

AN ANALYSIS OF “FAMILIARITY” AS IT RELATES TO ATTITUDES TOWARD GAYS AND LESBIANS

James O. Smith, Department of Management, College of Business,
East Carolina University, Greenville NC 27858, SMITHJAM@MAIL.ECU.EDU,
(252)737-1296

Joseph Tomkiewicz, Department of Management, College of Business,
East Carolina University, Greenville NC 27858, TOMKIEWICZJ@MAIL.ECU.EDU,
(252) 328-6836

ABSTRACT

The results confirms the conventional wisdom that in terms of familiarity family and friendship relations tend to be more important predictors of attitudes than work relationships. However, the sex of the person you are familiar with appears to have no effect.

This paper examines the concept of “familiarity” in attitudes toward gays and lesbians. We define familiarity as being in personal contact with gays and lesbians. There are many examples of familiarity including having gay/lesbian friends and family or working with them. This effort is a continuation of past research [18,19,20,21] that has focused on the attitudes toward gays and lesbians as managers.

These previous efforts examined the influence of the sex and religion of the perceiver. The sex of the object of perception was also studied. Familiarity was a small part of previous research. It was found that women had a more positive attitude toward gays/lesbians as managers than did men. Those who were more regular church goers had more negative views and that those with some familiarity with gays/lesbians had more positive views.

What is missing is the impact of the sex the person with whom the respondent was in contact. Research has shown that people tend to have a higher opinion of lesbians than they do of gay males. Thus if a man works with a lesbian does this moderate his views on gays in general and on gays/lesbians as managers? In essence this research attempts to determine if the sex of the person you are in contact with influences attitudes toward gays and lesbians.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Most studies of attitudes toward gays and lesbians are found in the psychology and social psychology literature. [For example see 1,2,7,8,9] Much of this work attempts to identify the factors that influence bias toward gays and lesbians. In general, the conventional wisdom is validated. Those with less contact with homosexuals are more likely to hold negative attitudes. [1,2,10] Individuals who are heavily involved in religious activities and especially of a fundamentalist nature, are more prone to negative attitudes. [21] The view that homosexuality is biologically determined, not a preference but an orientation, is associated with more positive attitudes. [6,12,14] Also, a general view that the cultural values of the gay “community” are against majority values, leads to negative attitudes. [6,7,14]

The literature also noted differences in attitudes depending upon the demographics of the perceiver and the object of that perception. Males tend to be more negative about homosexuality than are females. It was also noted that people had more negative attitudes about male homosexuals than lesbians.[2,7,8,9,12,16,17] This effect was especially true for male perceivers. It has been noticed that the race of the homosexual plays a role in the perceivers’ attitudes. [3] However, this effect is smaller and less pronounced for lesbians than for gays. [3] While it appears in the literature that attitudes differ depending on the sex of the person being perceived there is little if any research devoted to the sex of the person with whom you are familiar.

SAMPLE

Data were collected in the summer and fall of 2004. The respondents were students attending a mid-sized regional university. All were undergraduate students in the College of Business, taking the introductory management course. The sample which had an average age of 21.4 years, was composed of 293 usable responses. Table One displays the sample demographics. Tables two and three display the number and percent of the “familiarity” data.

TABLE ONE
Sample Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Percentage
Male	61
African-American	11
White	85
Regular church attendee.	24
Have a gay/lesbian family member or friend.	46
Have a gay/lesbian co-worker or fellow dorm resident.	60

We are interested in the 46% with a gay/lesbian friend or family member and the 60% who have lived in the dorm with or worked with a gay/lesbian person.

TABLE TWO
Sex of Gay- Lesbian Friend/Family Member

	Number	percent
No gay/lesbian family members or friends	157	54
Gay male family member or friend	71	24
Lesbian family member or friend	22	8
Both a gay male and a lesbian family member or friend	43	15

TABLE THREE
Sex of Gay- Lesbian Co-Worker/Fellow Dorm Resident

	Number	percent
No gay/lesbian co-workers/fellow dorm residents	120	40
Gay male co-workers/fellow dorm residents	83	28
Lesbian co-workers/fellow dorm residents	23	8
Both a gay male and a lesbian co-workers/fellow dorm residents	66	22

It should be noted that among those who reported having a friend or family member or a fellow dorm resident or co-worker who was gay or lesbian the highest percentage is for those who know a gay male and the lowest for knowing a lesbian only.

The overall study included a variation of the Blacks in Business Scale [22] to access the attitudes toward Lesbians as managers. (The demographic questions are displayed in Appendix One.)The attitudinal questions in the survey are displayed in Table four-below) concern attitudes toward homosexuality in general and will form the basis of the main analysis for this paper. These questions get to the core of beliefs about homosexuality. They are basically moral judgments. Thus how the responses are affected by familiarity will be an important step in our understanding of attitudes toward gays/lesbians.

ANALYSIS

TABLE FOUR
Attitudinal Questions related to Homosexuality

With one (1) being strongly disagree and ten (10) being strongly agree please indicate your response to the following question:

I believe the homosexual lifestyle is wrong. _____ [LIFESTYLE]

I believe homosexuals should have the same rights as anyone else. _____[RIGHTS]

I don't care what homosexuals do, I just don't want to be told all about it. _____[TALK]

Being homosexual is a preference not biologically determined. _____[PREFERENCE]

The responses to the above questions were subjected to a one way ANOVA by a variable that combined the two familiarity questions. Thus the independent variable was:

- No contact with gays or lesbians
- Family/friend contact but not work/dorm
- Co-worker/dorm resident contact but not family/friend
- Both family and co-worker

The variable did not attempt to identify the sex of the contact person but only that there was one. Several of the relationships among the types of familiarity indicated significant differences in the means, these are displayed in Table Five.

TABLE FIVE
Means of Attitudinal Questions by Types of Familiarity

QUESTION	MEAN
Type of familiarity	
LIFESTYLE	
No contact with gays or lesbians	6.91*
Family/friend contact but not work/dorm	5.88
Co-worker/dorm resident contact but not family/friend	5.34
Both family and co-worker	4.93*
* different at the .05 level	
RIGHTS	
No contact with gays or lesbians	6.32*
Family/friend contact but not work/dorm	6.97
Co-worker/dorm resident contact but not family/friend	7.92
Both family and co-worker	8.25*
* different at the .05 level	

TALK		
	No contact with gays or lesbians	7.53
	Family/friend contact but not work/dorm	7.55
	Co-worker/dorm resident contact but not family/friend	6.36
	Both family and co-worker	7.26
No relationships significantly different at the .05 level		
PREFERENCE		
	No contact with gays or lesbians	7.34*
	Family/friend contact but not work/dorm	6.95
	Co-worker/dorm resident contact but not family/friend	5.98
	Both family and co-worker	5.84*
* different at the .05 level		

When the attitudinal questions were analyzed by one way anovas only one relationship was found to be statistically significant with regard to the sex of the contact person in terms of family/friend contact. There were no differences among the work/dorm dimension.

The only difference was that those who reported a gay family member or friend were more inclined to believe that homosexuality was a preference than those with a lesbian friend or family member.

DISCUSSION

While familiarity does seem to affect attitudes toward homosexuals the magnitude of that effect appears slight. Only three of the four attitudinal questions showed differences related to familiarity and those were all between having no contact and contact in family/friend groupings and work/dorm environments. Thus those people were assumed to have much more contact. While research has indicated that attitudes are affected depending on the sex of the perceiver and the perceived no relationship was found relating to the sex of the contact person. So it would appear that the effects of familiarity would not be related to the sex of the person in contact. Study limitations might also account for the lack of measured differences.

Further studies will need to inquire as to family and friend status with separate questions as it would seem likely that contact with family members would lead to more acceptance. Further the family relationship will need to be enumerated. It would seem likely that the closer the family ties the more the acceptance.

REFERENCES

1. Anderssen, Norman, "Does contact with lesbians and gays lead to friendlier attitudes? A two year longitudinal study" *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 2002, 12 124-136.
2. Bowen, A. M. & Bourgeois, M. J., "Attitudes toward lesbian, gay and bisexual college students: The contribution of pluralistic ignorance, dynamic social impact, and contact theories" *Journal of American College Health*, 2001,, 50(2) 91-96.
3. Crow, Stephen, Folk, Lillian & Hartman, Sandra, "Who is at greatest risk of work-related discrimination—women, Blacks or Homosexuals?" *Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal*, 1998, 11(1) 15-26.
4. Day, Nancy & Schoenrade, Patricia, "Staying in the closet versus coming out: Relationships between communication about sexual orientation and work attitudes" *Personnel Psychology*, 1997 Sp 50(1) 147-163.
5. Day, Nancy & Schoenrade, Patricia, "The relationship among reported disclosure of sexual orientation, anti-discrimination policies, top management support and work attitudes of gay and lesbian employees" *Personnel Review*, 2000 29(3) 346-363.
6. Haslam, Nick, Rothschild, Louis & Ernst, Donald, "Are essentialist beliefs associated with prejudice?" *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 2002, 41 87-100.
7. Herek, Gregory M, "Sexual prejudice and gender: Do heterosexuals' attitudes toward lesbians and gay men differ?" *Journal of Social Issues*, 2000 56(2) 251-266.
8. Herek, Gregory M., "Gender gaps in public opinion about lesbians and gay men" *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 2002 Sp 66(1) 40-66.
9. Herek, Gregory M. & Capitanio, John, "Sex differences in how heterosexuals think about lesbians and gay men: Evidence from survey context effects" *Journal of Sex Research*, 1999 36(4) 348-360.
10. Herek, Gregory M. & Glunt, Eric, "Interpersonal contact and heterosexuals' attitudes toward gay men: Results from a national survey" *Journal of Sex Research*, 2003, Aug 30(3) 239-244.
11. Hernandez, B.; Keys, C.; & Balcazar F. "Employer attitudes toward workers with disabilities and their ADA employment rights: A literature review" *Journal of Rehabilitation*; 2000, Oct-Dec.
12. Horvath, Michael & Ryan, Ann Marie, "Antecedents and potential moderators of the relationship between attitudes and hiring discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation" *Sex Roles*, 2003 Feb 48(3/4) 115-130.
13. Ivancevich, J.M. *Human Resource Management*. Boston: Irwin, 1998.
14. Larwood, L. "Attributional effects of equal employment opportunity" *Group and Organizational Management*, 1995, 20, 391-408.
15. Lewis, Gregory, "Black-white differences in attitudes toward homosexuality and gay rights" *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 2003 Sp 67(1) 59-78.
16. Ragins, Belle Rose, Cornwell, John & Miller Janice, "Heterosexism in the workplace: Do race and gender matter?" *Group & Organizational Management*, 2003, Mar 28(1) 45-74.
17. Sakalli,Nuray, "Application of the attribution-value model to prejudice to homosexuality" *Journal of Social Psychology*, 2002, 142(2) 264-271.
18. Smith, J.O. & Tomkiewicz, J. "Attitudes toward gay white males as managers" *Proceedings of SeinForms*, 2004.
19. Smith, J.O. & Tomkiewicz, J. "Attitudes toward lesbians as managers" *Proceedings of SEDSI*, 2005.
20. Smith, J.O. & Tomkiewicz, J. "Factors influencing undergraduate student's attitudes toward homosexuals " *Proceedings of SEDSI*, 2006.

21. Smith, J.O. & Tomkiewicz, J. "Undergraduate students' attitudes toward gay white males" *Proceedings of SeinForms*, 2005.
22. Stevens, G "Attitudes toward Blacks in management are changing" *Personnel Administrator*, 1984, 29, 163-171.
23. Vanderstoep, Scott & Green, Charles, "Religiosity and homonegativism: A path-analytic approach" *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, 1988, 9(2) 135-147.

APPENDIX ONE
RELEVANT PORTION OF THE OVERALL SURVEY

The following demographic is being collect for analysis purposed only; nothing here can be used to identify you.

SEX: MALE _____ FEMALE_____

AGE: _____

I attend church regularly? YES____ NO____

RACE: WHITE____; AFRICAN AMERICAN:____; ASIAN____

I have a homosexual friend or family member? YES____ NO____

This family member-friend(s) is/are: MALE____; FEMALE____; BOTH____

This family member-friend(s) is/are:
WHITE____; AFRICAN AMERICAN:____ ASIAN____

I have worked with or have lived in the same dorm with homosexuals?

YES____ NO____

This/these person(s) is/are: MALE____; FEMALE____; BOTH____

This/these person(s) is/are:

WHITE____; AFRICAN AMERICAN____; ASIAN____

With one (1) being strongly disagree and ten (10) being strongly agree please indicate your response to the following question:

I believe the homosexual lifestyle is wrong. _____

I believe homosexuals should have the same rights as anyone else. _____

I don't care what homosexuals do, I just don't want to be told all about it. _____

Being homosexual is a preference not biologically determined. _____