



# Understanding Levels of Sexual Prejudice Using Mixed Methods

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## INTRODUCTION

Between February 2008 and June 2013, at least according to U.S. national media, twenty-seven young men and two young women, ranging in ages from 11 to 19, committed suicide based on their perceived or actual gender or sexual variance. Sexual minority youth are bullied more frequently than heterosexual youth, resulting in lower grade point averages and higher absenteeism. Youth who are victimized are less likely to attend college (GLSEN, 2010; Robinson & Espelage, 2011). Communities and society as a whole suffer from the economic and mental health consequences of bullying in school environments (Foy, 2012). Since teachers spend approximately twice as much time face-to-face time with children than parents (Allard & Janes, 2008), the influence of teachers on sexual minority youth cannot be overstated. Therefore, the purpose of my research was threefold.

- To explore K-12 pre-service and in-service teachers’ beliefs and attitudes toward sexual minorities
- To discover whether K-12 pre-service and in-service teachers had experiences with sexual minorities
- To shed light on the role of teacher educators in preparing teachers for gender and sexually variant students in their classrooms

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on teacher beliefs and attitudes toward homosexuals was limited. However, from previous research I defined my independent variables and created *a priori* hypotheses to be tested. For example, Pérez-Testor, Behar, Davins, Sala, Castillo, Salamero, Alomar, and Segarra (2010) administered the Subtle and Overt Prejudice Toward Homosexuals Scale to teachers in Barcelona, Spain. Having religious beliefs and being a churchgoer were associated with higher levels of prejudice, but having lesbian and gay friends was associated with lower levels of prejudice. Clark (2010) administered the Modern Homophobia Scale to master’s level pre-service teachers in the Midwest. Students were strongly anti-homophobic but did not feel they could “do ally-work” (Clark, 2010, p. 706). She identified a disconnect between being anti-homophobic and actually advocating for the well-being of sexual minority youth. Dowling, Rodger and Cummings (2007) administered the Index of Homophobia to pre-service teachers in Ontario, Canada. Among other results, male participants were found to be more homophobic than females. Mudrey and Medina-Adams (2006) administered the Attitudes Toward Homosexuality scale, the Index of Homophobia scale, and the Knowledge about Homosexuality scale to pre-service teachers in the Midwest. Race was found to be significantly associated with all three scales.

## METHODOLOGY

The overarching question that guided my project was:

**How can pre-service and in-service teachers’ preparation be improved to provide equal and equitable experiences for sexual minority youth in a multicultural society?**

### Research Questions:

- What are the beliefs and attitudes of K-12 pre-service and in-service teachers regarding sexual minorities?
- What experiences do K-12 pre-service and in-service teachers have with sexual minorities?
- What can teacher education programs do to raise awareness about sexual minorities in K-12 education?

I chose the sequential-explanatory mixed methods approach (Creswell, 2003). In the quantitative phase a survey was distributed, where respondents were asked to volunteer to be interviewed. Interviews were conducted in the qualitative phase utilizing semi-structured, open-ended questions.

## METHODOLOGY (continued)



(Creswell & Plano Clark, 2008)

From the MidCountry College print directory, 948 names and e-mail addresses were collected of students who were enrolled in undergraduate or graduate teacher education programs. An electronic survey was distributed and kept open for three weeks, including an incentive lottery (gift card to local bookstore) and an opportunity to volunteer to be interviewed. Ninety-two (92) surveys were returned; 86 were complete; and 24 respondents volunteered to be interviewed.

### QUANTITATIVE PHASE

The survey included 9 items from the Modern Homophobia Scale (Aosved, Long, & Voller, 2009; Raja & Stokes, 1998) and 15 items from the Subtle and Overt Prejudice toward Homosexuals scale (Pérez-Testor et al., 2010; Quiles del Castillo, Rodriguez, Torres, Pérez, & Martel, 2003). The mean of the 24 Likert items from each individual made up the PREJUDICE scale. The Likert items ranged from 1, least prejudiced to 5, most prejudiced. The independent variables fell into three categories:

- Demographic: gender, race/ethnicity, age, geography
- Educational: license, previous education, teaching content area
- Personal: political, religious, sexual orientation, non-heterosexual friends, coworkers, family members

### QUALITATIVE PHASE

All three research questions were addressed in the interviews. Twenty-four survey participants volunteered to be interviewed but only seventeen actually made an appointment. Interviews were transcribed and entered into Nvivo 10. Johnny Saldaña’s (2013) coding manual guided my coding strategies, and code mapping was adapted from Anfara, Brown, & Mangione (2002).

## RESULTS

### QUANTITATIVE PHASE

In fact, none of the demographic characteristics were statistically significantly associated with levels of sexual prejudice as measured by the PREJUDICE scale. However, there were some interesting trends: rural participants, older participants, and the youngest participants were associated with higher PREJUDICE scores; pre-service males were associated with lower levels, but in-service males were associated with higher levels of PREJUDICE scores.

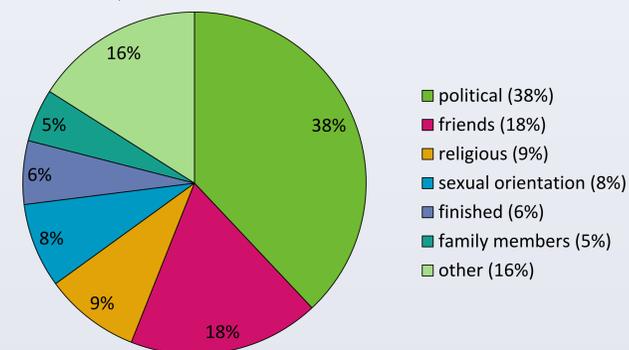
- Rural > Suburban/Urban
- pre-service Males < Females but in-service Males > Females
- Older pre-service (46-55yo) > youngest (<=25yo)
- Youngest in-service (<=25yo) > all other groups

Generally, educational characteristics were not statistically significantly associated with PREJUDICE, with one exception: pre-service participants completing *three* multicultural education courses were associated with statistically significantly higher PREJUDICE scores than pre-service participants completing *no* courses,  $p = .038$ ,  $\eta^2 = .091$  (medium). Trends here were interesting as well: regarding license sought and teaching content area, elementary education students were associated with higher levels of PREJUDICE compared to secondary or other (i.e., graduate) students. And, students who reported completing *any* coursework with sexual orientation content were associated with higher PREJUDICE scores compared to those completing *no* courses with sexual orientation content.

- Elementary Education > Secondary, Other (graduate): license sought, teaching content area
- One, two, three completed courses > none with sexual orientation content

## RESULTS (continued)

One-way between-groups analysis of variance of PREJUDICE scores with one independent variable at a time, indicated that personal characteristics were statistically significantly associated with levels of sexual prejudice. Seventy-four percent (74%) of the total variance in the PREJUDICE scale was accounted for by personal characteristics. We had no *a priori* hypothesis for testing overall group means. In order by percent of variance accounted for, political viewpoint > non-heterosexual friends > religious affiliation > sexual orientation > finished > non-heterosexual family members. Other factors accounted for 16% of the total variance which would include random effects, factors not accounted for, and interactions between factors.



In hypothesis testing, personal characteristics were also statistically significantly associated with PREJUDICE. Both pre-service and in-service participants with Christian affiliations were associated with higher levels of sexual prejudice than non-Christians or non-affiliated (see Table 1). Among pre-service participants, a conservative viewpoint toward multiculturalism, being heterosexual (see Table 1), and having no non-heterosexual friends, coworkers, or family members (see Table 2) were each statistically significantly associated with higher levels of sexual prejudice.

### QUALITATIVE PHASE

There were three primary findings from the qualitative phase:

- Some pre-service and in-service teachers stepped outside their conservative and/or Christian socialization.
- Having non-heterosexual friends and family members appeared to sensitize qualitative participants to social justice issues.
- Teachers learned about gender and sexual variance through life experiences, not from formal educational interventions.

**Table 1. Hypothesis testing of political viewpoint, religious affiliation, and sexual orientation (S.O.) of pre-service and in-service teachers**

Hypothesis	Pre-Service			p
	conservative > liberal	conservative	higher than moderate	
Political	conservative	higher than	moderate	$p = .003$
	conservative	higher than	somewhat liberal	$p = .002$
	conservative	higher than	liberal	$p = .000$
S.O.	hetero > non	heterosexual	higher than non-heterosexual	$p = .000$
Religious	Christian > non	Catholic	higher than non-Christian	$p = .028$
		Other Christian	higher than non-Christian	$p = .001$

**Table 2. Hypothesis testing of number of non-heterosexual friends, coworkers, and family members of pre-service and in-service teachers**

Hypothesis	Pre-Service			p
	more < none	Three	lower than <=Two	
non-heterosexual friends	more < none	Three	lower than <=Two	$p = .013$
		4-5	lower than <=Two	$p = .004$
		6-25	lower than <=Two	$p = .002$
non-heterosexual coworkers	more < none	One	lower than none	$p = .031$
		Two	lower than none	$p = .001$
		3-10	lower than none	$p = .014$
non-heterosexual family members	more < none	unknown	lower than none	$p = .008$
		1-4	lower than none	$p = .005$
		5-25	lower than none	$p = .005$
Hypothesis	In-Service			p
	more < none	Three	lower than <=Two	
non-heterosexual friends	more < none	Three	lower than <=Two	$p = .036$
		4-5	lower than <=Two	$p = .003$
		6-25	lower than <=Two	$p = .010$
		unknown	lower than <=Two	$p = .027$

## IMPLICATIONS

### FOR METHODOLOGY

- Contradictory findings became a strength, rather than a weakness*

Had only a survey been offered, limited findings about pre-service and in-service teachers in the Midwest would have resulted. Although there was a low response rate, the quantitative results confirmed previous research that indicates that knowing gay men and lesbian women lowers sexual prejudice (Allport, 1954; Herek, 1998; Pérez-Testor et al., 2010). The intergroup contact hypothesis posits that when majority group members have contact with minority group members that prejudice and discrimination of majority members toward minority members are lessened (Allport, 1954). Pérez-Testor and colleagues found that when teachers in Barcelona, Spain had gay and lesbian friends, their prejudice toward homosexuals scores were lower. Being conservative and being Christian was also associated with higher prejudice levels similar to previous research (Pérez-Testor et al., 2010).

Instead, the stories from my qualitative participants identified the exceptions. Participants with very religiously conservative backgrounds had reflected critically on their childhood messages.

“I don’t see differing sexualities as in any way like deviant or sinful at all.” (Wanda, master’s student)

“I think people should do what makes them happy (including divorce). (Sally, pre-service music education)

“I don’t care what my student’s sexual orientation is; it is just a fact about them and makes no difference to me.” (Linda, doctoral student)

“Teaching involves all students, no matter their skin color, ethnicity, gender, or sexual identity.” (Kyle, pre-service agricultural education)

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