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From Closet to Classroom:  
Student Perceptions of Homosexuality Issues in College  
Education

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## **Abstract**

Currently, there is little research which directly addresses homosexuality and the classroom environment. This study was designed to explore how the topic of homosexuality is perceived by students within the classroom setting. This includes student perceptions of how their professors and peers handle issues pertaining to homosexuality. The research was conducted on a small liberal arts college, utilizing both qualitative interviews with 13 gay, lesbian, or bisexual students and quantitative surveys of the general population with a response of 76 students. A major theme of the qualitative interviews was that the majority of participants expressed the opinion that the college was neither very negative or very positive. The quantitative survey showed that heterosexual students who have bisexual, lesbian, and/or gay acquaintances were more likely to have positive attitudes towards homosexuality than those students who do not have bisexual, lesbian, and/or gay acquaintances. Secondly, heterosexual individuals with positive attitudes towards homosexuality were more likely to feel that gay studies courses should be taught on campus. Third, heterosexual individuals with positive attitudes regarding homosexuality will have been no more likely to have noticed sexuality-preference bias in the classroom than those individuals who exhibited negative attitudes towards homosexuality.

## **Introduction**

This study was designed to explore how the topic of homosexuality is perceived by students within the classroom setting. This includes student perceptions of how their professors and peers handle issues pertaining to homosexuality. In order to give the reader a chance to conceptualize the findings of this research, the paper begins with a literature review dealing with the history of the culturally constructed meanings of homosexuality in the United States, as well as a brief description of the emergence of a gay liberation movement beginning in the 1960s. Then the paper moves into a review of

current academic research which focuses on college students' attitudes towards gays, lesbians, and bisexuals. The literature review ends with a section focusing specifically on research conducted that examined student attitudes towards homosexuality within the classroom setting. By examining the perceptions of the general college student population, as well as gay, lesbian, and bisexual students, one can obtain a better understanding of how students are being socialized in the classroom regarding homosexuality.

It is important to give an account of the history of the dominant changes in ideology within the United States regarding homosexuality in order to show how cultural movements shape and influence cultural views of homosexuality. I find this pertinent to my study of student perceptions of homosexuality. As Berger and Luckmann (1966) have discussed, as individuals we are both products of our culture and historical time, but at the same time, we have the ability to create new material and nonmaterial culture. The college classroom is a social situation with the manifest function of teaching students; however, class lectures cannot always be restricted solely to the presentation of unbiased information. The traditional classroom reflects the norms of society at large, specifically those in power, serving the latent function of reinforcing the socialization of cultural norms and values. Course topic coverage is created through conscious decisions made by faculty members (Conolly 2000). While some colleges began to offer courses on homosexuality during the 1970's (Conrad and Schneider 1992), many colleges that have taken steps to emphasize cultural diversity, such as gender, race, and ethnicity, have been slower to integrate queer studies<sup>1</sup> into the classroom curriculum (Conolly 2000).

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<sup>1</sup>Queer studies is an academic term taken from a pejorative term.

## **Limitations of Language**

A difficulty with working on a topic such as homosexuality is the limitation of language. Not only are words such as gay, bisexual, lesbian, sexual orientation, and preference imprecise, but there is the added difficulty of avoiding offensive terminology. What is considered offensive may also change with time or be different from person to person. For the purpose of this study, the language I shall be using is as follows. First, there is a difference between preference and orientation. Orientation is something that you can not change. It is what you are inclined to be attracted to. Preference implies a choice. Preference is similar to whether or not you like chocolate as opposed to vanilla ice-cream. However, when it comes to sexuality, it is hard to say whether it is preference or orientation, because it changes from person to person. Some people may feel that it is a choice and others may feel that it is a biological inclination. There is no word to describe a combination of the two or inclusion of the two. While neither word expresses the situation perfectly, I had to use one or the other out of a lack for better terminology. Also, the idea of a "lifestyle" choice, may also be offensive to some. However, the term is found in literature. I do not mean by "lifestyle" that someone is choosing to live any differently or aberrantly from someone else when they choose a "gay lifestyle" than a "heterosexual lifestyle" per say. The term lifestyle will be used to express the idea that someone has decided to live openly "gay." Gay suggests that the person, whether through choice or biological inclination, wishes to identify themselves as having strong sexual or emotional feelings towards someone of the same sex. Another term that is important to understand is "bisexual." This term is used to describe someone who through biological inclination or choice to identify as someone who finds both females and males as sexually or emotional stimulating. Finally, an ally is a professor or student who does not identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual, but is a member and supports the gay-straight alliance.

## **Literature Review**

### A Brief History of Homosexual Constructs

Although volumes have been written on the construction of homosexuality, I will condense this to a brief overview of major shifts in the social construction of homosexuality in the United States. Traditionally, in the United States, homosexuality, along with most sexual behavior, has been viewed with disapproval (Conrad and Schneider 1992). This can be seen as early as the colonization of the United States. Most of the colonists who came to America were members of the middle class and held strong morals regarding restrictive sexuality, with an emphasis placed on the importance of the family. With the Christian belief that people are sinners by nature, colonists felt that anyone was capable of sodomy. In order to prevent the sin, several New England colonies required single men to live either as servants or boarders in the house of a married couple (Greenberg 1988).

During the eighteenth and nineteenth century, physicians acted as champions of the traditional moral code. With the belief that orgasms weakened a person, they discouraged unnecessary sexual activities. Activities that previously had been viewed as immoral such as masturbation and homosexual activity, were now also seen as unhealthy, leading to lethargy, mental illness, and physical diseases (Conrad and Schneider 1992). In a sense, this was an echo of previous Christian restrictive sexuality (Greenberg 1998).

By the last decades of the nineteenth century, the idea of immoral sex causing bodily harm was being challenged by theories of heredity such as degeneracy and social Darwinism (Conrad and Schneider 1992). Degeneracy theory was first developed in France and claimed that pathologies that people developed by drinking, poor diet, and living in poverty could be passed down genetically through generations. Cesare Lombroso developed a theory in 1876, based on Darwin's theory of evolution, claiming that criminals and sexual perverts were genetic throw-backs from a more primitive stage of evolution (Lombroso 1876).



These theories of degeneracy would soon be challenged by psychiatric perspectives in the 20th century. Psychoanalysis and behaviorism were two psychological fields that would impact the viewpoint and treatment of homosexuality. Freud, often considered the father of psychoanalysis, theorized that everyone at one point during the course of their life enters a developmental stage characterized by homosexual urges. An important aspect of Freud's theory is that he did not define homosexuality as particularly bad or deviant, just different (Conrad and Schneider 1992).

The second psychological viewpoint that had a major influence on the treatment of homosexuality was behaviorism, also called the learning theory. Behaviorism is based on the theory that pleasure is a positive reinforcement which encourages a certain type of behavior, while pain is a negative reinforcement that discourages a type of behavior. While behaviorists did not label homosexuality as pathological, its form of treatment has been charged as inhumane, with the basic nature of its cruelty reinforcing society's negativity towards homosexuality (Greenberg 1988).

Further solidifying a shift of homosexuality as a degenerate disease into homosexuality as pathology, was the inclusion of homosexuality as a form of "sexual deviation" under the broader classification of "Sociopathic Personality Disturbance" in the first *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-I) which was first published in 1952. The DSM is the official classification system of psychiatric disorders of The American Psychiatric Association. The DSM-II, came out in 1968, and homosexuality was this time classified as a "sexual deviation," under the broader category of "Personality Disorders and Certain Other Non-Psychotic Mental Disorders." (American Psychiatric Association 1960). A survey of the American public's attitudes in 1970, showed that 62 percent of the participants viewed homosexuality as an illness that could be cured (Levitt and Klasser 1974). It was not until 1973, that homosexuality as a disorder itself was removed from the DSM (Conrad and Schneider 1992). However, almost 70 percent of the 2,500 psychiatrists surveyed by the journal *Medical Aspects of*

*Human Sexuality* reported opposition to the change (Kronemayer 1980). Also, homosexuality found a new home within the DSM under the classification “Sexual Orientation Disturbance (Homosexuality).” While homosexuality was no longer an illness in itself, the category still existed for those individuals who were disturbed by or wishing to change their homosexual orientation (Conrad and Schneider 1992).

Along with the movement from medicalization to pathology, the Kinsey studies are often hailed as an important changing agent in the middle of the twentieth century, influencing how people thought about sex. These were the first studies to look at sexual activity at such a large scale, with the interviewing and survey of 5,300 males and 5,940 females. They reported a rate of homosexual behavior much higher than what they expected. Thirty-seven percent of adult males in the United States and 13 percent of adult females reported having had “some sort of overt homosexual experience to the point of orgasm between adolescence and old age.” From this information, Kinsey concluded that there was no such thing as homosexuality. These were just homosexual acts. Kinsey viewed homosexuality as a socially constructed category, and stated that homosexual activity was a conduct that was learned and a matter of choice (Kinsey, Pomeroy and Martin 1948).

Although small, short-lived gay liberation groups existed prior to 1945, it was not until 1945 and the following five years that more consequential groups emerged that were dedicated to helping homosexuals who were arrested. By the 1960s, some religious representatives began to show support for the gay movement and The Council on Religion and the Homosexual was formed in 1965. Generally considered an important event in the growth of the gay movement, was the Stonewall riots.<sup>2</sup> The Stonewall Inn was a gay bar in Greenwich Village, which was often times raided by the police on so-called alcohol

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<sup>2</sup>Murray (1996) challenges the importance laid on the Stonewall Riot, stating that similar events occurred earlier in other places. Furthermore, he argues that a raid on the Snake Pit bar in New York later that summer, was probably more important than the Stonewall Riot.

violations. However, the gay community generally believed that the police raids were an attempt to frighten homosexuals. With this in mind, on June 27, 1969, patrons of the Inn fought back. Out of the event grew two highly influential organizations, the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) and the Gay Activist Alliance (GAA). Within the next year, five gay-focused newspapers emerged reflecting the surge of gay pride, and by 1972, more than 1000 local gay organizations sprouted up in the United States (Conrad and Schneider 1992).

Also following the Stonewall incident, was the emergence of support for the gay community by outside sources. For example, in 1969, the American Sociological Association condemned discrimination against individuals based on their sexual preference, the American Library Association formed a task force in 1970 to reclassify homosexuality from its location under "Sexual Perversion," and by 1971, Colorado, Connecticut, Idaho, Illinois, and Oregon had all passed laws that decriminalized consensual homosexual acts between adults that took place in private (Teal 1971).

The AIDS epidemic that broke out in the 1980's was an obstacle to the gay movement. It acted as an agent of homophobic sentiment in the United States. The government legislation and media representation of AIDS established a link between homosexuality and the disease (Donnelly, Donnelly, Kittleson, Fogarty, Procaccino, and Duncan 1997). During the 1980s, the AIDS issue eclipsed all other gay agendas. The gay movement has since begun to focus on other issues, such as the right for openly gay men to serve in the military and the legalization of same sex marriage (Murray 1996).

While gay-activists have succeeded creating a movement towards homosexuality being viewed as a life-style, a considerably large proportion of the society still believes that homosexuality is morally wrong or deviant. A *Newsweek* poll reported that in 1993, 53 percent of respondents believed that homosexuality was not an acceptable lifestyle. In the same year, *The New York Times* reported that 55 percent of respondents thought that sexual behavior between same-sex adults was morally wrong. Even more recently, the

Gallop Poll (2000) found that 47 percent of respondents either somewhat disagreed or strongly disagreed with the gay/lesbian rights movement and 64 percent of respondents did not think that the Boy Scouts of America should be required to allow openly gay adults to serve as Boy Scout leaders. This suggests that about half of the American population is still unaccepting of the homosexual lifestyle.

Today, the culturally constructed meanings of homosexuality are under debate. Research is being conducted in attempts to isolate a biological cause of homosexuality in the form of a “gay” gene. Some individuals view homosexuality as a life-style choice, while others maintain the belief that homosexuality is a sin. Research is also being undertaken that examines cross-culturally what it means to be gay in other cultures (Kimmel 2000).

#### Current Academic Research Regarding College Campuses and Homosexuality

Lesbian, gay, and bisexual issues on the college campus have gained increasing attention from researchers since the 1990’s (Bieschke, Eberz, and Wilson 2000), with much of the material focusing primarily on heterosexual attitudes towards homosexuality (Bascow and Johnson 2000; Cotten-Huston and Waite 2000; Donnelly et al. 1997) or incidents of harassment based on a person’s sexual preference (Herek 1993; D’Augelli and Rose 1992). Bascow and Johnson (2000) focused on female university students’ attitudes towards lesbians. Their sample consisted of 71 undergraduate women at a private liberal arts college in the Northeast. They found that college women who displayed the most negative attitudes toward lesbians were the ones who had the highest right-wing authoritarianism scores, placed the greatest importance on having feminine attributes, believed the least in sex role egalitarianism, and knew the fewest gay men or women.

Cotten-Huston and Waite (2000) studied predictors of homophobia in heterosexual, undergraduate students and the effectiveness of anti-homophobic classroom interventions, including the showing of a 45 minute video taped during a Gay Pride Parade and convening a gay panel consisting of two lesbians and one gay man. A total of 176

students participated in the research. Participants were from six business classes and three psychology classes.<sup>3</sup> Of these participants, data was analyzed only for the 150 students who reported being heterosexual. They found that the more gay acquaintances the college students had, the more likely they were to have positive attitudes towards homosexuality. Also, the more negative attitudes the college students had towards women and the more religious the students considered themselves, the more likely they were to have negative attitudes towards homosexuality. Neither of the classroom interventions significantly impacted scores on the Index of Attitudes Toward Homosexuals questionnaire. A study done by Donnelly et al. (1997) found that amongst the 104 Long Island New York University undergraduate and graduate students that they surveyed, women tended to have more positive attitudes towards homosexuals than their male counterparts.

Herek's (1993) study focused on harassment that homosexuals experienced from heterosexuals on the Yale campus. Herek distributed the questionnaire at a campus dance sponsored by lesbian and gay students, at meetings of lesbian and gay organizations on campus, and through snowball sampling. Of the 215 respondents<sup>4</sup>, Herek analyzed data only for the 166 respondents who identified themselves as gay, lesbian, or bisexual. Herek found that 67 percent of these respondents reported being the victims of verbal abuse and 25 percent of the respondents had been threatened with physical violence. Forty-two percent had experienced some form of physical abuse because of their sexual orientation and 25 percent reported having been chased. Twelve percent reported being sexually harassed or assaulted because of their sexual orientation. This was true equally for male and female responses. Also important to note, Herek found that 76 percent of the

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<sup>3</sup> There was heavy female representation with 72 percent of the respondents being female and 28 percent male.

<sup>4</sup> Fifty-four percent were male, 43 percent were female, and two percent did not state their gender. Sixty-four percent of the respondents were undergraduate students. Twenty percent of the respondents were graduate or professional students. Five percent were faculty, six percent were staff members, and two percent were Yale graduates or campus visitors.

respondents knew at least one other person who had been either harassed, threatened with violence, or physically attacked because of their perceived homosexuality. Fear of an attack caused 39 percent of the respondents to modify their behavior at Yale. An individual did not have to be harassed personally to feel the effects of homophobia. They may have witnessed or heard of harassment directed towards others.

D'Augelli and Rose (1990), studied heterosexual views concerning the harassment of lesbians and gay men. They examined the surveys of 249 heterosexual freshmen college students at Pennsylvania State University. They found that 98 percent of the freshmen surveyed had heard negative remarks about lesbians and gay men. Almost all of the freshmen expected lesbians or gay men on campus to be harassed.

Keeping in mind that none of the studies reviewed thus far involved random samples, and therefore, their findings can not be generalized to all campuses, I can still recap what has been found:

1. College women who report having the most negative attitudes toward lesbians are those who have the highest right-wing authoritarianism attitudes, place great importance on having feminine attributes, and have the least belief in sex role egalitarianism.
2. College students with gay acquaintances are more likely to report having positive attitudes towards homosexuality than their peers.
3. In an experimental setting classroom interventions have been relatively unsuccessful in attempting to create more positive attitudes towards homosexuality.
4. Women college students tend to have more positive attitudes towards homosexuals than their male counterparts.
5. The majority of homosexuals report being the victims of verbal abuse, physical abuse, and sexual harassment on the college campus.

These studies have revealed important findings that have shed light on such things as predictors of homophobic attitudes. As it was shown by Cotten-Huston and Waite (2000), those individuals who consider themselves religious and have negative views about women, are more likely to also have negative attitudes towards homosexuality than their peers. These types of findings are important if the college campus wants to design programs that will more effectively improve the environment for lesbians, bisexuals, and gay men. While intervention programs, such as the ones implemented by Cotten-Huston and Waite (2000), tend to have relatively small effect on heterosexual attitudes towards homosexuality, this kind of knowledge can help to develop programs that will be more affective. Finally, it is shown through Herek's (1993) study that improvements in the college environment need to be made. Seventy-six percent of the respondents in his study knew at least one person who had been harassed, threatened with violence, or physically attacked because of the perception that they were gay.

### Homosexuality in the Classroom

While several studies on college campuses focused on heterosexual attitudes and harassment towards gays and lesbians on college campuses, few studies have focused specifically on the classroom setting (Conolly 2000). A study done by Waterman, Reid, Garfield, and Hoy (2001) focused on courses specifically aimed at sexual diversity. The four main goals of the study were "to determine (a) who enrolled into a Psychology of Homosexuality class, (b) what topics about homosexuality were of most interest to the enrolled students, (c) what effect attending a class about homosexuality had on student homophobia, and (d) what teaching strategies were most valuable for students" (p. 21). The sample consisted of 114 students at a private, Midwestern university, enrolled in a "Psychology of Homosexuality" class.<sup>5</sup> The students were given a preclass questionnaire

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<sup>5</sup>The participants consisted of 62 percent women, 38 percent men, were 53 percent sophomores and 65 percent psychology majors. Seventy-nine percent of the men and 55 percent of the women who participated reported their sexual identity to be "exclusively heterosexual."

that included demographic information, the Index of Homophobia, Herek's Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gay Men scale, and questions regarding their sexual attraction, sexual activity, and sexual orientation. After the end of the semester, the students were then given a postclass questionnaire which consisted of the homophobia questionnaires, and rated their opinion of what topics in the class were most interesting, and how much they felt they had learned. Students also rated the teaching tactics of the professor. The study found that students enrolling in the course were mostly heterosexual and had previously been exposed to sexual diversity issues before taking the class. The participants reported a decrease in homophobia from the beginning of the class to the end. While students going into the class expressed the most interest in learning about why people are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered, in the postclass questionnaire, they reported the topic of "how best to support someone coming out" as most valuable. The teaching strategy rated as most effective by the students was the use of guest speakers (Waterman, Reid, Garfield, and Hoy 2001).

Besides Waterman et al, very little research exists addressing homosexual issues in the classroom setting. The college classroom setting is an important social situation where two influential groups, peers and faculty, can subject lesbian, gay, and bisexual people to psychological violence. Classmates' attitudes toward gay, lesbian, and bisexual people also affect the dynamics of the classroom, and research suggests that those students who have gay, lesbian, and bisexual acquaintances are more likely to have positive attitudes than those students who do not (Bascow and Johnson 2000; Cotten-Huston and Waite 2000). While negative remarks are the most obvious form of sexual preference bias, bias can also manifest itself through unintentional discrimination. Stephen Sweet (2001) defines unintentional discrimination as "behaviors that deny fair and equitable treatment, emanating from dispositions that are not necessarily accompanied by ill will or malice on the part of the oppressor." Examples of unintentional discrimination would be the



avoidance of approaching the issue of homosexuality in courses where the subject matter is appropriate and assuming everyone is heterosexual (Conolly 2000).

Possible classroom environments include a range from queer study courses, as opposed to courses with no mention of homosexual issues, either because there is no need for there to be or where the topic could be included but is not, to professors who include the topic of homosexuality on their course syllabus for a class period. Other possible classroom environments are ones where the teacher tolerates derogatory remarks directed towards homosexuals from fellow classmates, ones where the faculty member openly makes derogatory remarks, and environments where students are discriminated against based on their sexual preference. Furthermore, the classroom could be headed by a faculty member who is openly gay or closeted.

Currently, there is little research which directly addresses homosexuality and the classroom environment. Along with focusing specifically on the classroom setting, a second gap in the literature that this study addresses regarding gay, lesbian, and bisexual issues is a lack of variety in data collection techniques. In an analysis of research on gay, lesbian, and bisexual college students, Bieschke, Eberz, and Wilson (2000) found that six out of the examined nine studies used quantitative data collection exclusively, two were exclusively qualitative, and only one study used both quantitative and qualitative research methods. My research focuses primarily on student perceptions of college classroom environments and utilizes both quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

The intention of my study is to examine heterosexual students' level of homophobia and their perception of the classroom environment as it pertains to homosexuality. I examine whether students who have gay, lesbian, or bisexual friends are more likely to have positive attitudes towards homosexuality than their peers who do not, whether students with positive attitudes towards homosexuality will be more likely to feel that gay studies courses should be taught on campus, and whether or not these students noticed more sexuality-preference bias in the classroom than their peers. The study was

designed also to examine the perceptions of gay, lesbian, and bisexual students regarding the classroom setting. By utilizing qualitative interviews of gay, lesbian, and bisexual students, quantitative surveys of the general population of college students, and unobtrusive research methods, my study examines student perceptions of the environments created within the college classroom.

### **Research Methods**

This research utilized a triangulation of methods including qualitative interviews, quantitative surveys, and unobtrusive observations to address perceptions of homosexuality in the classroom. The participants were undergraduate students at a small liberal arts college in Pennsylvania which has a student body of 1420, with the majority of students coming from a rural setting. The population is approximately 55 percent female and 45 percent male, with 96 percent of these students white, and seventy-nine percent living in campus housing.

The college setting is one in which the campus gay-straight alliance holds an annual panel discussion in which the entire campus is invited to attend. There is also a support group of students with faculty allies that meets weekly. The campus is also the site for a yearly AIDS walk. The gay/straight alliance displays general posters about their organization on campus bulletin boards across campus. Of the full-time faculty members, 19% have either safe-zone stickers, flyers, or support buttons for the gay/straight alliance posted outside their offices.

#### Qualitative

Thirteen in-depth qualitative interviews with gay, lesbian, and bisexual students were conducted. The purpose of the interviews was to explore gay, lesbian, and bisexual students' feelings of inclusion or exclusion in the college classroom setting. This will be examined in terms of perceived classroom interactions and the inclusion or exclusion of gay issues in appropriate courses. For example, an issue that could be addressed in an

accounting class is appropriate taxation of those individuals in same sex relationships. Other examples would be addressing same-sex couples in a family course or discussing diversity issues regarding homosexuality in an education class. It is not expected that courses such as calculus and computer science courses, where material does not lend itself to homosexual/heterosexual differences, include a homosexual topic coverage.<sup>6</sup> To conceptualize the college experience, I also asked the participants to discuss perceived differences between college environments and their high school experiences.

My research involving the perceived attitudes of gays, lesbians, and bisexuals towards the college classroom environment lent itself to qualitative research in part because of the difficulty in finding large numbers of lesbian, bisexual, and gay individuals to participate in the study. The small sample made it nearly impossible to shape any quantitative assumptions that could be generalized to the gay population as a whole. Because of the exploratory nature of qualitative research, I used grounded theory to analyze the data (Strauss and Corbin 1990). Instead of predetermining to use my research to support or contradict a specific theory, I used open coding. Open coding involves looking over the notes taken from the interview and underlining or circling important themes, allowing for the development of a purpose (Newman 2000).

The thirteen gay, lesbian, and bisexual students who participated in the qualitative interviews were recruited through the gay/straight alliance, which is the campus organization for gays, lesbians, and bisexuals, and through the snowball sampling technique. Participants were contacted to set up an interview appointment and were given a choice of interview location to increase the participant's comfort. Arrangements were made to use a vacant faculty office (3 interviews), participants' dorm rooms (2 interviews), a private room in the library (2 interviews), a dorm lounge (2 participants),

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<sup>6</sup>Although, it should be noted that a member of the mathematics faculty has presented at a teaching conference on ways to incorporate homosexuality into mathematics examples.

my apartment (2 participants), a participant's apartment (1 participant), and even a park bench (1 participant). The interviews were semi-structured, and I utilized the interview schedule found in Appendix A.

### Quantitative Design

The first purpose of the quantitative research was to examine student attitudes towards gay, lesbian, and bisexual classmates. Previous research has found a correlation between acquaintances with gay, lesbian and bisexual people and attitudes towards homosexuality. The greater the number of gay, lesbian and bisexuals an individual knows, the more likely they are to have positive attitudes towards homosexuality (Bascow and Johnson 2000; Cotten-Huston and Waite 2000).

The survey also included questions regarding student perceptions of teacher and classmate attitudes regarding homosexuality and their perceptions of classroom coverage of gay, lesbian, and bisexual issues. The survey was also designed to explore the findings of gender studies that have suggested that groups which are culturally defined as dominant, often are unaware or unwilling to admit that a bias exists against the subordinate group (Ridgeway 2001). My hypotheses were:

- H1: Heterosexual students who have bisexual, lesbian, and/or gay acquaintances will be more likely to have positive attitudes towards homosexuality than those students who do not have bisexual, lesbian, and/or gay acquaintances.
- H2: Heterosexual individuals with positive attitudes towards homosexuality will be more likely to feel that queer studies courses should be taught on campus.
- H3: Heterosexual individuals with positive attitudes regarding homosexuality will have been no more likely to have noticed sexuality-preference bias in the classroom than those individuals who exhibited negative attitudes towards homosexuality.

## Sample

The survey sample came from those students living on campus. Three hundred surveys were sent out through the campus mail system, and seventy-six students returned the survey. The sample was selected through a random systematic method of every fifth student in the telephone directory.

## **Quantitative Results**

### Demographics

The survey was administered through the mail to a random sample of three hundred students. The demographic variables are displayed in Table 1. There was a response rate of 25% with approximately three-fourths (72.4 %) being female and one-fourth (27.6%) male. It is important to note that these percentages are not representative of the college which has a population comprised of 55 percent female and 45 percent male. The class year of the respondents were as follows, approximately one-fourth (27.6%) freshmen, one-sixth (14.5%) sophomore, one-fourth (25%) junior, and one-third (32.9%) senior. The majority of the students reported being heterosexual (92%), with only around one-tenth (8%) reporting gay, lesbian, bisexual, or other sexual orientation. Approximately nine-tenths (90.8%) of the respondents reported knowing at least one gay, lesbian, or bisexual sexual individual. When asked how many gay, lesbian, or bisexual individuals the respondent considered to be friends or acquaintances, approximately one-tenth (11.8%) reported zero, one-third (35.5%) reported 1 to 3, one-third (30.2%) reported 4 to 6, one-tenth (9.2%) reported 7-9, and slightly less than one-tenth (7.8%) reported having 10 or more friends who were gay, lesbian or bisexual.

**Table 1.1: Demographic Variables of Survey Respondents**

Variables	Frequency	Percent	Variables	Frequency	Percent
<b>Sex</b>			<b>Class Year</b>		
Female	55	72.4	Freshmen	21	27.6
Male	21	27.6	Sophomore	11	14.5
			Junior	19	25
			Senior	25	32.9
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>			<b>Number of Gay, Lesbian, or Bisexual Friends/ Acquaintances</b>		
Heterosexual	69	90.8	0	9	11.8
Gay	2	2.6	1-3	27	35.5
Bisexual	2	2.6	4-6	23	30.2
Lesbian	1	1.3	7-9	7	9.2
Other	1	1.3	10 or More	6	7.8
Missing	1	1.3	Missing	4	5.3
<b>Knows Someone Who is Gay, Lesbian, or Bisexual</b>					
Yes	69	90.8			
No	7	9.2			
			<b>Sample size</b>	<b>76</b>	

### Acceptance Level of Respondents

In order to measure the acceptance level of respondents, a six item scale was developed. The questions were adapted from Gregory Herek's 1992 ATLG scale<sup>7</sup>. Each question was scored on a range from 1 to 4, with one being not accepting and four being most accepting. Thus, the response range of the scale as a whole ranged from 6 (not accepting) to 24 (most accepting). The six items in the scale are as follows:

<sup>7</sup>Several questions in the original form of Herek's ATLG scale were deemed too offensive for this research. There was concern that students taking the survey could not walk away from it without emotional harm.

1. Female homosexuality is detrimental to society because it breaks down the natural divisions between the sexes.
2. State laws regulating private, consenting lesbian behavior should be loosened.
3. Female homosexuality in itself is no problem, but what society makes of it can be a problem.
4. If a man has homosexual feelings, he should do everything he can to overcome them.
5. I would *not* be too upset if I learned that my roommate were a homosexual.
6. Male homosexuality is merely a different kind of lifestyle that should *not* be condemned.

In general, the majority of the respondents reported positive attitudes towards homosexuality. On a scale where six equals not accepting and 24 equals the most accepting, one-tenth (12%) of the respondents scored 12 or less, two-fifths (39.8%) scored between 13 and 18, and one-half (51.8%) scored a 19 or above. The two most reported frequencies were 18 and 20, with one-tenth (10.5%) of the respondents scoring each. The mean score was 17.57.

These results may not be representative of the college populations. Because the survey was administered through the mail, the returned sample may have been biased. Students with positive attitudes towards homosexuality may have been more likely to take the time to fill out the survey than those students who have negative attitudes towards homosexuality.

### Classroom Environment

In general, the respondents reported perceptions of the classroom setting created by faculty and students that were neither strongly positive nor strongly negative. For example, while nine-tenths (89.5%) of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that

when homosexual issues come up in class (see Table 2), professors handle them well, only one-third (33.3%) agreed or strongly agreed that professors adequately integrate gay issues into their lectures (see Table 3). Furthermore, approximately one-third of respondents (32.9%) reported taking a class that included homosexual topics on the syllabus. In regards to respondent perceptions of classmates, seven-tenths (71.1%) reported having heard classmates make negative comments about homosexuality, only one-fifth (22.4%) agreed or strongly agreed that they heard a professor make negative comments about homosexuality (see Table 4). This suggests that the respondents perceive their peers as creating a less accepting classroom environment as compared to the faculty. Nine-tenths (89.5%) of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they often hear students use the term “gay” to describe something as stupid (see Table 5).

**Table 2:** When Homosexual Issues Come up in Class, Professors Handle Them Well

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0
Disagree	8	10.5	10.5	10.5
Agree	58	76.3	76.3	86.8
Strongly Agree	10	13.2	13.2	100
Total	76	100	100	

**Table 3:** Professors Adequately Integrate Gay Issues Into Their Lectures

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	12	15.8	16	16
Disagree	38	50	50.7	66.7
Agree	23	30.3	30.7	97.3
Strongly Agree	2	2.6	2.7	100
Total	75	98.7	100	
Missing	1	1.3		



**Table 4: I Have Heard a Professor Make Negative Comments About Homosexuality**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly agree	1	1.3	1.3	1.3
Agree	16	21.1	21.1	22.4
Disagree	31	40.8	40.8	63.2
Strongly Disagree	28	36.8	36.8	100
Total	76	100	100	

**Table 5: I Often Hear Students Use the Term “Gay” to Describe Something as Stupid**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	3	3.9	3.9	3.9
Disagree	5	6.6	6.6	10.5
Agree	23	30.3	30.3	40.8
Strongly Agree	45	59.2	59.2	100
Total	76	100	100	

### Bivariate Analysis

The first hypothesis tested was that heterosexual students who have bisexual, lesbian, and/or gay acquaintances will be more likely to have positive attitudes towards homosexuality than those students who do not have bisexual, lesbian, and/or gay acquaintances.<sup>8</sup> The data supported the hypothesis. The Spearman’s rho test showed a significant correlation coefficient (.560) with a p value less than .001 (see Table 6).

**Table 6: Acceptance by Amount of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual Friends**

		Acceptance Scale
How many gay, lesbian	Correlation Coefficient	.560**
or bisexual people do	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001
you consider friend or	N	69
acquaintances		

<sup>8</sup>Note that these results are pulled only from the responses given by the 69 students who listed their sexual orientation as heterosexual.

It is important to remember that we cannot draw cause and effect from this data. The findings showed a positive correlation between the amount of gay, lesbian, and bisexual friends that heterosexual students have and positive scores on the acceptance scale. It is not clear whether or not students who are more accepting to begin with are more likely to befriend gay, lesbian, and bisexual students, or if students who have come in contact with more gay, lesbian, and bisexual students are more likely to become more accepting because of it. The acceptance scale used to find the correlation above was a modified version of Herek's ATLG Scale and was tested for reliability. It scored a reliability coefficient alpha of .9051, which is considered very reliable.

My second hypothesis was, heterosexual individuals with positive attitudes towards homosexuality will be more likely to feel that queer studies courses should be taught on campus than heterosexual individuals with negative attitudes. This hypothesis was also supported. Using the Spearman's rho, the data shows a moderately strong correlation between the two variables with a correlation coefficient of .309 and p value of .01 (see Table 7). This suggests that the higher respondents scored on the acceptance scale, the more likely they are to believe that colleges and universities should offer queer studies courses.

**Table 7: Acceptance by Agreement of Queer Studies Courses**

		Acceptance Scale
Colleges and Universities	Correlation Coefficient	.309*
should offer queer	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.01
studies courses.	N	69

The third hypothesis was that heterosexual individuals with positive attitudes regarding homosexuality will have been no more likely to have noticed sexuality-preference bias in the classroom than those individuals who exhibited negative attitudes towards homosexuality. Using the Spearman's rho, this hypothesis was also

supported (see Table 8). The data did not suggest any correlation between acceptance and whether or not students:

1. heard a professor make negative comments about homosexuality (p value = .760)
2. felt that professors adequately integrate gay issues into their lectures (p value = .132)
3. felt that when homosexual issues come up in class, professors handle them well (p value = .789).

The correlation coefficients did show negative trends suggesting that those with higher acceptance scores noticed more negativity in the classroom compared to those respondents, but the trends were not strong enough to show significance.

**Table 8:** Acceptance of Students by Perceptions of the Classroom

		I have heard a professor make negative comments about homosexuality.	Professors adequately integrate gay issues into their lectures.	issues come up in class, professors handle them well.
Acceptance	Correlation	-0.038	-0.184	-0.033
Scale	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.76	0.132	0.789
	N	69	68	69

While the study was not designed to test further hypothesis, two other findings are worth mentioning. First, there was a moderately weak correlation between the respondent's year of study and acceptance score (see Table 9). Freshmen scored lowest on the acceptance scale with a mean rank of 26. Sophomores, with a mean rank of 35.62, and juniors, with a mean rank of 34.61, scored in the middle. Seniors scored the most accepting with a mean score of 42.50. The data shows a Chi-square of 7.262 and a p-value of .064. The weakness of this score may partly be explained by the small sample size.

**Table 1.12: Acceptance Levels by Year of Study**

	Year of Study	Sample Size	Mean Rank
Acceptance Scale	Freshmen	19	26
	Sophomore	9	35.61
	Junior	17	34.15
	Senior	24	42.5
	Total	69	
<b>Acceptance Scale</b>			
Chi Square	7.262		
df	3		
Asymp. Sig	.064		

While the data showed a moderately weak correlation between the year of study of the respondent and the respondent acceptance score, the data did not show a correlation between the sex of the respondent and the respondent acceptance score (see Table 10). The data showed a Z score of  $-.782$  and a p-value of  $.434$ . This finding is contrary to previous studies. Donnelly, et al's (1997) study that found that women tended to have more positive attitudes towards homosexuals than their male counterparts. A possible explanation could be the sample collected by a survey distributed through the mail. Remember that the respondents for this survey were almost three fourths female. The conjecture that respondents tended to have more positive attitudes towards homosexuality than those students who did not respond, would explain the discrepancy in male vs. female response rate and the lack of correlation between sex and acceptance score. However, it may very well be that the data is representative of the campus, and male and female students have similar attitudes towards homosexuality.

**Table 10: Acceptance of Males vs. Females**

	Year of Study	Sample Size	Sum of Ranks
Acceptance Scale	Female	50	1808
	Male	19	607
	Total	69	
<b>Acceptance Scale</b>			
Mann-Whitney U	417		
Wilcoxon W	607		
Z	-.782		
Asymp. Sig	.434		

### Survey Conclusions

In summation, the majority of the respondents displayed accepting attitudes towards homosexuality. They also perceived the classroom environment to be neither completely positive or completely negative, with the attitude that professors creating a more positive classroom environment than their peers. All three hypotheses were supported. First, heterosexual students who have bisexual, lesbian, and/or gay acquaintances were more likely to have positive attitudes towards homosexuality than those students who do not have bisexual, lesbian, and/or gay acquaintances. Secondly, heterosexual individuals with positive attitudes towards homosexuality were more likely to feel that gay studies courses should be taught on campus. Third, heterosexual individuals with positive attitudes regarding homosexuality will have been no more likely to have noticed sexuality-preference bias in the classroom than those individuals who exhibited negative attitudes towards homosexuality. Other findings include a correlation between class year and homosexuality acceptance levels, with freshmen being least accepting and seniors being most accepting. No correlation between sex of respondent and acceptance scores was found. The survey was limited by the small sample size and data collection method.

## Qualitative Findings

### Interview Themes

Thirteen interviews were conducted with gay, lesbian, and bisexual students on campus to explore their perceptions of the college environment with special attention paid to the classroom setting. In other words, the interview was intended to get an overview of whether or not students perceived professors as accepting of homosexual students and if the students felt that faculty integrate gay issues into their lectures. The interview was also designed to explore the gay, lesbian, and bisexual participants' perceptions of the acceptance level of their classmates. The participants were also asked to describe their high school environment to help place their college experiences into a context. Please note that I have given the interviewees pseudonyms to protect their identity. Among the seven males and six females interviewed, certain themes emerged. They are as follows:

1. The majority of the participants described the campus as neither very accepting or very negative. Most placed the college somewhere in the middle.
2. Most of those interviewed described college as a more accepting atmosphere for gay, lesbian, and bisexual students when compared with their high school experiences.
3. The participants were split between those who believe that their professors perceive them as gay and those who do not believe that their professors perceive them as gay.
4. Students did not feel as though they were treated unfairly by faculty because of their sexual orientation.
5. The participants were mostly split between those who felt that the professors adequately covered gay issues, felt that it was not covered adequately, and felt that whether or not the topic was adequately covered depended on the professor.
6. The majority of those interviewed never took a class because they believed the class to be a safe environment for gays, lesbian, and bisexual students.

7. The majority of the participants would take a class in queer studies if it were offered.
8. The majority of the participants considered themselves out, but many, expressed the opinion that they do not flaunt their sexual orientation.
9. Some participants expressed the opinion that jocks and fraternity brothers are generally not accepting of homosexuality.

Campus Atmosphere: The first thing that the interviewees were asked was to describe the general atmosphere of the college towards homosexuality and bisexuality. None of the students perceived the college environment to be extremely accepting or extremely negative. Four students described the campus as pretty accepting. Another student went on to say that while he found the campus accepting, he did not necessarily find it supportive. Two of the students described the campus as being split between those who are accepting and those who are not, and another student perceived the campus as being split between those who are accepting and those who are apathetic. Two students described the general atmosphere as apathetic or neutral and two students described the atmosphere as being less than neutral or emitting pressure to act within the norms. Interestingly, two students reported being harassed, but only one of these students, Jane, gave negative reports about the campus. Jane had experienced harassing phone calls the first semester that she came out. Karen also mentioned harassment, but she said that she doesn't "consider the incidents to be a part of the general atmosphere," because she "forgot about them." The incidents of harassment that Karen experienced consisted of guys yelling negative comments out of windows at her and her girlfriend and someone writing, "You fucking dyke" on her door. Karen went on to say that she perceives 99% of the people on campus as not caring.

College vs. High School Atmosphere: The majority of the gay, lesbian, and bisexual students who were interviewed agreed that college was a better

atmosphere than high school. Of the thirteen students interviewed, eight perceived the college atmosphere to be more accepting than their high school. Some of these students expressed a significant difference between high school and college. Two students described their high school atmosphere as "horrendous," and Joe said that coming out in high school would have been a "horrible, horrible, experience." Jason attributed the difference to a rise in maturity level of the students from high school to college. Crystal expressed the opinion that college students form their own opinions, as opposed to high school students who are pressured to retain the opinions of their parents. Another negative aspect expressed about high school was that there did not tend to be many openly gay students. Four of the interviewed students mentioned knowing a scarce amount of students in high school who were openly gay.

While the majority of those interviewed viewed the campus as a better environment for gay, lesbian, and bisexual students, two students described the two environments as similar. Karen remarked that high school was like college in that, "No one says anything, " and "No one cared." Jody made the comparison that both schools are small and that most people operate under the motto, "Don't know. Don't tell."

Being "Out" to Faculty: After comparing their high school and college environments, the students were then asked whether or not they believe their college professors perceive them as gay or bisexual. Five of the students did not feel as though their professors knew they were gay. Three of them thought that their professors were aware of their sexual orientation. Two believed that fairly many of their professors perceived them as gay. Two did not know, and one student believed that only the few professors they told knew. These answers are important, because they affect the expected answers to the next question the interviewees were asked. Students who did not believe their professors knew that



they were gay, lesbian, or bisexual individuals would not expect professors to treat them differently because of their sexual orientation.

Faculty Treatment of Participants: Of the three students who believed that professors knew that they were gay, two of them believed that they were treated unfairly because of their sexual orientation. One of the students who felt as though he was treated unfairly by a faculty member was Tony. He gave the example of asking a professor a question dealing with homosexuality which he thought was related to the subject matter being discussed only to have the professor reply, “That’s not what we’re talking about.” Crystal felt that she was discriminated against by a professor. She came right out and said, “A professor hates me, because I’m gay.” According to Crystal, the professor and she had gotten along fine until he found out that she was gay. Since then, she said, “He wouldn’t give me the time of day if I tried to talk to him,” and that his demeanor towards her became “really cold.”

While the interview did not include a specific question asking how the students interviewed would like to be treated, certain inferences can be made from their statements. The participants expressed opinions that suggest that their idea of the perfect classroom environment would be one in which the professor adequately integrated gay themes into their lectures but did not treat gay students any differently from their heterosexual peers. Jane wrote that “Once, a teacher brought [homosexuality] up, and I felt segregated. The teacher stared at me and acted as though I should be speaking about it.” Crystal made a similar statement. She said that, “If a professor knows you are openly gay and the topic comes up, they expect you to talk about it even if you don’t really feel like talking about it.” Another example demonstrating an participant’s wish to be treated the same as heterosexual classmates was given by Jennifer. She told about a professor who had been rumored to give better grades to gay, lesbian, and bisexual students.

Jennifer said that she tries to “stay out of those classrooms,” because “that isn’t being treated equally.”

Classroom Coverage: There was no consensus with regards to class coverage. Student responses were split between five students who believed their professors adequately cover gay issues, three students who did not believe that professors adequately cover gay issues, four students said that the amount of coverage varied between professors, and one student who did not feel that the professors in their classes had any reason to bring up the topic. Jason was one of the students who believed that gay topics should be brought up more often, and he explained that professors should bring up the topic “without making a point to . . . to make it not awkward to hear the word “gay.” He also said that “College is not just about book learning. It’s about meeting different groups of people, and gays are a significant minority.”

Safe Environment and Queer Studies: Out of the thirteen students interviewed, only one student reported taking a class specifically because he thought it would be a safe environment for gay, lesbian, and bisexual students. Robert said that he took a class, because he thought he’d be the only male student. Matthew mentioned that the closest he would come to taking “safe” classes would be avoiding “some gym classes,” but he went on to say that he “even took weight lifting and knew that the big tough guys would be in it. It’s not so bad.” Two students who said that they did not take a course because of it being a safe environment offered that they took classes which they thought would be interesting and that they knew would include the topic of homosexuality. Tony said that if he was going to take a class because he thought it was interesting, if it were being taught by two different professors, he might take the acceptance level of the professors into consideration when choosing which section to enroll in. While the majority of those interviewed did not enroll in a class, because they

viewed it as a safe environment, they did express an interest in taking a course in queer studies. Nine students said that they would take a class, two said maybe, and two said no.

“Out?”: Ten of the thirteen students interviewed considered themselves to be out, and three considered themselves as somewhat out. Five of the students made specific references stating that they did not believe themselves to flaunt their sexual orientation. Matthew even expressed the concern that, “Some people identify themselves by sexuality first and then personality.” Two students reinforced that they do not flaunt their sexuality by saying that they don’t wear rainbows. Karen said that she does have rainbow patches, but she did not consider herself as flaunting her sexuality. While it was not specifically stated by the participants, these references suggest a negative connotation given to gay, lesbian, and bisexual peers who are perceived as too stereotypical and flaunt their sexuality. Jennifer said that she felt that some of the lesbians on campus segregated themselves from the rest of the campus, and that “there are a lot of people who are gay who aren’t like that, and no one sees them.”

Perceptions of Masculinity: Along with flaunting sexuality, another topic that was not specifically addressed by my interview questions but was brought up by the students interviewed was the perception that jocks and fraternity brothers have negative attitudes towards homosexuality. Two of the students said that they witnessed jocks making negative comments about homosexuality. For example, it was previously mentioned that Matthew made a comment about possibly avoiding a type of gym class that would attract macho men. This implies the opinion that macho men would be less likely to be accepting of their homosexuality. There is also the experience of Robert who said that he took a class because he thought it would have all female students. This implies that Robert perceives men in general, not just macho men or jocks, to be less accepting than females. Sarah specifically

stated, “Some of the *men* are ignorant.” She could have said ‘some *people* are ignorant’, but she specifically stated “men.” Tony said that he did not feel comfortable holding his partner’s hand on the fraternity end of campus. This suggests that Tony perceived organizations that are stereotypically viewed as macho to hold negative opinions about homosexuality. However, there was one male interviewee, Thomas, who said that the majority of people aware of his sexuality were guys in his fraternity, and he hadn’t had any problems.

**Summation:** Overall, the participants expressed the opinion that the college was neither very negative or very positive. The majority perceived this atmosphere to be better than their high school atmosphere, with their high school atmosphere tending to be very negative. Most of the students did not feel as though they were treated unfairly because of their sexuality, but at the same time, many of the students did not feel that their professors knew they were gay or bisexual. The participants’ opinions were split about whether or not gay topics were adequately covered in classes. Many felt that it depended on the professor. Only one of the students stated that they had taken a class specifically because they believed it to be a safe environment, and the majority of the interviewees expressed an interest in taking a queer studies course. Most of the interviewees consider themselves as out, but five specifically stated that they do not flaunt their sexual orientation. Finally, a fairly large amount of interviewees perceived macho males to be less accepting of homosexuality as compared to the rest of their peers.

### **Policy Implications**

In general, my research suggests that students perceive the college atmosphere as neither a completely accepting nor a completely negative atmosphere for gay, lesbian, and bisexual students within the classroom setting. Both the interviews and the survey delineated an atmosphere that was in some

ways accepting, but still capable of improvement. For example, while the majority of students scored fairly high on the acceptance scale and didn't feel as though faculty discriminated by sexual orientation, many still felt as though professors did not adequately integrate homosexuality into the classroom setting. Similarly, many of the gay, lesbian, and bisexual students who were interviewed felt that professors either did not adequately cover gay issues or that the amount of coverage depended upon the individual professor.

A possible policy implication of this study would be to provide sensitivity training for faculty regarding homosexuality, similar to racial/ethnic sensitivity training which is already being implemented into colleges and universities. This training could help faculty learn how to include homosexuality in their courses, as well as how to treat gay, lesbian, and bisexual students within the classroom setting. For example, some of the interview participants expressed the opinion that they did not want to be pinpointed because of their sexual orientation. Some professors may pinpoint students in an attempt to be accepting. Teacher training would educate professors on the best way to handle the situation when homosexual topics come up and openly gay, lesbian, and bisexual students are in the classroom. Other professors may just be unaware of the probability that they do have gay students in their classes. My study showed a rate of approximately one gay, lesbian, bisexual or other student to ten heterosexual students. This means that in a class of twenty students, approximately two are gay.

### **Suggestions for Future Studies**

In designing this research and reviewing the data, it is important to note that I am limited by my own sexual preference. As a heterosexual I could not look at the data from the viewpoint of those I am interviewing. According to Andersen (1996), regarding studying race differences, it has been suggested that in order to successfully incorporate

the experiences and perceptions of a minority, the research should be conducted by someone of that minority group. A member of the traditionally dominant group may be incapable of fully understanding attitudes and perceptions described by members of the excluded group. Also, a member of the dominant group may ask different questions than those that researchers of the minority are interested in exploring. However, in an attempt to offset the possibility of missing important topics or questions that the minority would address, I ended each interview with asking the participant if there was anything that my interview left out that should have been addressed. Most of the students did not wish to add anything to the interview. Only one respondent mentioned adding a question that dealt with the classroom setting. Doug said that I should specifically ask if “professors would go out of the way to address issues.” He felt that “some would, and some wouldn’t.” Any other suggestions that the participants gave dealt with the campus in general. For example, Doug also suggested that questions be included that addressed student perceptions of the college’s gay/straight alliance. Karen discussed why she chose to come to the campus being studied. She said, “two main things that made me want to come” were “global pins around campus” and “the cloth-line project.” The clothesline project is an annual event where t-shirts are made by students, campus organizations, and faculty which speak out against violence. The t-shirts are hung outside the Academic Center for a week and then kept in the library. Karen said that, “a couple of the shirts dealt with gay issues.” While these suggestions do serve to better describe the general campus atmosphere, they do not pertain specifically to the classroom setting.

Future studies utilizing qualitative interviews of the classroom environment created towards gay, lesbian, and bisexual students by their classmates and faculty, could include a question specifically asking participants what they feel would be an ideal classroom environment. Another suggestion for future studies, would be to include interviews of heterosexual, gay, lesbian, or bisexual faculty. Also, this study did not record on a cassette the interviews to promote a comfortable atmosphere for those being

interviewed. However, many of the participants were not shy about discussing the subject matter, and expressed the opinion that they did not care if others overheard what they were saying. Therefore, future studies might consider using a cassette recorder, but giving the participant the option of turning off the recorder if they felt at all uncomfortable.

The main limitation of the survey data was the small sample size and response rate. The survey was originally to be distributed at the beginning of a variety of classes from different disciplines. This would have insured a near 100% response rate and a more representative sample. However, the Institution Review Board (IRB) mandated that the survey could not be distributed in that manner, because of confidentiality issues they confronted in the past with in-class surveys. I would suggest future studies to distribute the surveys through a different means. Perhaps the researcher could design a system to distribute the survey in the classroom setting and still ensure anonymity.

Another issue that future research should take into consideration in their survey design, is that on a small liberal arts campus such as the one under study, students may not be aware that “Queer” Studies is the name used by major universities for classes dealing with homosexuality. Question 14 on the survey inquired as to whether or not the respondents felt that “colleges and universities should offer courses that deal specifically with Queer Studies.” Two respondents crossed out the word “queer” and replaced it with “homosexual.” Another respondent wrote, “Not by being called “Queer Studies,” and one circled “queer” and wrote “offensive” next to it. Another respondent underlined the word “queer” and put a question mark next to it. Future studies might want to word the question in a manner that would make it clear that the term “Queer” Studies is the standard title for a class dealing with homosexuality and use the survey as an opportunity to educate students about the term queer studies. For example, the

question could read, 'Major universities offer courses in "Queer" Studies, do you  
feel that your campus should offer these classes?'



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# Appendices

# **Appendix A: Qualitative Interview Schedule and Informed Consent Form**

**\*Introduction:** During this part of the interview, I introduce myself and explain the purpose of my research. I assure the participant anonymity and tell them that they do not have to answer any questions they feel uncomfortable with. They are told that they can end the interview at any time. Also, the participants are asked to sign a consent form.

**Question 1.** How would you describe the atmosphere of Lycoming College in regards to homosexuality and bisexuality?

**Question 2.** How does this compare to the atmosphere of the High School you attended?

**Question 3.** How would you describe the atmosphere towards gays, lesbians, bisexuals, or transgender individuals as it pertains specifically within the college classroom?

**Question 4.** How would you compare the classroom atmosphere in college compared to the classroom atmosphere in high school?

**Question 5.** Do you believe that your faculty know that you are out or perceive you as gay?

**Question 6.** Have you ever felt as though a professor treated you unfairly because of your sexual preference? (probes) Would you say that this has occurred frequently? In what way have you been treated unfairly?

Question 7. Do you feel that gay issues are adequately covered during professors' lectures? In other words, do you feel that when it is applicable, professors do integrate gay issues into the course-work, or do professors ignore the issues, or assume that everyone in the class is heterosexual?

Question 8. Have you ever enrolled in a course because you believed the course to be a safe environment?

Question 9. If Lycoming College offered a course in queer studies, would you enroll in it?

Question 10. Do you consider yourself to be out?

Question 11. Are there any questions that I did not ask regarding homosexuality or bisexuality in the classroom that you feel are important?

## **Appendix B: Student Survey and Informed Consent Letter**

### **Survey on College Classroom Environment Issues**

*and a Chance to win a \$25!*

Dear Lycoming College Colleague,

Thank you for the time you will be spending filling out this survey. The goal of my research is to study the classroom environment and how people feel that the topic of homosexuality is treated. All of your answers and information shall remain anonymous. An identification number is on the return envelope which will be used solely for the purpose of the drawing. Upon receipt of your completed questionnaire, I will separate the return envelope from the questionnaire, thus never connecting respondent number with actual questionnaire. Please do not put your name anywhere on the survey. Simply put your completed questionnaire into the extra envelope and place it in the school mail.

Sincerely,

Katrina Bloch

Lycoming College

Part 1.

Thank you for taking the time to take this survey. The first section you will be filling out is an adaptation of a survey created by Gregory M. Herek (1992) called the ATLG Scale which will ask you questions concerning your opinions about lesbians, gays, and bisexuals. Please answer them as truthfully as possible by circling the response that most closely relates to your level of agreement or disagreement. Thank you.

1. Female homosexuality is detrimental to society because it breaks down the natural divisions between the sexes.

strongly agree      agree      disagree      strongly disagree

2. State laws regulating private, consenting lesbian behavior should be loosened.

strongly agree      agree      disagree      strongly disagree

3. Female homosexuality in itself is no problem, but what society makes of it can be a problem.

strongly agree      agree      disagree      strongly disagree

4. If a man has homosexual feelings, he should do everything he can to overcome them.

strongly agree      agree      disagree      strongly disagree

5. I would *not* be too upset if I learned that my roommate were a homosexual.

strongly agree      agree      disagree      strongly disagree

6. Male homosexuality is merely a different kind of lifestyle that should *not* be condemned.

strongly agree      agree      disagree      strongly disagree



## Part 2.

The college classroom is a place of learning, both educationally and socially. The way in which subject matter is handled both by professors and fellow students may influence the attitudes an individual holds towards the subject. This is true with attitudes towards homosexuality and bisexuality. Please take the time to tell me your observations in the classroom and the opinions you hold. The opinion of how the topic of homosexuality should be handled in the classroom varies from person to person, and I am interested in your beliefs.

**Circle the response that best matches your opinion. Thank you!**

7. I have felt discriminated against by a professor because of my sexual preference?

strongly agree      agree      disagree      strongly disagree

8. In the college classroom, I have felt discriminated against by other students because of my sexual preference.

strongly agree      agree      disagree      strongly disagree

9. I have been in a classroom where a professor has made negative comments about homosexuality.

strongly agree      agree      disagree      strongly disagree

10. I have taken at least one course that has specifically included homosexual topics on the syllabus.

yes      no

11. While in class, I have heard classmates make negative comments about homosexuality.

yes      no

12. Overall, college professors adequately integrated gay and bisexual issues into their lectures.

strongly agree      agree      disagree      strongly disagree

13. When homosexual issues come up in class, professors generally handle them well.

strongly agree      agree      disagree      strongly disagree

14. Colleges and universities should offer courses that deal specifically with queer studies.

strongly agree      agree      disagree      strongly disagree

15. I often hear students use the term “gay” to describe something as stupid.

strongly agree      agree      disagree      strongly disagree

16. I know someone who has been discriminated against by a professor because of their sexual preference.

yes      no

17. I have heard classmates call people “faggots” as an insult.

yes      no

### Part 3.

As a final step in this research, would you please take the time to answer these demographic questions.

**Circle the answer that best applies to you.**

18. What is your sex?

female      male

19. What year of study are you in?

freshmen

sophomore

junior

senior

20. Do you know any bisexuals, lesbians, or gay men?

no

yes (If yes, how many gay, lesbian, or bisexual people do you consider to be acquaintances or friends?) \_\_\_\_\_

21. What do you consider your sexual identity?

gay

lesbian

bisexual

heterosexual

other

22. What is your major? \_\_\_\_\_

Use this space to make any comments regarding this survey or any other comments you may wish to share regarding bias in the classroom based on sexual preference.

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**THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!**