

## **College Students' Attitudes towards Homosexuality**

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### **Abstract**

Attitudes towards homosexuality are influenced by several factors: religion, media, family, peers, gender and contact with homosexual individuals (Riaz, 2006; Calzo & Ward, 2009). How these factors intersect to form one's attitude is not fully understood. The purpose of this study was to identify if there are gender differences determining what influences shape attitudes towards homosexuality. The central research question in this study was, "Are there gendered differences determining what factors influence college students' attitudes toward homosexuality?" This study was conducted at a small Midwestern university; participants were 128 male and female students. Survey data was statistically analyzed using cross-tabulations, mean comparisons, independent t-tests, and a reliability analysis. Findings supported the hypothesis; there were significant mean differences in seven of the ten variables. Implications for practitioners include taking gender into account when working with issues surrounding homosexuality. It is recommended that males be provided with additional education regarding homosexuality to increase sensitivity. Implications for future research include qualitative interviews and focusing on family and religion in the development of attitudes.

“I feel that we need to make homosexuality a more positive thing in society.”

~Anonymous survey participant

Recent studies support the idea that a person's attitude towards homosexuality is influenced by several factors including religious affiliation, religiosity, mass media, family, peers, a person's gender, and overall contact with homosexual individuals (Riaz, 2006; Calzo & Ward, 2009). Exactly how these factors intersect with one another to form a college student's overall attitude towards homosexuality is not fully understood, though associations between religion and family have been greatly recognized. Homosexuality is defined as sexual desire or behavior directed toward a person or persons of one's own sex (Webster, 2001). There needs to be more research focused primarily on college students and the factors that influence their attitudes on controversial issues such as homosexuality. It is essential to gain a greater understanding of how certain attitudes are developed, such as those towards homosexuality. Attitudes towards homosexuality influence how people interact with members of the homosexual community. Negative attitudes have been associated with hate crimes directed towards homosexual individuals, while positive attitudes have been associated with social activism for the homosexual community. Within the current literature, researchers agreed that there are several factors that influence a person's attitude. The focus of this study was to determine if there were gender differences regarding what the main factors are that influence college students' attitudes towards homosexuality. After the researchers reviewed current literature on what factors influence a college student's attitude towards homosexuality, male and female college students age 18 and above were then surveyed at a small Midwestern University.

## **Literature Review**

The search engine Ebscohost was used to review the literature on differing factors contributing to college students' attitudes towards homosexuality. The literature found on this topic mainly focused on traditional aged college students with the average sampling age ranging from 18 to 25. In one previous study, religious affiliations were examined in a nationally represented survey of 1,610 legal adult citizens that resulted in a gap representing college students. In one study, pairs of twins, ages ranging from 18 to 25 were surveyed studying the influence of genetics on homophobic tendencies. This study was conducted in Australia, however; the information provided by this study was crucial to our research on family and the connection to attitudes towards homosexuality. The studies focused on similar variables such as gender, sexual orientation, age, family and peer influences, religion, and mass media (Calzo & Ward, 2009; Verweij, Shekar, Zietsch, Eaves, Bailey, Boomsma, & Martin, 2008; Olson, Cadge, & Harrison, 2006; Raiz, 2006).

Calzo and Ward (2009) examined the effects that the media had upon an individual's attitude towards homosexuality. This included looking at what types of television shows and movies one watched, the types of magazines one read, and how much exposure one had to the media. They found that specific genres of media, such as prime time television shows or magazines one prefers, such as teen magazines, may have the strongest influence upon a person's perception of homosexuality. The more a person consumed a specific type of media genre, the more the person's perception may be influenced. However, even when one consumed large amounts of media it did not imply that one would become more or less accepting of homosexuality. The study also found that the more media exposure males had, the more they moved toward flexible gender roles, which reflected a more accepting attitude toward homosexuality. Exposure to media appeared to

lessen the gap between male and female attitudes towards homosexuality, which was contrary to previous research on traditional gender role beliefs. This study also found that media use will often challenge an individual's preexisting attitudes, but overall the biggest indicator of media influence would be what genre is being watched, how often it is being watched, and gender of the person that is watching it.

In the second article, Verweij et al. (2008) explored the genetic and environmental influences on attitudes by comparing results from monozygotic and dizygotic twins of either the same sex or opposite sex. The study found that there was a difference in the distribution of attitudes towards homosexuality between males and females, with males tending to be more homophobic than females. Results suggested that a possible source of family attitudes towards homosexuality may be transferred genetically and that the genes that influence males are different from those genes that influence females. Results supported the idea that environmental influences are relatively small in comparison for males, but both genetics and the environment had a shared effect upon female attitudes. Some of the variations in homophobic attitudes were possibly due to environmental factors such as the norms and values that parents teach their children and the unique experiences that each individual had. They also found that heterosexual people held different attitudes towards gay men and lesbians, with lesbians generally being more accepted. The researchers concluded that it would be a wise idea to distinguish between male and female homosexuals in their questions because there are different stereotypes for each.

Olson et al. (2006) examined if religious practices influenced a person's attitude toward homosexuality. This study found that a person's religiosity and religious affiliation had a significant influence on their opinions about homosexuality. Congregation members that were heavily involved in the church and its social networks were likely to be

less accepting of homosexuality. Traditionally, homosexuality is opposed by most religious affiliations and there tends to be a clear message from the congregational leader that homosexual behavior is not accepted. When congregations express concern about moral values, individuals are much more likely to oppose gay marriage. All American religion is not entirely opposed to homosexuality and peoples' opinions toward homosexuality do tend to vary according to one's degree of religiosity. This article demonstrated that one's religiosity influences a person's opinion but is not the only factor in forming attitudes towards homosexuality.

Another piece of literature by Raiz (2006), examined the effects of gender role beliefs, peer support, and exposure to the gay community on the formation of college students' development for support of homosexuality. Results showed that contact with a homosexual acquaintance was associated with increased support for rights, while having a roommate that was openly gay was associated with decreased support for rights. Students who believed their family and friends to be more accepting were also more supportive. Students that viewed homosexuality as being a life style choice or students who considered themselves to be highly religious were less likely to be supportive of rights for homosexual people. The findings suggested that there is a relationship between family and friends attitudes towards homosexuality and a student's understanding and acceptance of what their religion has taught them. Also, how students perceive gender roles and the amount of contact students have had with the gay community played a part in the development of overall attitudes towards homosexuality.

The literature has established that religion, peers, family, mass media, and interaction with homosexual individuals contributed to the formation of attitudes towards homosexuality. Although the articles supported that all of these factors affected ones' attitudes, none of the studies have taken a comprehensive look at which factors had the greatest

influence. Since college is an influential period in many individuals' lives, it is important to examine what aspects people are introduced to that ultimately shape their opinions on controversial issues such as homosexuality. Through this study, researchers hope to advance the current literature by analyzing if there are significant gender differences regarding which of these variables or combination of variables is most influential upon the development of these attitudes among college students.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study applied the Family Ecology Theory framework (Bretherton, 1993). This theory assumes that individuals are affected by the different environmental settings by which they live and how these environments interact and affect one another. Environments under this theory include the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem. The microsystem consists of the person-to-person interactions between individuals and factors that immediately affect a person. The relationship between two or more microsystems is defined as the mesosystem. An exosystem has inadvertent effects upon the individual even though it is not directly interacting with the individual. The macrosystem is composed of the societal norms and regulations that also affect an individual. The theory as a whole focuses on the interrelationships among all of these subsystems and how these environments influence the individual.

As applied to the study, the Family Ecology Theory would predict that there would be multiple influences that attribute to the development of college student's attitudes towards homosexuality. Researchers expect the different aspects (family, peers, religion, media, and gender) to influence a college student's microsystem and mesosystem. Researchers also expect religious and family beliefs to have the most influence upon an individual's attitude towards

homosexuality because these influences have been the most predominant throughout their development. Another prediction is that attitudes towards homosexuality would vary greatly according to gender. Researchers predicted females would be more accepting towards homosexuality than males because females have also experienced oppression and discrimination in the United States' macrosystem. Historically females have faced legal obstacles to gain equal status in our culture which could create empathy for homosexual persons who are also trying to gain ethical and legal equality in our society. Researchers also predicted that the media would play a pivotal role in impacting the exosystem and macrosystem of individuals because it is influential in shaping society's perceptions.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study had three parts: (1) to identify if there are gendered differences determining what influences have the most significant impact in shaping a college students' attitude toward homosexuality, (2) to develop a reliable survey instrument to measure these influences, (3) to provide the data collected to the GLBT support group on the college campus as well as local high school guidance counselors. The authors found a similar study by Raiz et al., (2006) who examined college students and what factors contributed to the student's level of support for gay men and lesbian rights. Raiz et al., found that students who held more traditional gender roles were significantly associated with less supportive attitudes towards homosexuality.

The central research question in this study was, "Are there gendered differences determining what factors influence college students' attitudes toward homosexuality?" The authors predicted that females would be overall more accepting towards homosexuality than males since females have also experienced oppression and discrimination in the United States. This hypothesis was supported by the Family

Ecology Theory, within the macrosystem of the United States, females and males are socialized differently regarding sensitivity and overall attitudes towards homosexuality. The authors' hypothesis was informed by the literature which consistently reported that religiosity and family influence impacts a person's attitude toward homosexuality. In the literature the other influences such as media influence, peer influences, and contact with homosexual persons did not have as direct of an impact on shaping a person's attitude towards homosexuality. This hypothesis was also supported by the Family Ecology Theory that the relationship between an individual's development and their environment is of great significance.

## **Method**

### *Participants*

The site of this study was at a Midwestern university. The participants were 128 undergraduate students; researchers surveyed two general Sociology classes, one Introduction to Construction class and one Human Development and Family Studies class. Of these 128, 56 of the participants were male and 72 were female. There were 70 participants between the ages of 18-19, 29 between the ages of 20-21, 19 between the ages of 22-23, five between the ages of 24-25, and the remaining five participants were 26 years or older. Religious affiliation was also taken into consideration. Of these 128 participants, thirty-five identified themselves as Christian, 31 identified themselves as Catholic, 29 identified themselves as Lutheran, seven identified themselves as Agnostic, four identified themselves as Atheist, one identified themselves as Baptist, one identified themselves as Methodist, one identified themselves as Presbyterian, one identified themselves as Interfaith, one identified themselves as Buddhist, one identified themselves as East Indian, 16 responded that they did not have a religion.

### *Research Design*

The purpose of this survey research was to be able to generalize to a similar, larger population so that some inferences could be made about characteristics, attitudes, or behaviors of this population (Babbie, 1990). Current attitudes from our sample population were identified to generalize about a larger population of similar students on campus. The survey design type is best described as a cross-sectional study design in that it was used to capture knowledge, or attitudes, from a cross section of the population at one point in time. The form of data collection was self-administered questionnaires. The rationale for using this method was that it was the most efficient method to gather the data directly on campus due to the fast pace of our research course, convenience, low cost, and the quick return of data. The population was the university student population; the sample was male and female students in two general Sociology courses, along with one Construction Management course and one Human Development course. The study used a non-random purposive sample design, because the purpose of our study was to gain access to an equitable number of male and female students. Randomization was not used in order to be inclusive in the classroom. The ethical protection of human subjects was provided by completing the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (IRB) training; this study has been approved by the IRB.

### *Data Collection Instrument*

In order to address the factors that influence college students' attitudes toward homosexuality, a survey was designed. The survey included a cover letter with an implied consent which included a description of the study, definition of any terms not commonly known, risks and benefits, time commitment, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and contact information of the research team and the supervisor as well as instructions for completing the survey.

The survey consisted of three demographic questions relating to age, religious affiliation, and gender as a basis to compare groups and analyze our data. Participants were then given ten closed-ended statements based on a 5-point Likert scale which measured the intensity of the respondents' attitudes ranging from one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree). Questions were informed by literature and theories regarding what factors influence a college students' attitude towards homosexuality.

The survey instrument has both face validity and content validity. Face validity refers to the instrument questions having a logical connection to the concept and research question. Because the questions and concepts addressed in the survey are literature-inspired, it was determined that they clearly connected to the larger problem of what influences a college students' attitude towards homosexuality. Content validity refers to the instrument statements' coverage of the full range of concepts under the larger topic. The questions addressed a broad range of issues known to influence attitudes towards homosexuality, such as religion, media, family and peers. To increase validity, the survey was piloted to ten undergraduate students. Feedback indicated that the survey was clear and ready for distribution.

### **Procedure**

To collect the data for this study, professors that taught specific courses on campus were contacted about allowing the researchers to survey their students. The classes surveyed consisted of an Introduction to Construction class, a Human Development and Family Studies class, and two Introduction to Sociology classes. Confirmation e-mails were sent and received and a date and time to survey was established. Then students were surveyed in classes on campus between November 3, 2009 and November 11, 2009. The purposive sampling design led the researchers to a classroom that had a majority of males, a classroom that

had a majority of females, and two classes that had equitable numbers of males and females. Classes were chosen this way to insure that researches would have an equitable number of males and females. The process of collecting the data was as follows. Randomization was not used in order to inclusive in the classroom. Researchers introduced themselves to the students, introduced the research study, and reviewed the first two pages of the survey, which is known as the implied consent. Researchers and the professor then left the classroom to provide confidentiality and to reduce any potential pressure to participate in the research study. Students were then able to fill out the survey and place it in a designated folder when they were done. Once all the surveys were collected, the researchers reentered the room and collected the folder. Over sampling was done by eight to ensure the target sample number in case of missing data. When the surveys were collected, they were kept in locked drawer in one of the researcher's homes until data analysis.

### *Data Analysis Plan*

The data was first cleaned and checked for any missing data. The cleaned surveys were then coded using acronyms for each variable. The first three questions on the survey were demographic variables: age, and gender and religious affiliation. The independent variable was gender (GEN). Each survey statement was a dependent variable and given an acronym name: influences included mass media portrayal of homosexual individuals (MDP), media representation of homosexual relationships (MDR), the participants' religious affiliation (RAF) and level of religiosity or religious influence upon the participants' (RGN), if the participants' supported their religion's ideology towards homosexuality (SPR), the participants' perception of family acceptance towards homosexuality (FAM), the participants' perception of peer acceptance towards homosexuality (PER), the participants' overall contact with homosexual individuals (CWH),

the participants' supportive attitude for the homosexual community (SPA), how supportive they would be if a friend or family member identified as being homosexual (SPF) and if they were supportive of homosexuals having equal rights as heterosexuals in society, such as marriage, (RTM). To analyze the data, the data-analyzing computer program called Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), was used. The individual was used as the level of analysis. Given that groups were being compared based on gender, data analysis included: frequencies, cross-tabulations, and mean comparisons. A Cronbach's Alpha reliability analysis was conducted. Independent T-tests were also conducted for significance testing.

## **Results**

The computer program Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze the data collected. The analyses variables were subjected to include: frequencies, cross-tabulations, mean comparisons, independent t-tests, and a reliability analysis.

The first analysis run was a frequency distribution analysis. This analysis indicated that there was no data missing from the surveys. Researchers identified eight surveys that were incomplete and chose to leave that data out of the SPSS analyses.

Cross-tabulations were run with the independent variable, GEN. For variables SPA, PER, SPF, RTM, and CWH, there appeared to be a difference between groups, with the majority of females having agreed and/or strongly agreed, and the majority of males were undecided, disagreed and/or strongly disagreed. For SPR there appeared to be a difference with the majority of males having agreed and/or strongly agreed, but the majority of females were undecided, disagreed and/or strongly disagreed. For FAM, RGN, MDP and MDR, there appeared not to be a significant difference between groups (refer to Table 1 for Cross-Tabulations and Table 2 for Mean Comparisons).

Table 1  
Cross Tabulations

SPA						
GEN	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Male	17.9%	23.2%	33.9%	19.6%	5.4%	100%
Female	9.7%	6.9%	9.7%	45.8%	27.8%	100%

  

FAM						
GEN	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Male	26.8%	28.6%	30.4%	12.5%	1.8%	100%
Female	15.3%	25.0%	31.9%	23.6%	4.2%	100%

  

PER						
GEN	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Male	26.8%	26.8%	33.9%	8.9%	3.6%	100%
Female	1.4%	8.3%	29.2%	40.3%	20.8%	100%

  

SPF						
GEN	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Male	7.1%	5.4%	35.7%	37.5%	14.3%	100%
Female	1.4%	4.2%	15.3%	26.4%	52.8%	100%

  

RGN						
GEN	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Male	12.5%	10.7%	19.6%	23.2%	33.9%	100%
Female	15.3%	9.7%	23.6%	16.7%	34.7%	100%

  

SPR						
GEN	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Male	10.7%	1.8%	37.5%	35.7%	14.3%	100%
Female	22.2%	9.7%	37.5%	11.1%	19.4%	100%

  

MDP						
GEN	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Male	1.8%	21.4%	44.6%	25.0%	7.1%	100%

Female	2.8%	20.8%	36.1%	27.8%	12.5%	100%
MDR						
GEN	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Male	3.6%	10.7%	48.2%	30.4%	7.1%	100%
Female	2.8%	16.7%	38.9%	33.3%	8.3%	100%
RTM						
GEN	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Male	16.1%	23.2%	21.4%	23.2%	16.1%	100%
Female	8.3%	6.9%	22.2%	19.4%	43.1%	100%

Note. (GEN)= Gender of participant; (SPA)= I am supportive of the homosexual community; (FAM)= My family members are supportive of the homosexual community; (PER)= My friends are supportive of the homosexual community; (SPF)= I would be supportive of a family member or friend who identifies themselves as being homosexual; (RGN)= My religious affiliation teaches that homosexuality is a sin; (SPR)= I support my religious affiliation's perspective on homosexuality; (MDP)= Prime time sitcoms portray homosexuality in a positive manner; (MDR)= Prime time sitcoms show committed homosexual relationships; (RTM)= Homosexuals should have the same rights in society as heterosexuals; (CWH)= Someone close to me is homosexual.

Table 2  
Means, Standard Deviations, and Ranges

GEN	SPA	FAM	PER	SPF	RGN	SPR	MDP	MDR	RTM	CWH
Male										
Mean:	2.71	2.33	2.35	3.46	3.55	3.41	3.14	3.26	3.00	1.92
SD:	1.13	1.06	1.08	1.04	1.38	1.10	0.90	0.88	1.33	1.30
Range:	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00
Female										
Mean:	3.75	2.76	3.70	4.25	3.45	2.95	3.26	3.27	3.81	3.12
SD:	1.21	1.10	0.94	0.96	1.44	1.37	1.02	0.93	1.29	1.50
Range:	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00

Note. (SPA)= I am supportive of the homosexual community; (FAM)= My family members are supportive of the homosexual community; (PER)= My friends are supportive of the homosexual community; (SPF)= I would be supportive of a family member or friend who identifies themselves as being homosexual; (RGN)= My religious affiliation teaches that homosexuality is a sin; (SPR)= I support my religious affiliation's perspective on homosexuality; (MDP)= Prime time sitcoms portray homosexuality in a positive manner; (MDR)= Prime time sitcoms show committed homosexual relationships; (RTM)= Homosexuals should have the same rights in society as heterosexuals; (CWH)= Someone close to me is homosexual.

An independent samples t-test was run to compare mean scores for males and females. There were significant mean differences between the genders regarding variables SPA, FAM, PER, SPF, SPR, RTM, and CWH (refer to Table 3).

Table 3  
*Results of Mean Comparison T-tests*

Variable	Males	Females	t	df	Sig.
SPA	2.71 (1.13)	3.75 (1.21)	-4.905	126	*.000
FAM	2.33 (1.06)	2.76 (1.10)	-2.187	126	*.031
PER	2.35 (1.08)	3.70 (0.94)	-7.532	126	*.000
SPF	3.46 (1.04)	4.25 (0.96)	-4.420	126	*.000
RGN	3.55 (1.38)	3.45 (1.44)	.377	126	.707
SPR	3.41 (1.10)	2.95 (1.37)	2.003	126	*.047
MDP	3.14 (0.90)	3.26 (1.02)	-.699	126	.486
MDR	3.26 (0.88)	3.27 (0.93)	-.061	126	.952
RTM	3.00 (1.33)	3.81 (1.29)	-3.507	126	*.001
CWH	1.92 (1.30)	3.12 (1.50)	-4.801	124,550	*.000

Note. (SPA)= I am supportive of the homosexual community; (FAM)= My family members are supportive of the homosexual community; (PER)= My friends are supportive of the homosexual community; (SPF)= I would be supportive of a family member or friend who identifies themselves as being homosexual; (RGN)= My religious affiliation teaches that homosexuality is a sin; (SPR)= I support my religious affiliation's perspective on homosexuality; (MDP)= Prime time sitcoms portray homosexuality in a positive manner; (MDR)= Prime time sitcoms show committed homosexual relationships; (RTM)= Homosexuals should have the same rights in society as heterosexuals; (CWH)= Someone close to me is homosexual. \*significant @  $p < .05$ , two tailed. Standard deviations appear in parentheses below means.

A reliability analysis was run to indicate if the variables were a reliable index to measure the major concept:

Factors that influence college students' attitudes towards homosexuality. Cronbach's Alpha is a measure of reliability and was 0.581. This value indicated that survey items were a reliable measure of the major concept; however, if the variable SPR were to be removed, the reliability would rise to 0.717.

Qualitative comments were received at the end of a number of surveys. These comments will be analyzed and themes determined in the Discussion section.

### *Discussion*

Overall, results supported the hypothesis that female college students would be more supportive of homosexuality than male college students; significant mean differences were found in seven out of ten variables ( $p < .05$  level). These mean differences were supported in the literature (Verweij et al, 2008; Raiz, 2006). Each dependent variable will be discussed in terms of how the results were supported in the literature and /or through the theoretical framework. Thereafter, limitations to the study, implications for practitioners, implications for future research, and concluding remarks will be discussed.

Interestingly, results showed that more female respondents overwhelmingly agreed that they were supportive of the homosexual community than males. The literature supports this concept that females are more accepting of homosexuality than males (Verweij et al, 2008; Raiz, 2006). A significant mean difference was found between females and males; overall more females stated that they were supportive of the homosexual community and they believed that homosexual individuals should have the same rights in society as heterosexual individuals, such as the right to marry; this corresponds with the majority of females having more overall contact with homosexual individuals. There were no distinct differences in how both males and females responded regarding homosexuality and the media. Researchers believed this was due to the term

media being too broad of a concept although supporting literature suggested that media does play a role in developing attitudes (Calzo & Ward, 2009). This finding suggested that a more comprehensive look at exactly what media is being consumed by participants and how much would give a better insight as to how the media influences an individual's perception of homosexuality. A majority of both male and female respondents agreed that their religious affiliation teaches that homosexuality is a sin, and surprisingly when it came to stating whether or not they supported their religious affiliation's perspective on homosexuality, over one third of all respondents were undecided. Even though a participant may state their religious affiliation, it does not mean they are actively involved or supportive of all of the religion's philosophies. Literature did not make a distinction between males and females regarding religious practices. (Olson et al., 2006; Raiz, 2006). There were no significant differences between males and females regarding their belief that their family was supportive of the homosexual community; there were equitable numbers of disagree, undecided and agree for both males and females. On the other hand, there was more agreement seen among females than males regarding their belief that their friends were supportive of the homosexual community. This supports the literature that peer perceptions may play a part in the development of attitudes towards homosexuality. However, results may somewhat contradict the idea that family may have a strong influence on an individual's beliefs towards homosexuality, since there was no significant difference between males and females regarding the belief that their family was supportive of the homosexual community, with males and females both ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree at roughly the same percentage (Raiz, 2006; Verweij et al., 2008). The literature did not state whether or not there would be a difference between males and females regarding their family or their level of religiosity but there were significant

differences found for both in this study. Although there were equitable numbers of males and females that were undecided for both of these variables, a higher percentage of females viewed their family as being supportive of the homosexual community than did males, and a higher percentage of males than females supported their religious affiliation's stance on homosexuality.

Regarding the survey statement that someone close to me is homosexual, the majority of males disagreed while the majority of females agreed or strongly agreed. This finding could relate back to the Family Ecology Theory (Bretherton, 1993) in that the macrosystem in American society, in intangible ways, promotes males to reject homosexuality. This homophobic ideology subsequently alters a male participant's exosystem, thus ultimately affecting their mesosystem and microsystem. This may result in fewer interactions with homosexual individuals. A similar experience can be seen for females. Since females have been discriminated and oppressed by the macrosystem in American society, they may be more understanding and accepting of the homosexual community that is experiencing many of the same discriminations that women once faced. This difference could be associated with the rigid gender roles and stereotypes that are illustrated in the cultural layer of this theory.

### *Limitations*

This study used a nonrandom sample and therefore it is unable to be generalized and compared to the larger population of all college students.

### *Implications for Practitioners*

The results showed that there is a need for scholars and professionals who research homosexuality to take gender into account regarding the factors that influence a college student's attitude towards homosexuality. Researchers recommend that male college students be provided with additional sensitivity

education and awareness training towards homosexuals in hopes that exposure to the problems of homophobia can prevent acts of hate and/or discrimination. Students, starting at an early age, can benefit immensely by learning acceptance and compassion and these teaching's could potentially help shape their attitudes towards homosexuality. This can be conveyed to researchers, teaching professionals, counselors, LGBT support groups and parenting classes. It is essential that a student of any educational level has the option to seek support or information from parent's or professionals regarding homosexuality. Specialized training needs to be provided for professionals such as counselors and teaching professionals, who may work or come in contact with a homosexual person.

#### *Implications for Future Research*

It is recommended that the next step of research is to use a larger, random, and more diverse sample to be able to generalize to college students across the country. Another implication for future research would be to include qualitative interviews with participants and to focus more on family and religion in the development of student's attitudes regarding homosexuality. If this study were to be replicated, the rewording or discarding of the variable (SPR) would be suggested: I support my religious affiliation's perspective on homosexuality. According to the reliability statistics, Cronbach's Alpha would increase from .581 to .717 if this statement were taken out of the survey. This may be due to confusion concerning the wording of the statement.

#### **Conclusion**

As a result of this study, it is hoped that gender differences will be recognized as a significant factor regarding student's attitudes towards homosexuality and how these attitudes are formed. The researchers hope that more professionals will recognize and be sensitive to the

importance of student's perceptions towards homosexuality. Homophobia and discrimination towards homosexual individuals is apparent in our society, even in highly educated individuals. Results showed that there are five significant mean differences out of the ten variables tested. This suggests that there is a significant difference between gender and attitudes toward homosexuality. Researchers hope sensitivity education and awareness training is provided, especially for male students. The researchers hope that providing these additional resources to students can increase awareness and reduce homophobic attitudes. Resources should not only be provided at the college and high school level but also throughout the entire educational experience.

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