

# Attitudes toward Homosexuality in a School Context

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**Abstract**— *The purpose of this research was to ascertain the attitude of students toward homosexuality and the select factors correlated with it specifically age, gender, religion, frequency of going to church, exposure with the LGBT community, and preference for movies/shows with LGBT as main characters. The participants are comprised of 451 students and data were collected through survey questionnaires. The results revealed that attitudes toward homosexuality in a school setting could range from liberal to conservative depending on the situation and conceptualization. The participants tend to be liberal on working with homosexuals in team projects and being a member of organization with homosexual members. However, they could agree that same sex holding hands or displaying affection in public is disgusting and the love between two males or two females is quite different from the love between two persons of the opposite sex. Moreover, the student participants stood neutral on the propositions that “gay movement” is a positive thing; that homosexuality is not sinful and the increasing acceptance of homosexuality in society is aiding in the deterioration of morals. These indicate their ambivalent attitude towards homosexuality. This means that their attitudes toward homosexuality is confined to specific parameters. This study further concludes that age, sex, religious affiliation, frequency in going to church, having LGBT sibling/relative, and preference for movies/shows with LGBT main characters are significantly related with attitude towards homosexuality.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

In a cross-national study on attitudes towards homosexuality (Smith, 2011), the global trend showed that the Philippines followed by Russia and Slovenia registered the lowest approval of same-gender-sexual behavior. This was based on a survey conducted in 12 countries in 1991, 1998, and 2008. For 1998 and 2008 involving 24 countries, the Netherlands was top in both years and the Philippines at the bottom. As a result of the civil rights movement of gays and lesbians, homosexuality’s social and cultural status has evolved (Lingiardi and Capozzi, 2004). Also, in recent years, homosexuals have become targets of prejudices in school settings (Worthen, 2013). Academic, social and political discussions of homosexuality have become more and more complicated over the years. As Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) population have become prevalent among universities and colleges, so is the need for a deeper understanding on them. This is one great quest of every institution to provide their needs particularly that discrimination can be detrimental to well-being such as depression, suicide, and drug abuse (Birkett, Espelage, and Koenig, 2009). Hence, this study underscores the significance of examining the attitudes toward homosexuality in school setting. This is important because initiatives to minimize prejudices will be likely successful if it is research-based.

Besides, Birkett, Espelage, and Koenig (2009) found out that schools have the ability to counter negative outcomes of homophobia by creating positive school climate.

By understanding the attitudes and actions of heterosexuals toward homosexual populations on college campuses institutions can better determine the climate that LGBT students experience. According to Liang and Alimo (2005), this understanding can also “contribute to the development of educational programs that address negative heterosexual attitudes that influence negative physical, psychological, and educational outcomes.” Review of previous studies revealed that the LGBT student population in higher education is viewed as an evolution from exclusion to integration. LGBT students have become a visible campus population who are supported by the very educational institutions that once tried to suppress them. Likewise, the experiences of LGBT students have not been extensively examined in scholarly research. The term homosexuals is used in this study as a generic term for the LGBT community. It is worth noting that there has been an increase in the number of available terms to express a variety of sexual orientations and gender identities, or a tendency to defy labelling altogether (Marech, 2004).

In order to address “tolerance and acceptance,” some universities and colleges have incorporated “diversity” coursework and workshops into the core curriculum. Research suggests that college courses devoted to homophobia have been found to enhance heterosexual students’ attitudes toward gay men and lesbians. Also, while there is a trend toward incorporating “diversity” issues as a form of educational reform, often sexual orientation receives little attention, being pushed even further to the margins (Bowen and Bourgeois 2001). Akin to this, with increased education comes greater understanding, tolerance and acceptance of others. Lambert et al. (2006) found that students in the higher education have more positive attitude toward homosexuals than in basic education. This supports the assumption that higher education provides students opportunities for self-reflection, personal growth and social development with respect to prejudicial attitudes. However, Macintosh (2007) has warned of a curriculum that frequently reproduces heterosexuality as ‘normal’ and homosexuality as ‘other.’

While it is important to consider attitudes toward homosexuality, this research replicates some aspects of previous studies investigating the relationships between age (Besen, and Zicklin, 2007; Smith, 2011), sex (Smith, 2011), religion (Besen, and Zicklin, 2007; Smith, 2011), frequency to going to church, exposure (Calzo and Ward 2009) with the LGBT community, and preference for movies/shows with LGBT as main characters---with attitude towards

homosexuality. Over the past 35 years, a myriad of research has been conducted to determine characteristics of heterosexual attitudes towards homosexuality (Aguero, Bloch, and Byrne (1984) and how these attitudes impact society, especially the effects on LGBT student experiences. These studies have shown that gender, age, ethnicity, and cultural influences associated with level of education, religion and religious attendance all impact heterosexuals' views and behaviors towards homosexuality (Lambert, Ventura, Hall, & CluseTolar, 2006; Lewis, 2003; Negy & Eisenman, 2005). Having a better understanding of such influences is important for program developers and policy makers responsible for educating not only the youth, but all of society on the importance of tolerance in cultural diversity.

#### *Theoretical Framework of the Study*

This study is anchored on the attribution-value model which espouses that prejudice toward a group emanates from two variables particularly the attributions of controllability and cultural value (Sakalli, 2002). As applied in this study, it presupposes that attitudes toward homosexuality stem from individuals holding the homosexual community responsible for their behaviors and negative cultural perception of homosexuality. Shackelford and Besser (2007) supported this proposition hypothesizing that negative attitudes toward homosexuality demonstrate a general traditional belief system.

Moreover, this model is closely linked to Herek's model (1984) developed based on his review of previous studies. This model identifies three types of attitudes toward homosexuality based on its social psychological functions. The first is experiential which categorizes social reality by the individual's past interactions with homosexuals. The second is defensive which emanates from the individual's inner conflicts or anxieties by projecting them to the homosexuals. The third is symbolic which expresses abstract ideological concepts that are closely linked to one's notion of self and to one's social network and reference groups. These then serves as the theoretical framework of the study.

#### *Objective of the Study*

This study aimed to ascertain the attitudes of students toward homosexuality and the select factors correlated with it specifically age, sex, religion, frequency of going to church, exposure with the LGBT community, and preference for movies/shows with LGBT as main characters.

## II. METHODOLOGY

This study made use of the Descriptive Correlation Design with the self-administered survey as the technique for data collection. Data were obtained from college students enrolled at a state university and college in southern Philippines. Four hundred fifty-one (451) students who were 18 years old or more and who gave their consent participated in the study.

The survey questionnaire has two parts. The first part gathered information on the profile of the participants such as: age, sex, religion, frequency of going to church, exposure with the LGBT community, and preference for movies/shows with LGBT as main characters. The second part utilized the

Homosexuality Attitude Scale (HAS). It is a 21-item Likert scale that describes the participants' attitude towards homosexuality. The attitudinal statements fall into three subcomponents specifically attitudes toward homosexual persons, attitudes toward their behavior and civil rights (Kite and Whitley, 1996).

It has a test and retest reliability of .71 ( $r = .71$ ) and was developed by Mary Kite and Kaye Dueaux of Purdue University. Since the test was established using a different population, it has been pilot-tested to 30 participants whose characteristics are similar to this study's sample population. The test proved to have good internal consistency with Cronbach alpha of 0.879, thus, was reliable to use even with the sample population. However, to incorporate feedback from the pilot test, two items were rephrased and clarified for this study's sample. Meanwhile, the validity of the instrument is based on the premise that the data generated correspond to the objective of the study or the research questions and the measurement of the concepts are based on published literature and studies. Survey data were then statistically analysed using frequency and percent distributions, weighted means, and Pearson Product Moment Correlation.

This study recognizes its limitations. The findings and implications should be interpreted through the study's limitations, which derive from the sample. The samples were recruited from a state university and college and their experiences may not reflect those who studied in sectarian schools. Although, institutional diversity was assured such as they were drawn from various disciplines, the school cultural context and regional norms in which the institutions exist may have shaped the students' attitudes that gave a different results. In addition, this study adheres to the ethical standards of doing research specifically the free prior informed consent.

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

*Profile of Respondents.* Table 1 presents the profile of the participants and data show that more than half are female students (56.32%) with the male comprising 43.68% and with the mean age of 19. Moreover, the participants are predominantly Catholic (64.30%), followed distantly by the Born Again Christians (11.97%), while a minimal percentage from the following religions: Islam (5.76%), Iglesia ni Cristo (3.55%), Latter Day Saints (2.22%), Protestant (5.0%), and others (7.10%). As to the frequency of going to church, a large percent are Sunday goers only (48.12%), followed by those who go to church every month (27.05%), while 17.29% frequent the church 2-3 times a week and 7.54% who never goes to church. With all participants affiliated to a particular religion, it can be safely inferred that they are religious with almost half of them go to church every Sunday.

Negative attitudes toward LGBT individuals have been considered to be a function of social learning. Applying social identity theory to study negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians, Abrams et al. (1989) found that when heterosexual social identity is salient, negative attitudes and prejudice toward gay men and lesbians is elevated. It is important to note, however, that not all group members (i.e., heterosexuals) possess a strong social identity, despite being a group member.

In this study, it refers to the religious community. It presupposes that if the participants manifest strong social identity with his religion there is the tendency for them to have negative attitudes toward homosexuality.

Social identity theory was initially used to study the psychological basis of intergroup discrimination (Tajfel and Turner 1979). Concerned with both the psychological and sociological aspects of group behavior, social identity theory is made-up of three components: categorization, identification and comparison. To form one’s identity, social categorization initially occurs, that is, the ways in which an individual attempts to categorically (i.e., student-athlete, lesbian, heterosexual) distinguish one’s self from another. Throughout the identification process, individuals learn the values and norms for the particular group, or category they are situated (referred to as social identity). With social identity comes a sense of belonging and self-esteem for an individual. Members of a particular group will compare themselves with other groups in order to view themselves in a “positive” (as defined by themselves) manner (Abrams 1989; Tajfel and Turner 1979).

TABLE 1. Profile of Participants

Profile	Frequency	Percent
Age: Mean = 19 years old (53.9%)		
Sex		
Male	197	43.68
Female	254	56.32
Total	451	100.00
Religion		
Roman Catholic	290	64.30
Islam	26	5.76
Born Again Christian	54	11.97
Iglesia ni Cristo	16	3.55
Latter Day Saints	10	2.22
Protestant	23	5.10
Others	32	7.10
Total	451	100.00
Frequency in Going to Church		
2-3 times a week	78	17.29
Every Sunday	217	48.12
Once a Month	122	27.05
Never	34	7.54
Total	451	100.00
LGBT Sibling/Relative		
Yes	170	37.69
No	281	62.31
Total	451	100.00
Preference for movies/shows with LGBT main characters		
Yes	242	53.66
No	209	46.34
Total	451	100.00
Have any odd experiences with an LGBT		
Yes	76	16.85
No	222	49.22
No Response	153	33.93
Total	451	100.00
Who can help in addressing the issue on LGBT bullying		
Classmate/Friends	95	21.06
Faculty	32	7.10
Office of Student Affairs	53	11.75
Guidance Counselor	204	45.23
No Response	67	14.86
Total	451	100.00

Furthermore, 37.69% have siblings or relatives who are homosexuals while 62.31% have none. Majority prefer movies/shows with LGBT main characters (53.66%) while only few claimed having odd experiences with a homosexuals. When asked about who can help in addressing issue on LGBT bullying, 45.23% said the guidance counselor, 21.06% classmate/friends, 11.75% the Office of Student Affairs, 7.10% said the faculty, while 14.86% gave no response. In the study of Linley, *et. al.* (2016), the results revealed that faculty can be a source of support for the LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer) college students.

*Attitudes toward Homosexuality.* Table 2 presents the attitudes of the participants toward homosexuality and data show that on the average the participants are in agreement that they would not mind having a homosexual friend (WM=3.27) but not sure if they would initiate to form friendship to a gay individual (WM=2.57). They would not also mind doing projects with homosexuals in a team though it involves working outside the campus (WM=3.29) and they would not decline membership in an organization just because it has homosexual members (WM=3.27). These indicate the participants’ liberal attitudes toward homosexuality. However, they agree that they would look for a new place to live if they found out that their roommate is gay (WM=3.86). This implies homophobic tendency or fear or aversion to homosexuals. They also agree that two individuals of the same sex holding hands or displaying affection in public is disgusting (WM=3.41); and the love between two males or two females is quite different from the love between two persons of the opposite sex (WM=3.28). This somehow implies homonegativity fostered by a heterosexist society (Weishut, 2000). Accordingly, homonegativism is a construct describing the entire domain of the anti-homosexual responses. It can take on a variety of forms, and may range from passive resistance to the acceptance of homosexuals as equal members of society, to verbal or physical abuse. Homonegativism is not necessarily related to fear of homosexuality but found to be related with being more religious (Weishut, 2000).

Moreover, their strong disagreement is on the idea of keeping homosexuals separate from the rest of society such as separate housing and restricted employment (WM=1.73). They also disagreed that homosexuality is a mental sickness (WM=2.18) and they should be forced to have a psychological treatment (WM=1.86). The study of Ernulf, Innala, and Whitam (1989) with 745 respondents in four societies support the idea that homosexuality is not a mental sickness and they should not be forced to seek psychological treatment. In the said study, those who believed that homosexuals are “born that way” showed positive attitude towards homosexuality (Hewitt and Moore, 2002). Additionally, most participants disagreed that gays dislike members of the opposite sex (WM=2.05); and that homosexuals are more likely to commit deviant sexual acts, such as child molestation, rape, and “voyeurism” (the practice of gaining sexual pleasure from watching others when they are naked or engaged in sexual activity) than heterosexuals (WM=2.23).

TABLE 2. Attitudes toward Homosexuality

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Description
1. I would not mind having a homosexual friend.	3.27	Agree
2. Finding out that an artist was gay would have no effect on my appreciation of his/her work.	2.55	Neutral
3. I won't associate with known homosexuals if I can help it.	1.88	Disagree
4. I would look for a new place to live if I found out my roommate is gay.	3.86	Agree
5. Homosexuality is a mental sickness.	2.18	Disagree
6. I would not be afraid to have a homosexual teacher.	3.22	Neutral
7. Gays dislike members of the opposite sex.	2.05	Disagree
8. I do not really find the thought of homosexual acts horrible.	2.66	Neutral
9. Homosexuals are more likely to commit deviant sexual acts, such as child molestation, rape, and "voyeurism" (the practice of gaining sexual pleasure from watching others when they are naked or engaged in sexual activity) than heterosexuals.	2.23	Disagree
10. Homosexuals should be kept separate from the rest of society (separate housing, restricted employment).	1.73	Strongly Disagree
11. Two individuals of the same sex holding hands or displaying affection in public is disgusting.	3.41	Agree
12. The love between two males or two females is quite different from the love between two persons of the opposite sex.	3.28	Agree
13. I see the "gay movement" as a positive thing.	2.66	Neutral
14. Homosexuality, as far as I'm concerned, is not sinful.	2.77	Neutral
15. I would not mind doing projects with homosexuals in a team though it involves working outside the campus.	3.29	Agree
16. Homosexuals should be forced to have a psychological treatment.	1.86	Disagree
17. The increasing acceptance of homosexuality in our society is aiding in the deterioration of morals.	2.97	Neutral
18. I would not decline membership in an organization just because it has homosexual members.	3.27	Agree
19. I would vote for a homosexual in an election for student council.	2.52	Neutral
20. If I knew someone was gay, I would still go ahead and form friendship with that individual.	2.57	Neutral
21. If I were an eldest child, I could accept my brother or sister as an LGBT.	2.59	Neutral

WM= Weighted Mean: 4.01 and above= Strongly Agree; 3.26-4.00 = Agree; 2.51-3.25 = Neutral; 1.76-2.50 = Disagree; 1.00-1.75 = Strongly Disagree

Interestingly, they stood neutral on the propositions that: "gay movement" is a positive thing (WM=2.66); homosexuality is not sinful (WM=2.77); and the increasing

acceptance of homosexuality in society is aiding in the deterioration of morals (WM=2.97). They are also tentative whether or not they would vote for a homosexual in an election for student council (WM=2.52); and if they could accept an LGBT brother or sister (WM=2.59). These describe the participants' ambivalent attitudes toward homosexuality. Studies suggest that the early childhood experience and one's cultural surroundings (Pekarsky, 1998) is the core foundation towards a perceptive tolerance of homosexuality as a species of social interaction. Meanwhile, Kite and Whitley (1996) introduced the concept of attitudes toward homosexual behavior as, "the moral reprehensibility of homosexuality as a deviant sexual act and lifestyle."

The participants' responses to attitude statements further revealed that the participants make a distinction between homosexuality as a mental sickness of which they disagree and its morality where they tend to be neutral. Theories label homosexuality as either normal or abnormal and this could influence the community's tolerance towards homosexuality (Weishut, 2000).

*Select Factors Influencing Attitude towards Homosexuality.* Table 3 presents the correlates of attitude towards homosexuality and data show that age, sex, religious affiliation, frequency in going to church, with LGBT sibling/relative, and preference for movies/shows with LGBT main characters are found to have significant relationship with attitudes toward homosexuality as shown by its correlation coefficients and significance level below. Among these correlates, their preference for movies/shows with LGBT main characters registered the highest coefficient (r=0.59), closely followed by having LGBT sibling/relative (r=0.58), religion (r=0.57), sex (r=0.55), and frequency of going to church (r=0.53). This further implies moderate correlation. It is only age that shows low correlation (r=0.32).

Studies suggest that the influence of LGBT interactions on attitudes is strongly driven through exposure (Gelbal and Duyan, 2006). Exposure could be in a form of conversations with gay siblings or friends which seemed to have greater impact on attitude (Swank and Raiz, 2007; Eliason and Hughes, 2004; Hewitt and Moore, 2002). It presupposes that those who regularly have personal interactions with homosexuals tend to have positive perceptions with homosexuality. Likewise, knowing gay peers lessened homophobia (Swank and Raiz, 2007). Thus, having LGBT friends create positive attitude towards homosexuals in general. Another exposure is through media of which the results provide evidence of its mainstreaming effect (Calzo and Ward, 2009). Mainstream media in the Philippines showcased the popularity of homosexual celebrities who earned a handsome pay.

Moreover, religious preference and frequency of attendance have been correlated with differing attitudes toward homosexuality, often indicating certain religions and levels of religiosity negatively affect homosexual attitudes (Herek, 2006; Negy & Eisenman, 2005; Plugge-Foust & Strickland, 2000; Gelbal and Duyan, 2006; Jensen, Gambles, and Olsen, 1988). This means that the more religious an individual the more conservative is their attitude towards

homosexuality. Since religion is central to the Filipino way of life it is not surprising that religion influences the people's attitudes towards homosexuality.

TABLE 3. Correlates of Attitude towards Homosexuality

Variable		r	DR	Sig. Level
Age	Attitude	0.32	Low correlation	.025 Significant
Sex	Attitude	0.55	Moderate correlation	.010 Significant
Religion	Attitude	0.57	Moderate correlation	.006 Significant
Frequency in going to church	Attitude	0.53	Moderate correlation	.012 Significant
With LGBT Sibling/Relative	Attitude	0.58	Moderate correlation	.005 Significant
Preference for movies/shows with LGBT main characters	Attitude	0.59	Moderate correlation	.004 Significant

Legend: r= correlation value; DR= descriptive rating;  
 ±0.00 to 0.30 (Negligible correlation);  
 ±0.31 to 0.50 (Low correlation);  
 ±0.51 to 0.70 (Moderate correlation);  
 ±0.71 to 0.90 (High correlation);  
 ±0.91 to 1.00 (Very high correlation);

Furthermore, several studies support the significant relationship between attitude towards homosexuality and gender (Lewis, 2003; Verweij, Shekar, Zietsch, Eaves, Bailey, Boomsma, and Martin, 2008; Worthen, 2013), religion (Hinrichs, and Rosenberg, 2002), and interpersonal exposure with homosexuals. While researchers have studied attitudes toward gay men and lesbians among various populations such as medical professionals, psychologists, social workers, college students (Gelbal and Duyan, 2006), the results have been consistently similar. The majority of research suggests that men hold more negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians than women (Herek 1994; Herek and Capitanio 1996; Lim 2002; Gelbal and Duyan, 2006). Also, men have been found to hold more negative attitudes toward gay men, compared to lesbians (Lim, 2002). In the study of Sakalli (2002) involving Turkish undergraduates, women were found to be more tolerant towards homosexuality than men. It has also been found that individuals with more negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians are less likely to have personal contact with individuals that identify as gay or lesbian (Herek and Capitanio 1996), and more likely to subscribe to a conservative religious ideology (Herek 1988). This means that interpersonal exposure with homosexuals is correlated with positive attitude towards them (Sakalh and Ugurlu, 2002).

IV. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that attitudes toward homosexuality in a school setting are complex and could range from liberal to conservative depending on the situation and conceptualization. The participants tend to be liberal on working with homosexuals in team projects and being a member of organization with homosexual members. They don't mind having homosexual as friends but tend to be neutral on forming friendship with gay individual. They tend to be liberal in terms of their association with homosexuals as friends or

acquaintance but not as roommate. However, they could agree that same sex holding hands or displaying affection in public is disgusting and the love between two males or two females is quite different from the love between two persons of the opposite sex. Alongside this, they strongly disagree on the idea of keeping homosexuals separate from the rest of society such as separate housing and restricted employment. They also don't agree that homosexuality is a mental sickness and should be forced to have psychological treatment.

Moreover, the student participants stood neutral on the propositions that "gay movement" is a positive thing; that homosexuality is not sinful and the increasing acceptance of homosexuality in society is aiding in the deterioration of morals. They are also tentative whether or not they would vote for a homosexual in an election for student council and if they could accept an LGBT brother or sister. These indicate their ambivalent attitude towards homosexuality. This means that their attitudes toward homosexuality is confined to specific parameters although it is evident that their inclination is towards the conservative standard of morality. This study further concludes that age, sex, religious affiliation, frequency in going to church, having LGBT sibling/relative, and preference for movies/shows with LGBT main characters are significantly related with attitude towards homosexuality.

From the foregoing, this study recommends that school administrators, curriculum planners and implementers should continue to keep the issue of homophobia on the campus at the forefront of their school agenda. This study is a reminder that goals for inclusivity and equal treatment of all students are yet to be realized. Nevertheless, it presupposes that education and personal experience are still important factors in changing attitudes and eliminating stereotypes which are necessary to help create more inclusive campus communities.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors would like to thank the participants of the study who willingly gave their consent to answer the survey questionnaires. Deep gratitude is also extended to the Research Institute for Community Empowerment and the Center for Inclusive Development Studies of the University of Science and Technology of Southern Philippines for the support during the conduct of the study.

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