

Attitudes Towards Homosexuality:

A Correlational Study

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Abstract

Attitudes towards homosexuality among 243 undergraduates at Texas A&M University were examined in this study. Measures were taken of tolerance for homosexuality, level of principled moral development, and a variety of personal interest values to discover relationships that may exist between these variables. Results indicated that females sampled were significantly more tolerant than males. No significant difference was found between males and females in level of principled moral development. Females scored significantly higher on the Religious, Aesthetic, and Social personality interest measures while males scored higher on the Theoretical, Economic, and Political measures. Aesthetic personality was found to be the strongest overall predictor for tolerance. Gender was found to be a determinant in predictive elements for tolerance. Elements predictive in females included the Aesthetic, Theoretical, and Social personality interests while level of principled moral development, Aesthetic, Religious, and Social personality interests were predictive for males.

Introduction

Stereotyping has historically been a topic that has captured the interest of social psychologists, although individual differences in the bases for stereotypic beliefs are still little understood (Kite, 1994). Exploring such bases for stereotyping is important because stereotyped attitudes often lead to exploitation and discrimination. Homosexuals form one subgroup that has long been the victim of such stereotyping and discrimination.

Homophobia, an irrational fear, intolerance, and hatred of people holding a lesbian, bisexual, or gay sexual orientation (Pharr, 1988) has been the impetus for numerous crimes and acts of violence. Berrill's (1992) review of 23 studies of homosexual populations found that a median of 80% had suffered verbal harassment and a median of 17% had been physically assaulted. The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (1984) reported that of 2,000 lesbians and gay men surveyed, over 90% had experiences of victimization due to their sexual orientation. The fact that most experiences of homophobic harassment go unreported (Herek, 1989) underscores the need for a better understanding of the individual differences in attitudes toward lesbians and gay males.

Since the deletion of homosexuality as a mental illness from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 22 years ago, there have been gradual changes in attitudes toward homosexuality. Much of the literature before this time was dominated by research on the cause of homosexuality and the search for a cure. Only 8% of the studies up to this time dealt with the topic of attitudes toward homosexuality (Morin, 1977). Recently, however, differences in attitudes towards lesbians and gay males has been the focus of much research. Whitley and Kite (1995) found 66 studies that dealt directly on sex differences in

attitudes toward homosexuality. A majority of these studies found gender differences in attitudes toward homosexuality with more males than females expressing negative attitudes toward lesbians and gay males (Herek, 1988). Differences have been shown in other aspects of personality as well. Age, academic performance, religious orientation, and moral reasoning have all been related to attitudes toward homosexuality (Kurdek, 1988). Positive attitudes toward gay men were shown to be strongly associated with interpersonal contact (Herek and Glunt, 1993). This contact was more often reported by those who were highly educated, young, and female. Brooke (1993) found that church congregations whose members averaged higher levels of moral reasoning also displayed a higher degree of acceptance for homosexuality.

Although much work has been done in the area of tolerance for homosexuality, AIDS has become the focus of many current studies (Schwanberg, 1990) while others have concentrated on individual differences in the homosexual (Dew, 1985). Much remains to be learned about the nature of tolerance for homosexuality and the personality traits that may be involved in fostering such an attitude.

The purpose of this study is to examine cognitive and personality characteristics that may influence a tolerance for homosexuality. Principled moral development and various personality interests will be examined to determine any relationships that may exist with tolerance. All variables will be examined by gender to discover differences in male and female responses and all will be analyzed to determine predictive ability for tolerance for homosexuality.

Method

Participants

Data from 243 subjects (51% females, 49% males) was analyzed for this study. Questionnaires were given to 364 subjects, but 115 (32%) were dropped from the study for failure to fill out the forms completely and according to instructions. An additional six subjects (.02%) were dropped because of M-scores (meaningless answers) of greater than eight on the Defining Issues Test. All subjects were undergraduate students at Texas A&M University (mean age=19.58 yrs) who participated as a requirement for an introduction to psychology course.

Measures

Three instruments were used in this study: The Homosexuality Attitude Scale (Kite & Deaux, 1986), The Study of Values (Allport, Vernon, & Lindzey, 1960), and The Defining Issues Test (DIT) (Rest, 1986).

The Homosexuality Attitude Scale is a quantitative measure of tolerance towards lesbians and gay males. The scale consists of 21-items (for example, "I see the gay movement as a positive thing"), rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale, with possible scores ranging from 21 (lowest tolerance) to 105 (highest tolerance). Kite and Deaux (1986) report that it possesses a strong test-retest reliability ($r = .71$) and excellent internal consistency ($\alpha = .93$). In addition to establishing consistency and reliability, Kite and Deaux (1986) combined The Homosexuality Attitudes Scale with a laboratory experiment and found that the Scale reliably predicted individual differences in behavior toward homosexuals.

The Study of Values (Allport, Vernon, & Lindzey, 1960) was used to quantify six personal values subscales based on Spranger's (1928) classification scheme:

1. Theoretical. The search for truth is the dominant interest of theoretical people. They are characterized as intellectuals, who seek only to reason and to systematize their knowledge.
2. Economic. Usefulness is the dominant value for economic people. They are practical, and judge matters based on financial implications.
3. Aesthetic. The value that is dominant for aesthetic people is form and harmony. Artistic episodes of life hold the interest of aesthetic people as they are sensitive to symmetry, grace, and a fitness in experiences.
4. Social. Altruistic and philanthropic love of others is the dominant value of social people. The social person is characterized as kind, sympathetic, and unselfish in dealing with others.
5. Political. Power is the dominant value of political people. Influence, leadership, and renown are the goals of the political person and they see competition and struggle as a means to achieve these ends.
6. Religious. The religious person holds unity as their dominant value. They attempt to relate themselves to a higher reality and attempt a mystical comprehension of the cosmos.

Scores on each subscale may range from 10 to 70. Scores on the subscales are the results of forced-choice questions, so the subscales are not independent. Therefore, a higher score in one area of interest entails a lower score in another area. An example of such a forced-choice question is "Which of the following branches of study do you expect will

prove more important for mankind? (a) mathematics or (b) theology.”

Allport, Vernon, and Lindzey (1960) report that The Study of Values has very strong internal consistency and test-retest reliability. Split-half reliability coefficients ranged from .84 (the theoretical values) to .95 (the religious values). Item-total correlations for each scale were significant at the .01 level, and test-retest coefficients ranged from .77 (social values) to .92 (economic values).

The Defining Issues Test (Rest, 1986) is a quantitative measure of moral judgment based on Kohlberg's theory of moral development. Six social-moral problems are presented in order to assess conceptual adequacy in moral thinking. One such problem is the Doctor's Dilemma : “A lady was dying of cancer which could not be cured and she had only about six months to live. She was in terrible pain, but she was so weak that a good dose of pain-killer like morphine would make her die sooner. She was delirious and almost crazy with pain, and in her calm periods, she would ask the doctor to give her enough morphine to kill her. She said she couldn't stand the pain and that she was going to die in a few months anyway. What should the doctor do?”

Answers that reflect advanced moral reasoning (Stage five and above) are averaged in a principled morality score (P-score) which is interpreted as "the relative importance a subject gives to principled moral considerations in making a decision about moral dilemmas" (Rest, 1986, p.2). P-scores may range from 0 to 95.

Davison and Robbins (1978) report high test-retest reliability for the P-score of the DIT, strong internal consistency, and high degrees of criterion-group and longitudinal validity.

All of the measures mentioned above have a considerable amount of normative data available from which comparisons can be drawn.

Procedures

Participants filled out anonymous questionnaires in group settings. The order in which subjects completed the three instruments was counterbalanced with approximately equal numbers of subjects receiving each of the six possible orders.

Results

Overall Means

As shown in Table 1, the overall level of tolerance for homosexuality reported for this sample ranged from 23 to 105 (out of a possible range of 21 to 105) with a mean of 65.95. An average of 33.51 was found for the P-score (principled morality) on the DIT measure with a range of 3.33 to 61.67. Table 1 also shows the wide range of scores on each of the personality interest measures obtained with Allport's Study of Values, the highest being reported on the Religious scale (mean=42.15) and the lowest being the Aesthetic scale (mean=37.90).

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Gender Differences

Males and females differed significantly on all measures except that of principled moral reasoning. Females were more tolerant (mean=70.28) than males (mean=61.43) ($t=3.87$, $df=240$, $p<.001$) and scored higher on three of the personality interest measures (Religious, Social, and Aesthetic). Males, in turn, scored higher on the Theoretical, Political, and Economic personality measures. Results of the t-test for gender differences for each of the personality interest measures are presented in Figure 1.

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Correlations Between Variables (Overall)

Pearson correlations between the dependent variables are presented in Table 2. A significant positive correlation was found to exist between the level of principled morality and a tolerance for homosexuality ($r=.32$, $p<.0001$). The Social ($r=.27$, $p<.0001$), and the Aesthetic ($r=.43$, $p<.0001$) personality measures were positively correlated with tolerance. Negative correlations were found for the Religious ($r=-.24$, $p<.001$), the Political ($r=-.23$, $p<.001$), and the Economic ($r=-.21$, $p<.001$) personality measures. The only personality measure that significantly correlated with principled morality was the Social measure ($r=.16$, $p<.05$).

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Correlations Between Variables (Female)

Table 2 also provides a breakdown of all correlations by gender. Among females, there were positive correlations between tolerance and level of principled morality ($r=.22$, $p<.05$), Theoretical personality ($r=.18$, $p<.05$) and Aesthetic personality ($r=.33$, $p<.001$). Negative correlations were found between tolerance and Religious personality ($r=-.18$, $p<.05$), Political personality ($r=-.20$, $p<.05$), and Economic personality ($r=-.24$, $p<.01$). There was also a significant correlation between tolerance and principled morality ($r=.22$, $p<.05$).

Correlations Between Variables (Male)

A strong positive correlation was found between levels of principled morality and

tolerance for homosexuality among males ($r=.43$, $p<.0001$). Positive correlations were also found between tolerance and the Social ($r=.27$, $p<.01$) and Aesthetic ($r=.40$, $p<.0001$) personality measures. A strong negative correlation was found between tolerance and the Religious personality measure ($r=-.41$, $p<.0001$). In addition, the Social personality measure was positively correlated with level of principled morality ($r=.21$, $p<.05$).

Prediction of Tolerance (Overall)

A stepwise regression procedure was used to determine predictive elements for tolerance for homosexuality. Results for this procedure are presented in Table 3. The strongest overall predictor was the Aesthetic personality measure ($r=.18$, $F=53.60$, $df=1,241$, $p<.0001$). The measure for principled morality was the second strongest predictor ($r=.25$, $F=22.98$, $df=2,240$, $p<.0001$). The Social personality measure was the third predictor ($r=.29$, $F=11.87$, $df=3,239$, $p<.001$). The measure of Religious personality was the fourth and final predictor ($r=.33$, $F=13.33$, $df=4,238$, $p<.001$).

Place Table 3 Here

Prediction of Tolerance (Female)

Table 3 also provides a gender breakdown of information provided by the stepwise regression procedure. The measure for Aesthetic personality proved to be the strongest predictor for tolerance ($r=.11$, $F=15.29$, $df=1,122$, $p<.001$) among females. The Theoretical personality measure was the second strongest predictive element for tolerance ($r=.15$, $F=6.00$, $df=2,121$, $p<.05$). The third and final predictive element was the measure of Social personality ($r=.18$, $F=4.44$, $df=3,120$, $p<.05$).

Prediction of Tolerance (Male)

The element most predictive for tolerance in males was the measure of principled morality ($r=.18$, $F=25.74$, $df=1,117$, $p<.0001$). The second most predictive element was the measure of Aesthetic personality ($r=.30$, $F=20.76$, $df=2,116$, $p<.0001$). The Religious personality measure was the third most predictive element ($r=.37$, $F=12.68$, $df=3,115$, $p<.001$). The final predictive element was the measure for Social personality ($r=.42$, $F=9.97$, $df=4,114$, $p<.01$).

Discussion

Gender Differences

As expected, several gender differences were found. Females were more tolerant than males. This is consistent with the results of the meta-analysis by Whitley and Kite (1995). In the present study, the average score for females on the measure of tolerance for homosexuality (mean=70.28) fell within the "tolerant" range as suggested by Kite (1994) while the average scores for males (mean=61.43) did not. Males and females were not significantly different in their level of principled morality. This is consistent with findings by Rest (1986) that sex differences on the DIT are trivial and account for less than 1/2 of a percent of DIT variance. Differences in personality interest measures were found between males and females. These findings are all consistent with general established norms (Allport, Vernon, & Lindzey, 1960) which found males to score higher on the Theoretical, Economic, and Political scales and females on the Social, Aesthetic, and Religious scales. In the present study, all scores for males and females, for each personality interest fell within established

ranges for normal scoring (Allport, Vernon, and Lindzey, 1960).

Gender Differences in Correlations

There were gender differences in correlations between dependent variables. Although both males and females displayed positive correlations between principled morality and tolerance, the correlation was much higher for males (.43 for males vs. .22 for females). As expected, a number of personality interests shared a significant correlation with tolerance for homosexuality. There was a positive correlation between tolerance and Aesthetic personality and a negative correlation between tolerance and Religious personality for both males and females although the correlation was higher for males (-.41 for males vs. -.18 for females). This is consistent with findings by Herek (1988) in which degree of religious orientation was shown to be negatively correlated with tolerance for homosexuality.

This pattern of differences in correlations between attitudes, moral reasoning and personality variables indicates that the construct for tolerance may vary by gender.

Prediction of Tolerance

The elements that were found to be significantly predictive of tolerance for homosexuality were the Aesthetic, Social, and Religious personality interests, as well as the level of principled morality. The strongest overall predictor was found to be the measure of Aesthetic personality.

The regression procedure elaborated gender differences in tolerance. The variables that best predicted tolerance were quite different for males and females. Measures predictive of tolerance among females were (1) Aesthetic personality, (2) Theoretical personality, and (3) Social personality.

Measures predictive of tolerance among males were (1) principled morality, (2) Aesthetic personality, (3) Religious personality, and (4) Social personality.

Conclusions

This study shows that there are numerous gender differences active in tolerance for homosexuality. Males and females differed on all measures with the exception of the measure of principled morality. Predictive elements of tolerance were shown to be quite different between males and females as well. The Religious personality measure was less predictive of tolerance than the measure for Aesthetic personality for both males and females and the level of principled morality among males. Differences found between males and females may be the result of differences in emphasis in moral reasoning (Gilligan, 1977). The strength of the Religious measure and P-score for males may be reflective of an adherence to a belief system based on rules and regulations, while the females may be acting from a more nurturing paradigm.

Additional information on gender differences in tolerance is called for and should be the focus of continuing research. Behavioral consequences resulting from a tolerance for homosexuality have been previously studied (Kite and Deaux, 1986), and will likely continue to be the focus of research. Future studies must continue to take into account the differences found between individuals in regards to tolerance and the role that gender plays in these differences.

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Table 1

Overall Means for Level of Tolerance, Principled Morality, and Personality Interest Measures

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max
Tolerance	65.95	18.30	23.00	105.00
P-Score	33.51	11.23	3.33	61.67
Religious	42.15	9.72	15.00	59.00
Theoretical	38.05	7.84	21.00	67.00
Social	38.62	7.73	18.00	55.00
Aesthetic	37.90	8.89	16.00	64.00
Political	40.44	7.58	22.00	62.00
Economic	42.84	7.77	23.00	64.00

Note : n=243 for all variables

Table 2

Correlations Between Dependent Variables : Overall and By Gender

	Tolerance for Homosexuality			Principled Moral Development		
	Overall	Female	Male	Overall	Female	Male
Tolerance	1.00	1.00	1.00	.32*	.22*	.43**
P. Moral Dev't.	.32*	.22*	.43**	1.00	1.00	1.00
Religious Values	-.24*	-.18*	-.41**	-.09	-.07	-.15
Theoretical Values	-.02	.18*	.06	.04	.11	.07
Social Values	.27*	.13	.27**	.16*	.08	.21*
Aesthetic Values	.43*	.33**	.40**	.13*	.10	.13
Political Values	-.23*	-.20*	-.14	-.14*	-.13	-.11
Economic Values	-.21*	-.24**	-.08	-.11	-.08	-.11

* Significant at a level of .05
 ** Significant at a level of .01

Table 3

Results of Stepwise Regression Procedure to Determine Predictive Elements for Tolerance for Homosexuality

Overall

<u>Step</u>	<u>Variable</u>	<u>R²</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>Prob>F</u>
1	Aesthetic	.18	1,241	53.60	0.0001
2	P-Score	.25	2,240	22.98	0.0001
3	Social	.29	3,239	11.87	0.0007
4	Religious	.33	4,238	13.33	0.0003

Female

<u>Step</u>	<u>Variable</u>	<u>R²</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>Prob>F</u>
1	Aesthetic	.11	1,122	15.29	0.0002
2	Theoretical	.15	2,121	6.00	0.0158
3	Social	.18	3,120	4.44	0.0373

Male

<u>Step</u>	<u>Variable</u>	<u>R²</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>Prob>F</u>
1	P-Score	.18	1,117	25.74	0.0001
2	Aesthetic	.31	2,116	20.77	0.0001
3	Religious	.37	3,115	12.68	0.0005
4	Social	.42	4,114	9.97	0.0020

Figure Caption

Figure 1. Results of t-test of gender differences on the personality interest measures.

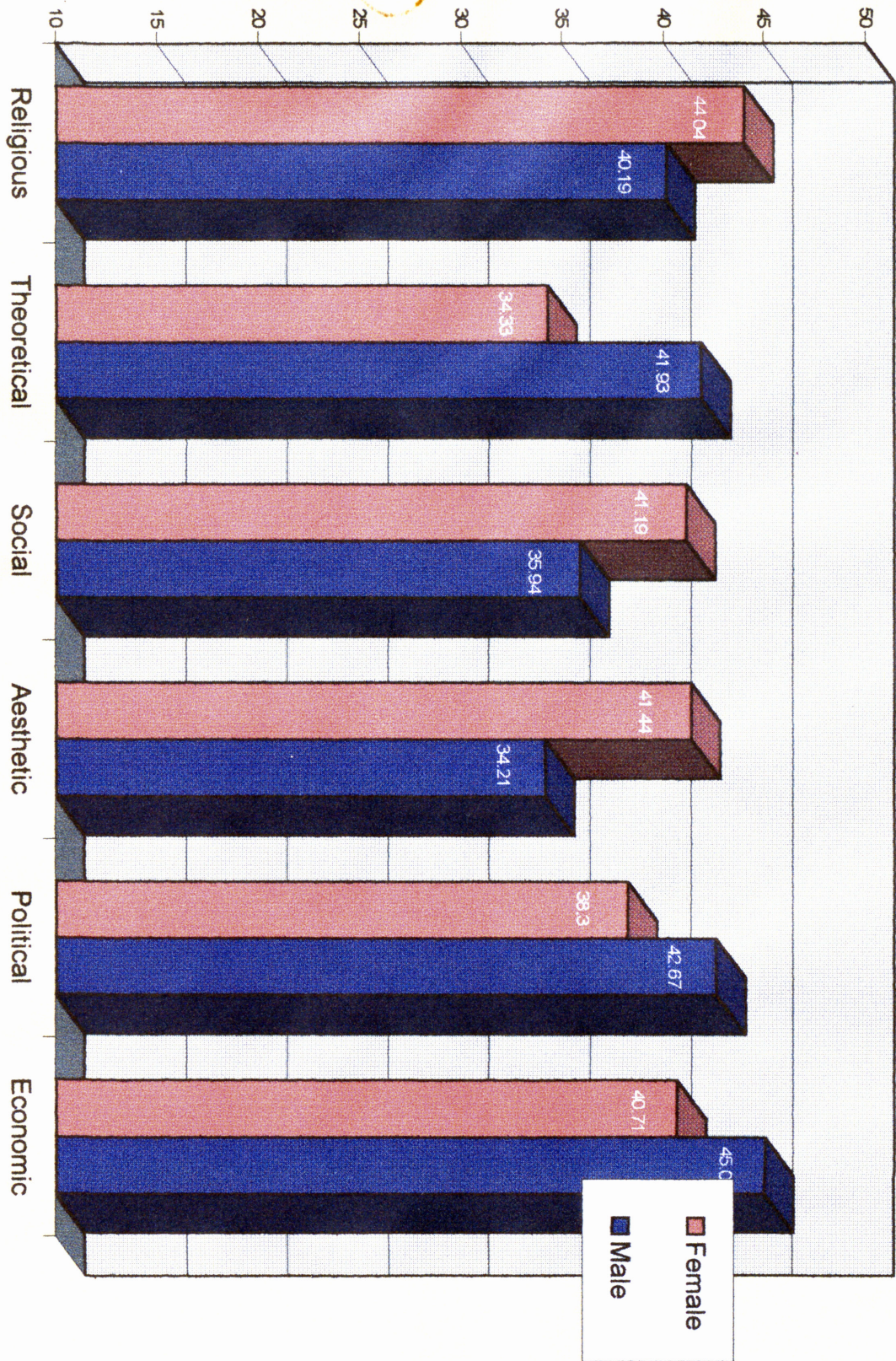


Figure 1