

Broadcasting the Closet: The Influence of Television Consumption on Attitudes Toward Homosexuality



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■ ■ ■ ABSTRACT ■ ■ ■

This study aims to explore the relationships between exposure to television programming and attitudes toward homosexuality. While numerous studies have explored homosexuality in the media, few have taken an in-depth look at how exposure to television programming influences attitudes toward homosexuality. To measure the potential correlation between television exposure and attitudes toward homosexuality, an online survey was administered to college students at a Midwestern University. The survey used an adapted version of Massey's (2009) measure of sexual prejudice to measure attitudes toward homosexuality. While previous research has found that there is a direct correlation between television exposure and attitudes toward homosexuality, this study found no correlation to exist.

■ ■ ■ INTRODUCTION ■ ■ ■

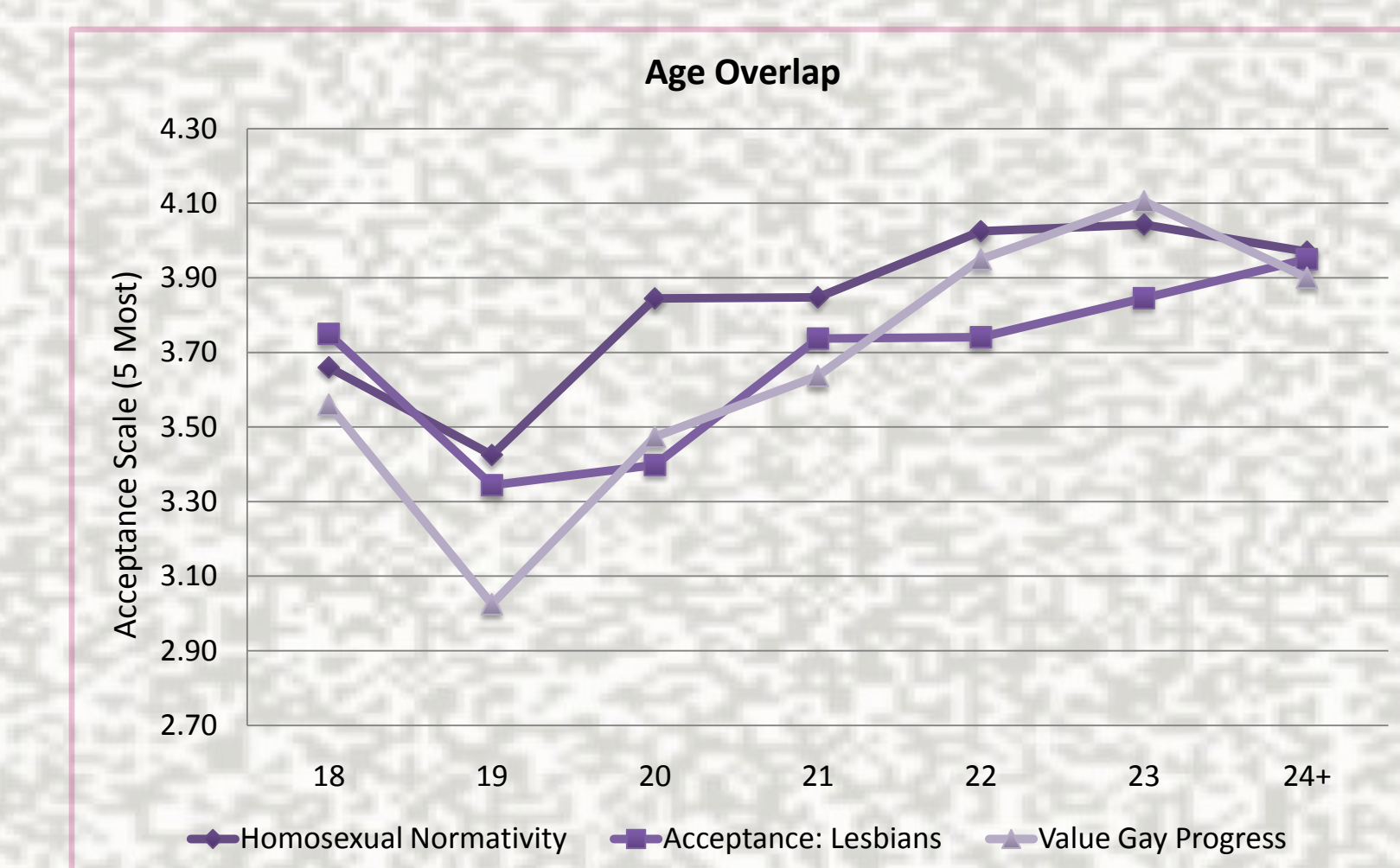
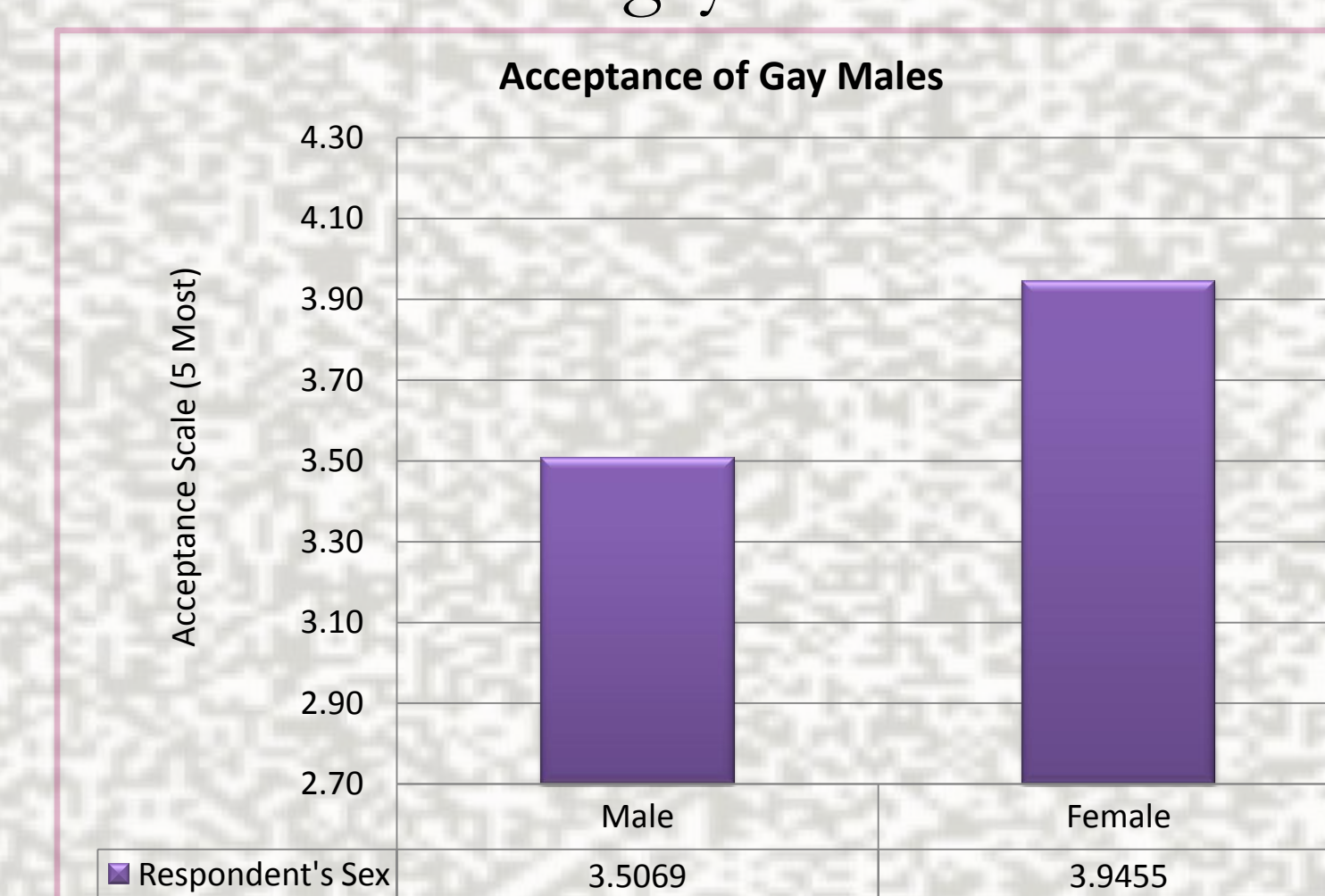
- Television is viewed as the most universal mass medium (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1980) which makes it a powerful influence on opinions and perceptions (Pfau, Moy, & Szabo, 2001).
- Television programs portray homosexual characters in a stereotypical manner following Clark's (1969) chronological stages of non-recognition, ridicule, regulation, and respect.
- Based on cultivation theory, the portrayals of homosexuality on television may influence beliefs about homosexuality held by heavy television viewers (Fisher, Hill, Grube, Gruber, 2007).
- Television representations of homosexuals and heterosexuals alike shape the ways in which society comes to view homosexuality. Furthermore, the media serve to reinforce heterosexual norms and stereotypes, whether intentionally or inadvertently. This reality constructed by the media is one that abides by hegemonic and heteronormative principles (Dyer, 2002; Hall, 2002).
- Research Question: What is the relationship between college students' exposure to television programming and their attitudes toward homosexuality?

■ ■ ■ METHOD ■ ■ ■

- Participants were 137 (44.9% response rate) students from a mid-size Midwestern University. Of the participants, 92.7% were between the ages of 18 and 23 years old, with 36 (26%) identifying as male and 101 (74%) identifying as female.
- Network convenience sampling was used to recruit participants via a Facebook event page and email invitations created by the researchers.
- Measures
 - To measure amount of primetime television viewed, participants were asked to specify how many hours per week they spend watching primetime television via television, computer, or other viewing sources. Participants were then asked to specify which genres they view, and the specific shows within those genres.
 - To measure attitudes toward homosexuality, an adapted version of Massey's 2009 scale was used. Participants were asked to respond to each prompt on a 5-point Likert scale.

■ ■ ■ RESULTS ■ ■ ■

- A Pearson Correlation test revealed no significant correlation between amount of television exposure and attitudes toward homosexuality.
- A Pearson Correlation test also revealed a negative correlation between age and traditional heterosexism as well as age and aversion to lesbians.
- Another Pearson Correlation showed a positive correlation concerning age and the valuing of gay progress.
- A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed that men reported higher levels of aversion toward gay men than women did.



■ ■ ■ DISCUSSION ■ ■ ■

- Previous research suggests that television exposure would play a significant role in the formation of attitudes toward homosexuality. This study showed that television may not be as influential as formerly considered.
- Television may have been replaced as the most universal form of media by some other medium or media. Future research exploring media use and influence should focus on the role that new media forms play in affecting thoughts and behaviors.
- While exposure to television may not directly affect attitudes toward homosexuality as shown in this research, it was discovered that biological sex is a correlating factor to attitude formation about homosexuality. Future research should examine the differences in male and female attitude formation more in depth.

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