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Impact of Interviews on Heterosexual Students' Expressions of Cultural Competency

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the effects of a cultural competency intervention on dental pre-doctoral students' attitudes toward individuals of a different sexual orientation. 22 heterosexual students interviewed gay or lesbian individuals and wrote reflective text. Results illustrated that participants found that their interviewees had "surprisingly similar" beliefs and values – especially in the areas of religion and family. Because of their "similar values," these students expressed respect toward their interviewees who were "so different" than themselves. This conclusion of "sameness" forced them to see homosexuals as people, rather than a stigmatized invisible outgroup, mitigating sexual prejudice.

Keywords

Heterosexuality, Intervention, Qualitative, Sexual Prejudice, Healthcare

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Impact of Interviews on Heterosexual Students' Expressions of Cultural Competency

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The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the effects of a cultural competency intervention on dental pre-doctoral students' attitudes toward individuals of a different sexual orientation. 22 heterosexual students interviewed gay or lesbian individuals and wrote reflective text. Results illustrated that participants found that their interviewees had "surprisingly similar" beliefs and values – especially in the areas of religion and family. Because of their "similar values," these students expressed respect toward their interviewees who were "so different" than themselves. This conclusion of "sameness" forced them to see homosexuals as people, rather than a stigmatized invisible outgroup, mitigating sexual prejudice. Keywords: Heterosexuality, Intervention, Qualitative, Sexual Prejudice, Healthcare

The Institute of Medicine and the Council of Dental Accreditation (CODA) recommends that dental practitioners become culturally competent in response to healthcare disparity in the U.S. (Asch et al., 2006; Behar-Horenstein, Garvan, Moore, & Catalanotto, 2013; Dharamsi, Ho, Spadafora, & Woollard, 2011; Frist, 2005; Schoen & Doty, 2004). These skills are necessary to improve patient perceptions of quality and satisfaction, population health and to reduce healthcare costs (Berwick, Nolan, & Whittington, 2008). Increasing diversity and cultural competence are important educational goals as students need awareness of unconscious bias (Teal, Green, Gill & Crandall, 2012).

In a previously published study, we analyzed documents among 80 pre-doctoral dental students and found linguistic differences using text analysis software in students' reflective writing assignments before and after interviewing an individual who was culturally different (Isaac, Behar-Horenstein, Lee, & Catalanotto, 2014). These interviews and reflective writing demonstrated the interventional strategy and provided, "increasing opportunities for contact" (Devine, Forscher, Austin, & Cox, 2012). Although there were significant increase in scores for each group (race, religion, SES/able-ness, gender, sexual orientation), the change was not significant for those students (male/female, majority/non-majority) who interviewed those of different sexual orientation (Isaac et al., 2014). For the current study, the researchers sought to explore the perceptions of these heterosexual students after conducting interviews with individuals unlike themselves.

Dental curriculum typically lacks discussions of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) issues (Brondani & Paterson, 2011). One study reported that 88% of dental schools were neutral or negative about their program's preparation for treating LGBT patients (Anderson, Patterson, Temple, & Inglehart, 2009). In a study of 54 dental school administrators, only 61% reported that their dental school was "somewhat tolerant" or "very tolerant" of LGBT students and faculty (More, Whitehead, & Gonthier, 2004). This lack of tolerance extends to other healthcare professionals. In a cross-sectional study at the University of California-Davis, medical students reported discomfort towards gay men's

“intimate behavior and homosexuality” in patients but also among their student peers as well (Matharu, Kravitz, McMahon, Wilson, & Fitzgerald, 2012, p. 1).

A heteronormative society constructs and relies on assumptions of heterosexuality as normal (Kimmel, 2010). Although explicit homophobic behaviors are deemed socially and politically incorrect, heterosexism, the belief that heterosexuality is more “normal,” permeates society and organizations (Berkman & Zinberg, 1997; Yep, 2002). This heterosexual bias remains “strategically invisible” (Yep, 2002), and because heterosexuality is the majority sexual orientation, heterosexual individuals experience privileges that LGBT individuals do not (Bieschke, 2002). The negative effects of homophobia, defined as negative feelings and actions toward homosexuality (Maher et al., 2009), ranges from psychological alienation, loss of status, discrimination, to violence (Evans & Broido, 2002; Herek & McLemore, 2013; Kimmel, 2010). This drives the need for competency training that transcends conceptual discussions with different pedagogical methods (Matharu et al., 2012).

Research shows that particular demographic attributes align with individuals displaying sexual prejudice. For example, heterosexuals that have a low educational level, are older, live in rural areas, and exhibit high levels of conservative values are more prone to homophobia (Herek, Gillis, & Cogan, 2009; Herek & McLemore, 2013). Other research in college students found that older students, women, and European-Americans reported more awareness of heterosexist privilege (Simoni & Walters, 2001; Yep, 2002). Basow and Johnson (2000) found common correlates of sexual prejudice with traditional gender role values, political conservatism and religiosity. Similarly, Cotton-Huston and Waite (2000) found that homophobic attitudes were significantly predicted by gender role attitudes and religious conviction. Finally, men tend to be less accepting of divergent sexual identities than women, especially gay males (Herek, Cogan, & Gillis, 2002; Herek & McLemore, 2013; Simoni & Walters, 2001; Wright, Adams, & Bernat, 1999). However, similar to other forms of bias (Pettigrew, Tropp, Wagner, & Christ, 2011), sexual prejudice is negatively correlated with intergroup contact; heterosexuals will be less prejudiced with personal interaction with LGBT individuals (Basow & Johnson, 2000; Cotton-Huston & Waite, 2000; Herek & McLemore, 2013).

Interventions for Change

Among highly motivated heterosexuals, the need to change their attitudes toward LGBT individuals often stems from a conflict between their self-image as being open and tolerant, and the need to respond consistently with their non-prejudiced standards (Devine, Monteith, Zuwerink, & Elliot, 1991). One fourteen year study of Canadian college students found that influential reasons for increased tolerance towards LGBT people included: learning of a biological basis for homosexuality, contact with LGBT individuals, empathetic feelings towards the hardships of LGBT individuals, perceiving changing social norms, and associating heterosexual role models with LGBT individuals (Altemeyer, 2001). Other studies suggest that positive attitude change comes from affirmative contact with peer groups (Evans & Broido, 2005), enrolling in a sexual identity or diversity course (Athanasas & Larrabee, 2003; Eliason, 1995; Waterman, Reid, Garfield, & Hoy, 2001), and the use of speaker’s panels including LGBT’s life experiences (Geasler, Croteau, & Heineman, 1995; Nelson & Krieger, 1997). Training discussion groups have decreased intergroup prejudice across ethnic, racial, and sexual-orientation differences by having participants explore their stereotypes, engage in case studies, and develop action plans (Finkel, Storaasli, Bandele, & Schaefer, 2003; Gelberg & Chojnacki, 1995; Iasenza & Troutt, 1990). Herek (2002) used data collected from 937 individuals in a national AIDS telephone survey and found that

interpersonal contact predicted attitudes toward gays better than any other demographic or social psychological variable.

There are several theories that explain the reduction of sexual prejudice as people often gravitate toward psychologically functional attitudes (Herek & McLemore, 2013). This functional approach to sexual prejudice suggests that people have three motivations: a social adjustment function, or the utility for meeting personal goals such as strengthening bonds with valued or high status groups; the value-expressive function, where heterosexuals align themselves to moral or political principles central to their self-concept; or the defensive function, that serves as a strategy for coping with negative emotions resulting from perceived threats to self-esteem (Herek, 1987; Herek & McLemore, 2013; Maio & Olson, 2000). For example, conservative Christians may display a social adjustment function when they ally with like-minded fundamentalists. They may display a value adjustment function when they perceive LGBT's as an anti-Christian political force that violates moral values central to their self-concept. The defensive function serves authoritarianism, defined as psychological intolerance exacerbated by social threat, which feeds intolerance to minimize difference and preserve social norms (Stenner, 2005).

Cognitive Dissonance Theory also holds that behavior precedes attitudes as a person changes his beliefs in order to justify his actions. Cognitive dissonance is often employed when individuals justify decision making, lying, cruelty, and behavior contrary to one's self-perception (Festinger, 1959). Individuals are motivated to maintain cognitive consistency which can sometimes create maladaptive behavior.

Many theoretical models illustrate the understanding of heterosexual identity development in regards to understanding the privilege and oppression associated with LGBT individuals (Mohr, 2002; Sullivan, 1998; Worthington, Savoy, & Dillon, 2002). These theories frequently describe the progression of beliefs from lacking of awareness of heterosexual privilege, to questioning their dominant group membership, to ultimately becoming conscious and accepting of the complexity of sexual identity (including theirs). Mohr (2002) developed four theoretical working models of heterosexual identity. In the first, "democratic heterosexuality," heterosexual individuals view the experience of all sexual identities the same, without taking privilege or oppression associated with sexual orientation. In the second, "compulsory heterosexuality," heterosexuals believe that heterosexuality is the only appropriate sexual orientation and hold negative attitudes toward LGBT people. In the third, "politicized heterosexuality," heterosexuals begin to understand their privilege and view LGBT individuals as heroic. In the fourth, "integrative heterosexuality," heterosexuals become aware of the oppressive system for LGBT individuals and fully realize their privileged identity.

Course Design

In a course focused on the psycho-social determinants of health, students learned about characteristics of cultural competence, barriers to its development, the impact of equity, and social-historical and socio-political impacts on cultural competence. Students were assigned a comparative assignment. The first requirement was to write a reflection paper on their cultural values and how they were developed in eight categories: race, gender, ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation, personal able-ness, faith, and cultural groups. The second assignment required each student to interview an individual who is "unlike himself or herself" in regards to those the eight categories (List 1). This exercise was designed to create cognitive disequilibrium, to allow students to reflect on their own bias, privilege and assumptions, and to seek effective solutions (Mezirow, 1990).

Research Question

What personal expressions of cultural competence are the result of heterosexuals' interviews with gay and lesbian individuals?

Method

The instructor (LBH) implemented cultural competency training as part of a required course and assigned pre-doctoral dental students used reflective writing assignments in conjunction with interviews with individuals unlike themselves in two cohorts. Reflective writing helps students describe events and feelings, analyze their reactions, consider alternative responses and actions (Behar-Horenstein, Schneider-Mitchell, & Graff, 2009; Blake, 2005; Gibbs, 1988; Isaac, Kaatz, Lee, & Carnes, 2012; Mezirow, 1990). Students were given two reflective writing assignments one week apart. For assignment 1, they were asked to describe their personal awareness along eight categories: race, gender, ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation, personal able-ness, faith, and cultural groups. For assignment #2, students were given assignment cards designating what type of an individual that they were to interview. They were to ask the interviewee the same questions that they had asked themselves and then answer, "As a result of conducting the interview, describe the insight you acquired about your values, prevalent assumptions and experiences you have had." Students then went out into the community and interviewed acquaintances.

Design

This study utilized a pragmatic, interpretive lens which has the supposition that participants construct meaning as they engage with the world through social interactions with individuals (Hesse-Biber, 2010). A pragmatist epistemology examines problems by looking at the "what" and "how" of the research (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007). Interviews are a "focused conversation" to obtain the interviewee's descriptions of their life world with respect to their interpretation of a described phenomenon (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). In this study, participants interacted with gay or lesbian individuals using focused questions and reflection to extend their personal awareness of their cultural competence.

Sample Description

The sample was taken in 2012 and 2013 of two cohorts (80, 92) pre-doctoral students in a Southeastern dental school; none of which identified as LGBT. Of the 22 heterosexual students that interviewed gay and lesbian individuals 5 (23%) were majority-male, 7 (31%) were majority-female, 5 (23%) were under-represented minority (URM) male and 5 (23%) identified as URM females. 16 interviewees were gay and 5 were lesbian and one was unknown.

Data Analysis

The university's Institutional Review Board approved all study procedures and participants provided written informed consent. All textual data was imputed into qualitative software and coded line-by-line, using an analytic, inductive approach as researchers synthesized initial codes and created code categories to interpret the data (Boyatzis, 1998; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Hesse-Biber & Nagy Leavy, 2011). This open-ended thematic analysis identified iterative categorical patterns within the data (Attride-Stirling,

2001; Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Conceptually linked categories (focused codes) were integrated into unifying themes. Once the final coding scheme was established, the two authors (CI, LBH) independently coded four interviews achieving an intercoder agreement ranging from 63 to 99% with an average of 83%. NVivo software was used for coding, data retrieval, and organization (Richards, 2006). Validity was enhanced by the presence of two experienced qualitative researchers with extensive knowledge in the area of cultural competency in higher education.

Results

Line-by-line coding produced 35 inductive and deductive initial codes that were combined into six focused codes that resulted in a conceptual framework based on three emerging themes (Figure 1). The initial codes were collapsed into three categories that were formed along a continuum (Saldaña, 2013). “Gay marriage OK” and “Gay marriage Not OK” were categories that represented those students who were either comfortable or not comfortable with gay and lesbian issues as determined by their stance on same-sex marriage. The initial codes in these categories had greater than 50% of those students with those views, although all of the initial codes such as “gay or lesbian in family-close friends,” “respect-share views,” “religion accepting,” and “interviews reinforced beliefs” were in the “Gay marriage OK” student category. Students in the “Not OK” category had greater than 50% coded text of those students with codes such as “Religion-similar values,” “Purpose in life,” “Interviews changed beliefs,” and “I could be wrong.”

The “consonant” codes represented coded text from both “OK” and “Not OK” groups and included initial codes such as “Family determined sexual orientation,” “Stereotyping-assumptions,” and “As the result of this interview.” The initial codes in the two “OK” and “Not OK” categories were further condensed into focused codes that were synthesized in conjunction with the “consonant” initial codes into the emerging themes of: “Assumptions,” “Yes, we are surprisingly similar,” and “Because we have similar values, have respect.” The next section will illustrate the two categories “Gay marriage OK” and “Gay marriage Not OK” and how they were merged into the three emerging themes. This section will also clarify the subtle gender and majority/URM differences within the text that were not apparent in the first study (Isaac et al., 2014).

Student Category: Gay Marriage OK

This category included the focused codes “Respect-share views,” “Religion accepting,” and “Interviews reinforced beliefs.” Only 4 of the 15 students in this category had gay or lesbians in their family or as close friends. One minority male explained “I personally have friends that face the same situation and being able to listen to this individual allowed me to value more what these people face every day as they get critiqued and not properly respected.” Illuminating what contact with a minority group does in terms of respect, this minority female stated,

Despite being of different sexual orientation from the person whom I interviewed, I came to the conclusion that our very similar backgrounds in terms of our family structure (divorced parents), Christian faith in our family and believing in the concept of education as an empowering tool in life have made us very similar in terms of our current values.

Both she and her interviewee had similar Christian faiths that were accepting of all sexual orientations. None of the minority females were in the “Not OK” category.

The “OK” category had evidence of Mohr’s democratic, politicized and integrative heterosexual stages as well. This majority male illustrated democratic heterosexuality by saying, “I feel as if sexual orientation should not define a person, and like how [interviewee] said earlier—‘people are people.’” Of the ten minorities in this group, five demonstrated “Politicized heterosexuality.” This URM male stated,

I have much respect for this man for what he has gone through and the hurdles he has undoubtedly overcome due to his sexual orientation in our world today. I hope that I can stand up for what I believe in as fervently as he has....

Only the students that had gay or lesbian friends or family reached the “Integrative heterosexuality” category, where they understood their privilege in an oppressive system. This majority female reflected,

On a personal note, since my uncle is a homosexual male, it saddens me to think that he is treated with less respect and dignity because of his sexual preferences. My life has had experiences where I was also treated poorly which have helped shape me into the tolerant person I am today.

14 of the 15 students who were tolerant of same-sex marriage reported that the “Interviews reinforced beliefs.” This majority female illustrated this theme:

I felt strongly enough in my core about never persecuting people for being different that it enabled me to look at everyone as equal, including people with sexual orientation differing from mine. After learning more about this person through the interview, I feel nearly the same, but even more open-minded.

This URM male reiterated that his interviewee “answered almost exactly what I was thinking each time I read a question or statement to him.” This majority female stated that “this assignment didn’t really do much for me in terms of learning acceptance, as I already had it.” 9 of the 14 that reported the “Interviews reinforced beliefs” were women.

Category: Gay Marriage Not OK

This category included the focused codes of “Religion NOT supportive,” “Similar religious values and purpose,” and “Interviews changed beliefs.” None of these students had gay or lesbian family or friends. Of the 7 students in this category, none were among 5 URM females. These students confided that their religion was not supportive. For example, this majority female stated, “I myself am Catholic and believe marriage should only be between a man and a wife.” Although she was not entirely against same-sex marriage, her religious beliefs were evident:

I have always wondered is how someone with a religious background would feel being a homosexual and going against God’s wish/morals. I know if it was me I would feel disappointed in myself for going against his wish, but deep down I know he is forgiving and would still love me no matter what.

This participant expressed the theme “Religion NOT supportive” as she negotiated her process. Another majority female stated:

Right now I am thinking about my family, and in a way being thankful that I am straight. I know that sounds awful, and I don't mean it in a bad or demeaning way. I have nothing against gay people, in fact I've always wanted to have a gay best friend, a male. I'm just thankful because my family is very old fashioned and if I were to come home one day and tell my parents that I will never bring a man home, they would probably disown me and I would not be able to deal with that because my family is my life. Life would be so much simpler and nicer if people could just close their eyes and open their minds and accept everyone around us-despite what the religion says. Look at this girl, even though she knows how the bible feels about her decision, she hasn't given up on God, she just found an alternate path to him.

This quote illustrates the “Compulsory heterosexuality” theme although this participant wanted acceptance.

The last example also illustrated the second focused code of “Similar religious values and purpose.” Often this was the first time these students had come in contact with gay or lesbian individuals. They were amazed how similar their values were to themselves. His interview shifted this majority male's beliefs:

After interviewing this woman, I realized that her childhood and family life was as “normal” as mine. This individual places just as much emphasis and value in her family and their relationships as I do. (...) Although my religion and beliefs do not support same-sex relationships, I do realize that my stereotyping of this group of individuals is clearly wrong. Many of these individuals have the same background, religion, and family life as I do. I have never had any gay friends so I have never been forced to think about this type of thing before.

The identification of similar values, especially religion, was a turning point for these students. An URM male thought each person needed their “own definition of certain values within us” and was surprised that “both see religion as a great guidance.” This identification led to the focused theme, “Interviews changed beliefs” as 6 of the 7 “Not OK” students expressed changed beliefs about gay and lesbian individuals. One white male stated, “I do realize that my stereotyping of this group of individuals is clearly wrong.” Another white male reflected:

An interesting point which got to me was her opinion on the purpose of life which is just to be happy. (...) and be good towards people. My conclusion is that I have to consciously and with a lot of effort try to hold back on making preliminary judgments on people no matter what sexual orientation, race, religion, etc., they are.

This increased awareness of sexual prejudice motivated this white male to start practicing a bias mitigating strategy known as “stereotype replacement” (Devine et al., 2012).

Emerging Themes

The consonant codes integrated with the focused codes from “Gay marriage OK” and “Gay marriage Not OK” created three emerging themes: “Assumptions,” “Yes, we are surprisingly similar,” and “Because we have similar values, have respect.”

Assumptions. Repeatedly, students discussed assumptions that had before the interviews. This URM male stated, “As humans, we are bound to make judgments on people and with this assignment, my assigned term of ‘sexual orientation’ obviously caused me to make some assumptions on people that were different.” A majority female reported, “The only real assumption I had coming into this topic was that homosexuals are all pro-gay marriage.” One majority male recounted “To assume is to make an ASS out of U and ME.” All 22 students discussed their assumptions before the interview and while 15 had their assumptions reinforced, 6 had their beliefs changed and 1 who still did not agree found that “This is a very valuable experience to better understand about how gay or lesbian[s] think.”

Yes, We Are Surprisingly Similar. A majority female stated that “it was clear to me that many of my current values and assumptions were very similar to those of a person so different.” This student was surprised, “that not only many of our life experiences were similar but many of our values were alike too.” Another majority female echoed, “The only thing that really surprised me when interviewing [interviewee] was that his upbringing was very similar to mine.” This minority female reiterated:

All in all, we seem to have a lot more in common than we are different. It does not seem like his family structure or religious beliefs were so far distant from my own that they would have “shaped him” or “caused him” to be attracted to someone of the same sex.

18 of the 22 students confirmed that their interviewees had similar values to themselves, including common topics such as education, religion, and family.

Because We Have Similar Values, Have Respect. This majority male who was in the “OK” category expanded on this “Yes, we are surprisingly similar” theme transitioning to “Because similar values, have respect” theme, “I have a great respect for the person I interviewed, and I see similarities in his values and my own.” Only one “Not OK” student used the word respect; a URM male who stated, “Overall this interview was a tremendous learning experience which I have learned how to respect the opinion of my patients and how to be conservative when it comes to expressing my views.” Although this student still may not be personally tolerant, he gained cultural competence. Components of cultural competency include awareness and “valuing/respecting differences” (Sue, 2001) p. 799). The other “Not OK” students used language such as “In the same way,” “Besides this one difference of sexual orientation (...), we have the same values,” and “This individual places just as much emphasis and value in her family as I do” Although these students did not use the word “respect,” they all “valued” the opinion of their interviewees because of “sameness” not “difference. As this “Not OK” URM male summarized,

I believe I had many more things in common with him than I would have ever thought possible. Pretty much the only difference between us was the fact that he is gay and I am not. (...) I really enjoyed this interview and getting to know a new person who is different, but at the same time very similar.

Discussion

The participants in the study are educated pre-professional students, yet research shows that even educated healthcare professionals are impacted by implicit bias (Green et al., 2007) giving this interventional study social relevance. As in previous research, our study found that homophobic attitudes were influenced by gender role attitudes and religious conviction (Herek et al., 2002; Herek & McLemore, 2013; Simoni & Walters, 2001; Wright et al., 1999). However, contrary to previous research (Simoni & Walters, 2001; Yep, 2002), minorities, especially women, expressed more tolerant views of LGBT than other groups. Consistent with previous research is that with intergroup contact, these heterosexual students expressed cognitive dissonance regarding their bias with personal interaction with LGBT individuals (Basow & Johnson, 2000; Cotten-Huston & Waite, 2000; Herek & McLemore, 2013).

Devine and colleagues (2012) promote an intervention strategy called “increasing opportunities for contact” where participants voluntarily practice meeting individuals different than themselves to mitigate implicit bias. In this study, students were mandated to interview individuals of a different orientation as part of coursework. Research does indicate that mandatory equity policies may create a “rebound” of bias (Ng & Wiesner, 2007; Rosen & Mericle, 1979); however, the evidence in this study does not support this, as these students experienced a reinforcement of their views or at least a better understanding of homosexual issues.

Adherence to traditional gender roles maintains a hegemonic hierarchy where men gain social status in roles associated with hegemonic masculinity (Kimmel, 2010), and women gain status in the “complementary” role of femininity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). As a heterosexual integrates into their prescribed gender role, they may reject and distance themselves from homosexuality. These behaviors may be an implicit manifestation of homophobia; however, many individuals “self-monitor to be politically and socially “correct.” Students, especially in the “Not OK” category, demonstrated attributes of compulsory heteronormativity. However, 18 of the 22 students confirmed that their interviewees had similar values to themselves on such important values central to their self-concept such as education, religion, and family.

Herek and McLemore’s work (2013) suggests three psychologically functional attitudes toward sexual prejudice: a social adjustment function, a value-expressive function, and a defensive function. These students may have welcomed the opportunity to meet a personal goal of bonding with a valued group, although gay and lesbian individuals have a stigmatized status (Herek & McLemore, 2013). The value-expressive function encourages heterosexuals to align themselves to the moral/political principle that they “should” be tolerant to protect their self-concept. Evidence of the defensive function, couched in self-justification, protected these students from negative emotions from perceived threats to their self-esteem (Herek, 1987; Herek & McLemore, 2013; Maio & Olson, 2000).

For the “Not OK” group, none of these students expressed any contact with gays or lesbians before and all described beliefs formed by religious beliefs or family. Having their previous beliefs of difference discounted created the “Yes, we are surprisingly similar” category. Furthermore, these students could not distance themselves from the homosexual individuals whose values were so similar. This cognitive dissonance forced a re-evaluation, where if students could not use the word “respect,” they could “value” the surprising similarities they found.

Limitations

This was a small sample of students at one institution in two different cohorts, and their selection of interviewees was a convenience sample of gay and lesbian individuals only, without bisexual or transgender representation. None of the original cohorts (80, 92) of students self-reported as LGBT which is improbable. Other than gender, we do not have any other demographics on their interviewees. They did have structured interview questions, but other questions might have been asked. The initial study (Isaac et al., 2015) did not find significant differences pre and post interviews for those students (male/female, majority/non-majority) who interviewed those of different sexual orientation. However, qualitative analysis of their reflections using deductive (Mohr, 2002) and inductive data analysis was not only consistent with the literature but some unique contextual findings for future interventional strategies.

Conclusion

The term “homophobia” encompasses a wide range of negative feelings toward homosexuals (Maher et al, 2009). The students’ text in the “Not OK” group (and “OK”) echoed varying degrees of homonegativity, blaming these feelings and beliefs on psychopathology (Herek, 2004). However, contact with gay or lesbian individuals, especially for “Not OK” group, heightened their awareness of the possible “wrongness” of their assumptions. Present in this study were factors clearly consistent with research including gender, religious conservatism, perceived similarity, and degree of interaction (Britton, 1990). One difference, which warrants further research, is the evidence that minority females seemed to display greater empathy and acceptance than any other demographic.

As public opinion changes, researchers may need to shift their focus to those who “hate” gay and lesbians (Maher et al., 2009). These pre-doctoral students found that their interviewees had “surprisingly similar” beliefs and values – especially in the area of religion and family. Because of “similar values,” these students expressed attitudes of respect for those who were “so different” than themselves. This conclusion of “sameness” forced them to see homosexuals as people, rather than a stigmatized invisible outgroup. These contextual results illustrated how a short intervention may mitigate sexual prejudice.

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