likely than women to support traditional gender roles, which results in the negative feelings toward alternatives to those traditional roles (Davies, 2004).

Religion and Homophobia

The next theme, homosexuality being construed as a morally deviant lifestyle, would be held by many conservative Christian doctrines. Thus many conservative Christian individuals support the traditional family and 'normal' gender roles, as defined by society. With negativity portrayed in doctrine, the result is often negative attitudes toward homosexuality in the religious group. Self-admittedly, people who are members of fundamentalist Christian denominations tend to be prejudiced toward homosexuals (Rowatt, Tsang, Kelly, LaMartina, McCullers, & McKinley, 2006). In a recent survey of young adults ranging in age from 16 to 29, (305 Christians and 440 non-Christians), a vast majority (80 percent of Christians and 91 percent of non-Christians) agreed that Christianity has an anti-homosexual attitude (polls find shifts by young evangelicals, 2007). These results demonstrate that fundamentalist Christians are willing to admit that their attitudes toward homosexuals are negative; society in general is not just being wrongly critical of fundamentalist viewpoints. Among incoming college students, expressions of prejudice toward homosexuals could be the result of attachment to the beliefs of parents, traditional attitudes that have been instilled throughout development,

or through involvement in a group that tolerates and/or encourages homophobia (Schwartz & Lindley, 2005).

Conservative Christian groups, like the one at the funeral in the Matthew Shepard case, are not alone in their homophobic feelings and reactions. A statistically significant relationship between religiousness and homophobia has been noted by Rowatt, LaBouff, Johnson, Froese, and Tsang (2009). In addition to religiousness, research completed by Swank and Raiz (2007) suggests that there are a number of common characteristics in individuals who are more likely to have negative feelings toward homosexuality or to be homophobic. The list includes children of homophobic parents, people living in rural areas, and individuals with little personal contact with homosexuals. In addition, other factors that have been determined to play a role in increased homophobia include race and gender.

Of course, conservative Christian groups are only one take on the religious perspective of homosexuality. Research on this specific subject is scarce. However, it can also be considered, for example, that the majority of the religious population of the Midwest claims Christianity as their religious preference. Therefore, even if not practicing Christians, many have been exposed to the Christian belief system in some capacity.

Homosexuality and the Law

The final theme presented by Kite and Whitley's writing focuses on the lack of legal and constitutional support of gay rights, meaning that the government itself harbors a homophobic attitude which can influence the society it governs (1996). Without the

support of the government, the citizens of the country are being given the legal permission to be prejudiced toward a group of people seeking, but not being offered, the same human rights as other groups of people. Before any kind of moral or attitudinal change can fully be made, human rights must be backed legally in order to support the moral frameworks for human rights, specifically in reference to gay rights (Ellis, 2002).

Even with the both systematic and attitudinal homophobia reported in research, it is important to keep in mind that, as mentioned previously, homosexuality is still a relatively new subject being openly discussed governmentally and socially. The past three decades have been instrumental in attaining increased acceptance and rights of homosexual citizens. In fact, with the recent movements in a number of states toward the legalization of either gay marriage or civil unions (legal acknowledgement of a relationship that grants the same benefits of a married man and woman), voices are speaking out loudly as both supporters and protesters express their opinions of the step toward social justice. Currently, gay marriage is legal in Iowa, Massachusetts, and Connecticut, with pending legalization in Vermont in September 2009. In addition, civil unions are legal in New Hampshire and New Jersey right now, and those states, along with Maine and New York, are considering gay marriage legislation (Associated Press, 2009).

Another interesting current situation that has created a stir with the legal debate on gay marriage began at the Miss USA Pageant on April 19, 2009, when Miss California contestant Carrie Prejean gave her opinion opposing gay marriage on the stage during the pageant. The question was asked of her by an openly gay celebrity blogger, Perez Hilton, who acted as a judge in the 2009 pageant. Since taking her stand, Prejean has been given

intense media coverage, including some very negative remarks on the blogger's website. Since the pageant, Prejean, who was crowned as the runner up of the Miss USA Pageant, has been actively campaigning against gay marriage, working closely with the National Organization for Marriage, which "...respects marriage [between a man and a woman] and the people who support it" (Celizic, 2009, pp.1). The Prejean controversy is an example of how the media has made the topic of gay marriage/civil unions almost a sensationalized topic. While, in some cases, Prejean was publicly criticized for responding to the question with less tact than a Miss USA candidate should, much of the coverage focused on Hilton's social blog website, www.perezhilton.com, where there were some very strongly worded and equally untactful arguments against Prejean. Though it would be difficult to measure, it would be interesting to discover how much impact social discrepancies such as this situation have on the opinions of the general public who read and/or watch the social media.

With the social media often taking the spotlight, sometimes meaningful litigation can be overshadowed. The Washington Post recently compiled a number of legal suits that ended favorably for homosexuals who were discriminated against. Among the examples were a photographer who was sued for refusing to photograph a couple's commitment ceremony, a psychologist who was fired for refusing relationship counseling to a lesbian, and a fertility doctor being barred from practice for refusing to artificially inseminate a lesbian woman (Salmon, 2009). Though each of these are small steps when compared to other legal battles, such as Proposition 8 in California, which is a ban on once legalized gay marriage, each little victory is a step toward justice for homosexuals and their supporters (Wildermuth, 2009).

However, institutions of higher education, especially divisions of student affairs, need be open minded and welcoming to new ideas, programs, and initiatives in order to increase awareness of current events and policies surrounding the topic of homosexuality, as well as encourage a campus culture that is accepting and welcoming to lifestyles that might be considered alternative to the societal norm. A position of open-mindedness will work to ensure the equal treatment of all students on campus, no matter their sexual identity, hoping to give each student the same opportunity for a developmental and successful college experience. Rosik, Griffith, and Cruz spoke about the reason for studying causes for homophobia and programs for eliminating negative feelings toward homosexuals, which can also be carried into higher education and student affairs missions. They stated, "The ultimate aim of research in this area is for all hostility and oppression based on sexual orientation to be eradicated, presumably including the elimination of opposing moral frameworks" (2007, p. 15).

CHAPTER III

Method

Participants

Undergraduate students, both residential and non-residential, at a public, Midwestern comprehensive university, were asked to take part in the study. This study employed a stratified sampling technique with the goal of achieving a representative sample of the larger population. The larger population consists of approximately 10,000 undergraduate students, which is comprised of 42 percent males and 58 percent females. In addition, the population is 78 percent Caucasian, 11 percent African American, 3 percent Hispanic, and 8 percent other (“other” refers to students who did not fit into categories provided). Students living off campus and commuting account for 58 percent of the population, while 42 percent live in campus housing. The instrument was distributed to 600 students via e-mail. The exact procedure will be explained in more detail in the section titled *Procedure*.

Results are based on responses from 201 students, with the male to female ratio being slightly skewed at 27 percent male and 73 percent female. In addition, 88 percent of participants are Caucasian, 9 percent African American, 2 percent Hispanic, and 1 percent other. The residential sampling return rate was nearly perfectly reflective of the larger population with 42 percent living in a residence hall or campus apartment and 58 percent living in off-campus housing and commuting.

Those students participating had their names entered into a drawing for a gift card reward. After completing the online survey, participants had the opportunity to save the

final screen of the survey confirming survey submission and e-mail the file to the researcher. This automatically entered the participants' names into the drawing. All student information and responses remained strictly confidential throughout the study.

Instrumentation

The Homosexual Attitude Scale (Kite & Deaux, 1986) was used for the study. This 21 item scale uses a Likert scale to assess "people's stereotypes, misconceptions, and anxieties about homosexuals. The measure contains a unidimensional factor representing a favorable or unfavorable evaluation of homosexuals" (Kite & Deaux, 1986, pp. 137). The scale has an internal consistency of .92 and a test-retest reliability of .71. The scale consistently uses the term "homosexual" instead of using gender specific "gay" and "lesbian," meaning that the reliability is not differing based on language and perception differences. Using the Likert scale, 11 of the 21 items are reverse scored in order to keep consistency with the scores associated with attitudes. Scale co-author, Dr. Mary Kite, provided express written permission for this scale to be used for research purposes (Appendix A). A copy of the cover letter and scale used in the study is included in Appendix B. In addition to those 21 questions are 11 questions used for gathering demographic and other information from participants that will be used in correlation with the Homosexual Attitude Scale to respond to research questions.

Procedure

The instrument was created through the university Center for Academic Technology Support department at the same university where the research was conducted. An online survey was created that allowed the researcher to develop a

specific instrument, administer the instrument, gather responses, and manipulate the data. Students asked to complete the survey were reached via e-mail address, with the goal of reaching as many students as possible, while maintaining confidentiality and consistency to help ensure validity. The appropriate number of student e-mail addresses were issued by the Information Technology Services department. The students were chosen through a statistical random sampling technique based on gender, race, and housing (on-campus vs. off-campus). In an attempt to increase the response rate, the survey was e-mailed out to participants on three different occasions. The e-mails were sent on December 2, 2008, December 12, 2008, and January 6, 2009. These dates fell during final exams for Fall 2008, during the winter break, and as student returned to the university from winter break. In addition, students were encouraged to complete the survey with an incentive of putting all responders names in a drawing to win a Visa Check Card. Students were asked that they complete the instrument only once.

Limitations of the Design

Because the instrument was distributed only to a percentage of students at a medium size, Midwestern, state university, the demographics of students participating in the study could tend to have comparable tendencies in answers based on similar backgrounds and cultures. Also, when studying an abstract concept as homophobia, perceived meaning of terms could affect the validity of the data collected. Measures will be taken to clearly define terms in a cover letter accompanying the scale in order to help prevent this.

In addition, in relying on e-mail and online survey submissions, the response rate was not as high as predicted, which created less sound information off of which to base responses to research questions. However, because the instrument was completed by participants online and at their own leisure, at a time that was convenient for them, with the assurance of complete confidence, the projected outcome is more honest and accurate results.

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this study, the term homosexuality will act as an umbrella term, encompassing meaning for all terms that refer to an individual or group of people who identify with an alternative gender (s). For reference, the following are the denotations of some terms that may be used and can fall under the umbrella term homosexual. All definitions were retrieved from the Oxford English Dictionary Online (Simpson & Weiner, 2008).

Gay: “a homosexual person”; “more frequently used of male homosexuals.”

Homosexual: “involving, related to, or characterized by a sexual propensity for one’s own sex; of or involving sexual activity with a member of one’s own sex, or between individuals of the same sex.”

Lesbian: “a female homosexual.”

Pansexual: “pertaining to the theory that all human behavior is based on sexuality;” gender-blind.

Queer: “a homosexual; esp. a male homosexual.”

Transgender: “Of, relating to, or designating a person whose identity does not conform unambiguously to conventional notions of male or female gender, but combines or moves between these.”

Transsexual: “having physical characteristics of one sex and psychological characteristics of the other”; “one whose sex has been changed by surgery.”

Research Questions

Research Question One

What is the relationship between students’ year in school (e.g. freshman, sophomore, junior, etc.) and their reported level of homophobia?

Research Question Two

What is the relationship between gender and reported levels of homophobia?

Research Question Three

How do students differ in levels of homophobia if they report having a close homosexual friend compared to not having a close homosexual friend?

Research Question Four

What is the relationship between reported levels of homophobia and religious affiliation?

Research Question Five

What is the relationship between population of student hometown and reported levels of homophobia?

Research Question Six

What is the relationship between student involvement and reported levels of homophobia?

CHAPTER IV

Results

Before focusing on each of the research questions individually, the entire combined results should be analyzed. Because the 21 items from the Homosexual Attitude Scale are based on a Likert scale, the mean or a neutral score would be 63. This was determined based on designated items being reverse scored, with means higher than 63 reflecting positive attitudes from participants (greater chance of participants being accepting of homosexuals) and lower means reflecting more negative attitudes toward homosexuals (greater chance of participants presenting homophobic attitudes and actions). The highest possible score that could be achieved, which would, as mentioned, reflect the most accepting and positive attitudes, is 105. The overall mean of the scores was 83.07, which is higher than the neutral mean, hence reflecting more positive attitudes toward homosexuals. The overall standard deviation (SD) of the participant scores is 18.19. Not only was the overall mean higher than the neutral mean of the scores, but in no category was there a mean lower than the neutral mean or a negative SD. Therefore, not just overall, but also consistently throughout, the representative population of the university displays positive attitudes toward homosexuality.

As a general note, when looking at the tables and information presented, results are based on the responses of 201 participants. However, this number includes participants who omitted answers to select questions. In those cases, the n representing the number of responses might not always add up to 201.

Research Question 1

The first question looked at the relationship between a students' academic standing in school (e.g. freshman, sophomore, junior, senior, etc.) and reported levels of homophobia. The general data is displayed in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Relationship between Academic Standing and Homophobia

Year in School	n	Percentage	Mean	SD
Freshman	36	17.91	83.16	15.28
Sophomore	32	15.92	87.47	16.57
Junior	83	41.29	81.71	15.92
Senior	40	19.90	83.00	18.58
Senior (+4 years)	10	4.98	88.60	12.61

Note. N is representative of the number of responses

As mentioned, all of the scores, no matter grade level, were leaning toward positive attitudes/acceptance of homosexuals. However, in looking for a trend or pattern in the research, there really is none. In fact, freshmen, juniors, and four year seniors have very similar scoring.

Research Question 2

Table 2 shows the data gathered in relation to gender and homophobia. It can be noted that male scores reflected more homophobic attitudes than females in this particular study.

Table 2

Relationship of Gender to Homophobia

Gender	n	Percentage	Mean	SD
Male	53	26.90	78.15	16.55
Female	144	73.10	85.94	15.64

Note. N is representative of the number of responses

Research Question 3

The third research question posed in the study looks at an abstract kind of topic. The concept presented is that if a student has a close friend who is homosexual, that student will be more likely to hold more positive attitudes toward homosexuality than students who do not have close homosexual friends. Table 3 below holds the general data gathered from this research topic.

Table 3

Relationship of Interactions with Homosexuals to Homophobia

Close homosexual friend?	n	Percentage	Mean	SD
Yes	95	47.74	90.25	13.25
No	104	52.26	78.07	16.68

Note. N is representative of the number of responses

Research Question 4

Question four looks at research that has deduced to be one of the most influential determining factors of perception of homosexuality. Religion, doctrine, and beliefs are often traditional, and in some cases have a tendency to influence followers of those specific belief systems on the “rights” and “wrongs” of many aspects of life, sometimes including sexual orientation. The table below (Table 4) shows the results of the most prominent belief systems reported by students.

Table 4

Relationship of Religion and Homophobia

Religion	n	Percentage	Mean	SD
Catholic	59	32.24	83.49	13.16
Baptist	13	7.10	79.38	18.24
Christian/Non-denominational	53	28.96	77.43	18.78
Methodist	14	7.65	88.21	9.46
Lutheran	17	9.29	85.35	16.14
Agnostic	17	9.29	97.65	8.48
Atheist	10	5.48	93.80	12.06

As can be seen here, approximately 30 percent of the student participants identify themselves with the Catholic faith. Another 30 percent claim to be non-denominational Christian. With the distribution of religions being so heavy in these two areas, information in the *Discussion* section hypothesizes and analyzes the results and reasoning.

Research Question 5

Along a similar thought process of geographic location playing an integral role in attitudes toward homophobia, question five looks at the population of hometown compared to measured levels of homophobia. The results of research question 5 can be viewed in Table 5 below.

Table 5

Relationship of Hometown Population and Homophobia

Hometown Population	n	Percentage	Mean	SD
Less than 1,000	11	5.50	80.36	17.76
1,000-10,000	52	26.00	80.75	18.40
10,001-50,000	74	37.00	85.55	14.73
50,001-100,000	30	15.00	89.47	13.05
100,001-500,000	26	13.00	82.12	16.01
More than 500,000	7	3.50	78.29	21.86

Note. N represents number of responses

As can be noted from Table 5, there is no outstanding evidence that would suggest that geography/hometown population can be determined a defining factor.

Research Question 6

The final research question presented in the study looks at the relationship of student involvement and attitudes toward homosexuality. Participants were asked to choose which area of student involvement they devoted the most time to, and they were provided with a fairly conclusive list of options, including the option to say they were not involved in any way. Provided below in Table 6 are the results.

Table 6

Relationship of Involvement to Homophobia

Group Affiliation	n	Percentage	Mean	SD
University Athletics	14	7.78	81.71	8.79
Intramural Sports	15	8.33	77.00	17.38
Fraternity	5	2.78	93.40	6.50
Sorority	19	10.56	80.74	16.32
Registered Student Group	32	17.78	90.00	14.26
Faith Affiliated Group	11	6.11	70.09	17.69
Residence Hall				
Organization	13	7.22	94.62	9.70
None	71	39.44	83.75	16.28

Note. N represents the number of responses

Again, as a general overview, all of the scores leaned toward positive attitudes, but some definite patterns are beginning to arise, especially when paired with results from previous research questions. These will be examined further in the discussion.

CHAPTER V

Discussion

Research Question 1

Research shows, as students progress academically, they are likely to become more liberalized and open to new ideas and lifestyles. The results of this particular study, though, do not seem to show a pattern of increased acceptance through the years, as there is uneven distribution of scores.

Also, it is worth mentioning that there were more juniors participating in the study than any other academic level, with more than 40 percent of all results contributed by students in their third academic year. This might have some impact on the accuracy of the results and distribution of scores. Therefore, in the future it could be recommended that the sample population somehow be managed in a way that would be more representative of the true academic distribution of a university in order to ensure more realistic and accurate results.

Research Question 2

In reviewing literature on what traits and experiences impact views on homosexuality, one of the main recurring suggestions was gender plays an important role, especially in views of gender roles and homosexuality. It is held by supportive research mentioned earlier in the study that men commonly hold more negative views on homosexuality than women, hence tend to portray more homophobic feelings.

However, both males and females scored above a neutral score, meaning there

could be validity to homophobia as correlated with gender. Further research would need to be completed, though, because as previously noted, a struggle with this study was attaining a truly representative sample of the population. In this case, more than 70 percent of the responses were from women. In reality, 58 percent of the campus population is comprised of females, but the results could likely be more favorable of women considering their higher response rate.

Research Question 3

This information indicates just what was hypothesized, with students who have close homosexual friends reporting much more positive attitudes toward homosexuality in general. It is important to note that a proactive step was taken to help reduce confusion toward this question in the survey by asking three questions related to the topic. First, participants were asked if they know someone who is homosexual, in hopes of extracting answers from students who have only acquaintances with homosexual individuals. Next, participants were asked if they have a close homosexual friend, referring to close relationships and friendships instead of acquaintances. Finally, participants were asked if they have a homosexual family member. In asking all of these questions, the research should reflect more accurate information that differentiates between acquaintances and friendships, with friendships logically being deeper and more substantial.

Another note to make is in the sheer number of people reporting to have close homosexual friends. More than 93 percent of student participants in the study reported that they identify themselves as heterosexual. With an overwhelming majority of straight participants, almost 94 percent of all participants said they know someone who is

homosexual, and nearly 50 percent have close homosexual friends. With the history of homosexuality (even in recent years), these numbers help to reflect liberalization of society. This report most likely would have been shocking had the results appeared 20 or 30 years ago, on a college campus or otherwise.

Research Question 4

Traditionally, the Catholic religion holds that relationships are reserved for the love between a man and a woman. Along the same lines, Christian/Non-denominational faiths typically follow the conservative, literal interpretations of Biblical text, which condemns homosexuality. These two religions, while still reporting overall acceptance of homosexuality in terms of their means and standard deviations, reflect both the least positive scores of the religious practices and the largest percentages of students holding those beliefs (together accounting for more than half of the participants).

On the other hand, though fewer participants claiming the agnostic belief set (no commitment in either way to believing in the existence or non-existence of a higher being), the responses were among the highest means gathered in the entire study. It is possible, considering the geographic location of the university that some students grew up in the “Bible Belt” of the Midwest United States, which could impact the results, though the majority of the campus population would not be considered as residents of that area.

Research Question 5

Just as some religions tend to lean toward the conservative side, as we examined in the previous research question, previous research has mentioned that “small town”

beliefs can tend to be more traditional/conservative than larger cities. This could be the result of larger cities having more diverse populations than small towns, thus creating more opportunities for residents to become familiar and comfortable with ideas of which small towns might be less accepting. Though the results from this study did not replicate the research referenced, further research would be recommended to ensure validity.

Research Question 6

All of the scores for Research Question 6 had an outcome of positive attitudes toward homosexuals, though a pattern could be appearing in the numbers. For example, the lowest scoring group in the study belongs to those participants who devote most of their extracurricular time to faith affiliated groups. Because the study did not ask students to specify organizations, it is possible that there is a prominent religious group on campus, so the numbers here could potentially reflect the opinions of one religious group (rather than a wide array).

Among the highest scoring groups are those affiliated with student affairs supported organizations, including registered student groups and fraternities. This could be representative of the fact that student affairs and student life departments are commonly the hubs of developing student leaders and reaching out to and gaining an understanding of challenges of all college students.

General Discussion

As has been reiterated in the results, all of the overall reports from the study have been calculated as having positive results in relation to attitudes toward homosexuality. Though some factors, including religion, gender, and involvement seem to have a little

more impact on attitudes toward homosexuality than other factors that were considered in the study, not one category or question had a report of negative overall feelings toward homosexuality. It would be wonderful if these results were truly reflected on every college campus; however, it seems unlikely that this would be the case.

Perhaps it is true that the general campus feeling is positive toward homosexuals, as groups such as Pride and other support and educational groups focused on individuals to identify themselves as other than heterosexual become more prominent. Maybe the institutional programming and mission statements of inclusiveness are having a positive effect on the students on campus. There is any number of factors that could be making the push for more positive attitudes. Unfortunately, there are still reported cases of hate crime such as the Matthew Shepard story and many other undocumented, smaller cases of hate speech and general discrimination based on sexual identity, that are plaguing campuses. This being said, there are definitely strides being taken toward equality for minorities on campuses, but there are some aspects of this study that may have limited the results.

Looking at the larger picture, quite possibly, with the recent advances politically, the generation that is currently attending college could see the full legalization of gay marriage, which is the first step toward full justice. It could be helpful in looking at the data collected in this study to compare results of the same instrument with other colleges and see if results are similar across the board. If this is the case, though there are clearly groups and individuals out there who promote the traditional marriage, there might be an overwhelming (and surprising) support of homosexuality.

Limitations

With the set-up of the study revolving around an e-mail distributed and administered survey, though the participants were chosen as a random representative sample, the returned information was often weighted in certain directions. It is possible that the cover letter of the instrument, which appeared in the body of the e-mail to participants appealed to certain people or groups simply based on their interest in the topic rather than an interest in contributing to research. If only people who are passionate about the topic completed the instrument, it is quite likely that the results reported here are inaccurate in comparison to the larger population.

In addition, much of the demographic information that was gathered as a part of the survey instrument seemed not to be useful in the manipulation of data in regard to the research questions at hand. These pre-Homosexual Attitude Scale questions should have been more carefully edited in order to determine how they would be used in relation to the research questions and data calculations.

A final thought is in reference to the Homosexual Attitude Scale and its validity to society today. The instrument, which was created in 1986, was based off of stereotypes and ideas of homosexuality of that time. Though remnants of those ideas still remain in society, another instrument, perhaps something that encompasses more current social concepts, would be a more reliable source of information from which to draw conclusions.

Future Research

To gain the maximum amount of data on the subject, ideally a pre-test/post-test study could be implemented with a class of college students. As the class begins their freshman year at a university, they would be given the survey instrument, and the data would be manipulated. Before the class graduates, they would be given the same instrument again. This could help to determine whether the concept of students becoming more liberal throughout college is substantial.

The results of the current study had limited survey responses from a couple groups that would be interesting to study in reference to the topic. First, looking at the subject through the eyes of homosexuals could give quite a different perspective on the topic, even on their personal choices and beliefs, including religion and level of involvement on campus. Secondly, the study was also predominantly completed by white females. Because of some preconceived stereotypes/aversion to homosexuals known to sometimes be held in the African American culture, especially in males, it would be interesting to gain a more clear perspective by attaining information via survey from that group of student participants.

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Appendix A

The following is an e-mail from Dr. Mary Kite, co-creator of the Homosexual Attitude Scale, expressing her permission for using the scale for research purposes.

“Amy:

Yes, it is fine for you to use the measures. If you have questions about the measures, I'll be happy to answer them.

Best of luck with your research.

Mary”

-----Original Message-----

From: Baumgart, Amy J. [<mailto:ajbaumgart@eiu.edu>]

Sent: Wednesday, April 23, 2008 2:07 PM

To: Kite, Mary E.

Subject: Master's thesis

“Hello Dr. Kite,

I am currently enrolled at Eastern Illinois University, working to earn my master's degree in College Student Affairs. In researching for my master's thesis, I came across the Homosexual Attitude Scale and Components of Attitudes Toward Homosexuality measurement, which, as I understand, you created as a part of your research. After reviewing the items on the scales, I found them of great interest, and they would prove to be very beneficial to my own research. First, I would like to know if it would be possible for me to use these measures in my research, of course giving you proper reference in my report. If so, I also have a couple questions regarding the Components of Attitudes Toward Homosexuality measure in terms of the wording in the questions and reliability. If you have any questions or concerns for me, please feel free to voice those. I appreciate your research and consideration, and I hope to discuss this possibility with you in the near future.

Thank you,

Amy Baumgart”

Appendix B

Below is a copy of the cover letter, which was pasted in an e-mail body to the sample of students chosen to complete the instrument, and a copy of the Homosexual Attitude Scale. As mentioned previously, the survey was created online, and the link students followed from the cover letter took them directly to the survey. Everything was completed anonymously online and through e-mail.

Dear Student,

I am completing research as a part of my master's thesis in College Student Affairs, and I need your help. If you choose to complete the five minute, confidential online survey, your name will be entered into a drawing for a chance to win a Visa check card! I am studying the correlation of demographic features of college students to levels of homophobia. In order to do this, I am using an instrument called the Homosexual Attitude Scale, which is a 21 item questionnaire that will take less than five minutes to complete. For each item, you will be asked to rate your opinion on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 representing *Strongly Disagree* and 5 representing *Strongly Agree*.

For the purpose of this study, the terms *homosexual* and *gay* are used interchangeably. This means that any time you see either of these words, you could also substitute any other word for alternative gender or sexual affiliations, including gay men, lesbian women, transgender individuals, transsexual individuals, etc.

Please fill out the survey completely, as this will help to insure accuracy of results. Of course, your responses will be kept completely confidential, and your participation is entirely voluntary. At no time will your name or responses be linked, and no one will have access to this information.

Follow this link to begin: <http://www.eiu.edu/~cats/csd/ajbaumgart/survey.php>

If you have any questions, please contact the researcher, Amy Baumgart, via e-mail at ajbaumgart@eiu.edu or (618)384-9755. Questions can also be directed to Dr. Dan Nadler, thesis chairman, at Nadler@eiu.edu or (217)581-3221. If you have any questions or concerns about the treatment of human participants in this study, you may call or write:

Institutional Review Board, Eastern Illinois University

600 Lincoln Avenue

Charleston, IL 61920

Phone: (217)581-8576, E-mail: eiuirb@eiu.edu

After you complete and submit the survey, a page will be displayed that gives you the instructions for entering yourself into the drawing for the gift card. Please follow these instructions, and if your name is chosen as the winner of the prize, you will be notified via e-mail by the end of December. In advance, thank you for your participation!

Sincerely,

Amy Baumgart

HOMOSEXUAL ATTITUDE SCALE

Please click the box(s) next to the appropriate response(s):

Year in school: Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior Senior (+4 years)

Academic Area: College of Arts and Humanities College of Business and Applied Sciences

College of Education and Professional Studies College of Sciences

Undecided

Area(s) of Campus Involvement (Please check top two activities where you spend your time.):

University Athletics Intramural Sports Fraternity Sorority Registered Student Group

ROTC Faith Affiliated Group Student Government Residence Hall Organization

Multicultural Organization Other None

What best describes your living situation:

Levels of Homophobia

Residence Hall Campus Apartment Off-campus House/Apartment Other

Gender: Male Female Other

Sexual Orientation: Straight Bisexual Gay man Lesbian woman

Transsexual Transgender Other_____

Religious Affiliation: Catholic Baptist Christian (non-denominational)

Methodist Lutheran Jewish Muslim/Islam

Buddhist Agnostic Atheist Other_____

Race: Caucasian African American/Black American Indian/Alaskan Asian

Hawaiian/Pacific Islander Hispanic Other_____

Hometown Population: Less than 1,000 1,000-10,000 10,001-50,000

50,001-100,000 100,001-500,000 More than
500,000

Do you know someone who is homosexual? Yes No

Do you have a close friend who is homosexual? Yes No

Do you have a family member who is homosexual? Yes No

Please indicate your level of agreement with the items below using the following scale:

1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neutral, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree

1. I would not mind having a homosexual friend.

1 2 3 4 5

2. Finding out that an artist was gay would have no effect on my appreciation of his/her work.

1 2 3 4 5

3. I won't associate with known homosexuals if I can help it.

1 2 3 4 5

4. I would look for a new place to live if I found out my roommate was gay.

1 2 3 4 5

5. Homosexuality is a mental illness.

1 2 3 4 5

6. I would not be afraid for my child to have a homosexual teacher.

1 2 3 4 5

7. Gays dislike members of the opposite sex.

1 2 3 4 5

8. I do not really find the thought of homosexual acts disgusting.

1 2 3 4 5

9. Homosexuals are more likely to commit deviant sexual acts, such as child molestation, rape, and voyeurism (Peeping Toms), than are heterosexuals.

1 2 3 4 5

10. Homosexuals should be kept separate from the rest of society (i.e. separate housing, restricted employment).

1 2 3 4 5

11. Two individuals of the same sex holding hands or displaying affection in public is revolting.

1 2 3 4 5

12. The love between two males or two females is quite different from the love between two persons of the opposite sex.

1 2 3 4 5

13. I see the gay movement as a positive thing.

1 2 3 4 5

14. Homosexuality, as far as I'm concerned, is not sinful.

1 2 3 4 5

15. I would not mind being employed by a homosexual.

Levels of Homophobia

1 2 3 4 5

16. Homosexuals should be forced to have psychological treatment.

1 2 3 4 5

17. The increasing acceptance of homosexuality in our society is aiding in the deterioration of morals.

1 2 3 4 5

18. I would not decline membership in an organization just because it had homosexual members.

1 2 3 4 5

19. I would vote for a homosexual in public office.

1 2 3 4 5

20. If I knew someone were homosexual, I would still go ahead and form a friendship with that individual.

1 2 3 4 5

21. If I were a parent, I could accept my son or daughter being gay.

1 2 3 4 5