An Investigation of The Attitudes of Chinese High School and College Students Toward Homosexuality

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Abstract. Sexual minorities in China are receiving increasing attention from the general public as a result of increased awareness. The opinions regarding sexual minorities appear to change as people become older and more educated. This study evaluates the differences in high school and college student opinions regarding homosexuality in China to confirm or refute this notion. The Chinese adaptation of Herek's Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gay Men scale (ATLG) was used in this study to administer a questionnaire to 114 high school students and 143 university students. The results of a two-way ANOVA conducted using SPSS revealed that there was no significant difference in views about homosexuality between Chinese high school and college students, while there was a significant difference between males and females. There was no significant interaction between the level of education and gender. According to the findings, gender differences rather than level of education influence Chinese students' sentiments about the homosexual population.

Keywords: ATLG, Homosexuality, Education, Gender.

1. Introduction

The Diagnostic Statistical Manual of 1952 listed homosexuality as a sociopathic personality disorder; in 1968, it was shifted to the category of other sexual aberrations; and in 1973, the American Psychiatric Association eventually eliminated the diagnosis of homosexuality as a mental disease. Homosexuality has undergone a process of “criminalization” to “normalization” in many industrialized countries, and the evolution of homosexuality studies has also interacted with this process [1]. In the mid-19th century, with the emergence of behavioural science, some medical experts began to pay attention to human sexuality. In 1849, the Swiss doctor Claude François Mikia published the first-ever medical paper on sexual perversion based on the analysis of a necrophilia case, in which he proposed for the first time that homosexuality is a birth defect. At the beginning of the 20th century, psychoanalysis founded by Austrian psychiatrist Sigmund Freud believed that if a boy comes from a family with a strong mother and a weak father, his relationship with his mother must be too close and his father relatively alienated. It is bound to lack the proper masculinity, so he tries to find a male partner to make up for it — the "Oedipus complex" is the emotional origin of gay men [2]. Although Freud tended in his later years to subscribe to the idea that homosexuality was not a disease, by this time psychoanalysis had come to dominate the mental health profession, and "conversion therapy" had become the prevailing treatment for homosexuality [3]. The authors can see that although people's attitude towards the homosexual community was not very friendly in the early days, and people can also see the importance conveyed in it. Under the broad scope of studying homosexual behaviour and daily life performance, the attitudes people study towards homosexuality are also very important, because only when the researchers really rely on data to grasp the positive or negative attitudes toward the homosexual communities, can the people improve and optimize the public's perception of this minority group on its basis.

The social stigma that this sexual minority experience is a crippling problem. According to the Center for Disease Control in the US reported from 2009, there has been an eight-fold increase in the likelihood of suicide among gays and lesbians, a six-fold increase in the likelihood of depression, and a three-fold increase in the likelihood of using illegal drugs and engaging in risky sexual behaviour [4]. In order to minimize the incidence of these potential psychological problems in the homosexual community, a survey of homosexual attitudes aimed at the younger generation is necessary. Since homosexuality was depathologised 44 years ago, psychologists in the West have created and executed many treatments to counter prejudice against homosexuals. A large proportion of these findings have been incorporated into education, for example, educational interventions on the psychological problems faced by gay and lesbian individuals [5]. Despite the importance of sexual health education, it is often absent from schools in China and overlooked by teachers [6]. As a result, many students are unable to gain the knowledge and skills necessary to make informed decisions about their sexual health. Meanwhile, Compared to Western students who receive systematic sex education, they could thus harbour more prejudice against the homosexual population.

The authors' project investigates the differences in attitudes toward homosexuality among high school and college students. This is the stage at which people begin to learn information and ideas from the society that they cannot learn in school, broaden their horizons, begin to change their thinking, and become more accepting and tolerant, for the reason that this is an area that few researchers have addressed, so the authors chose to investigate people's attitudes toward homosexuality from this angle.

In this thesis, the authors used a quantitative method by conducting an online survey. In the questionnaire, the researchers divided the questionnaire respondents into two clear groups: the high school students' group and the college students' group. In the current study, the authors focused on the age group factors that were not considered in previous studies. Therefore, this study will bring some new findings to the field of sexual minorities' research. Through this study, the authors found that different age groups have different perceptions of sexual minority groups, which will provide some help for further research on the homosexual community, filling the gap in past homosexual research. Not only that, but the purpose is also to understand the public's misunderstanding and prejudice against homosexuality, so as to solve these negative factors.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Using a convenience selection strategy, 257 high school and university students from across China mainland were recruited for this study, with questionnaires disseminated via social media (WeChat and QQ). There were no invalid surveys with missing or confusing responses, thus 257 valid questionnaires were returned. There were 89 men and 168 women among them; 114 were high school students and 143 were college students, shown as in Table 1.

Table.1. Participants' information

	Value label	Number
Gender	Male	89
	Female	168
Education Attainment	High School	114
	College	143

2.2. Instrument

The authors' study used a convenience sample, and an anonymous questionnaire distributed to people via the Internet, which the authors then collect and analyze.

This study used a revised Chinese version of Herek's Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gay Men scale by YU et al., which included two subscales: Attitudes Towards Lesbians (ATL) and Attitudes

Towards Gay Men (ATG) [7, 8]. The scale is graded from 1 to 5, with higher scores indicating greater degrees of homophobia. The total internal consistency coefficient of the scale in this study was 0.93, with the ATL and ATG subscales having internal consistency coefficients of 0.89 and 0.89, respectively [7].

2.3. Data Analysis

SPSS® version 26 software was used to manage and analyse the data. Descriptive statistics were calculated for the main study variable and the study sample characteristics. The data were managed and analysed using two-way ANOVA. Gender and education were considered independent factors, whereas ATL, ATG, and ATLG total scale scores were used as dependent variables for analysis.

3. Results

3.1. Descriptive Analyses

The mean scores were calculated for the ATL, ATG and ATLG scales, and the results showed that among high school students the mean scores for the ATL, ATG and Total Homosexual Attitudes scales were 2.54±0.42, 2.48±0.44 and 2.51±0.39; For college students, the scores were 2.45±0.35, 2.43±0.42 and 2.44±0.34 respectively.

3.2. Two-way ANOVA Analyses

Education and gender were entered as fixed factors, and scores on the ATL, ATG and ATLG scales were entered as dependent variables. The results show that the main effect of gender is significant, $p<.00$ ($F=18.19$, $df=1$); the main effect of education is non-significant, $p>.05$ ($F=1.60$, $df=1$); the interaction between gender and education is non-significant, $p>.05$ ($F=.03$, $df=1$).

4. Discussion

This study intends to evaluate attitudes toward homosexuality among different genders and to analyze perspectives on homosexuality across two academic categories in China, high school and college students. An online survey was used to acquire the data for this investigation. Using the ATLG scale that Yu et al. had adapted, sentiments regarding homosexuality were obtained from Chinese high school and college students [7]. The study's results showed that while views about homosexuality did not differ significantly between Chinese high school and college students, they did differ significantly between males and females, with male attitudes toward the homosexual community being worse than female attitudes. The part that follows will go through the link between this study and the existing literature, the relationship between the findings and the hypothesis, and the study's limitations.

The authors' assumption and prediction are that "college students are more tolerant of homosexuality than high school students" in light of the prior findings [9]. The outcomes of this study did not support previous hypotheses or expectations, but completely the reverse. Additionally, a surprising discovery was that women were more accepting of homosexuality. There is no discernible difference between men's and women's attitudes about homosexuality, according to Wang Hengjie's paper on gender bias and research on homosexual attitudes, and the findings show that males are more prejudiced [10]. Moreover, there are not many men who respond to this questionnaire in the first place. While women are more actively participating in this survey than men, some men may see it and not even want to open it, which further demonstrates how negatively males view the homosexual community (F: 163 versus M: 84). The authors can explain this by pointing out that some statistical findings are not significant. The opinions regarding homosexuality are not substantially different between high school and college students. Lesbians have a p-value of 0.08, while gay-related issues have a p-value of 0.374, which is slightly significant but still equal in significance level (P is larger than 0.05). Since the authors now have a clear objective, they can infer the value of these

unanticipated events, which is that the authors can provide the homosexual groups with more targeted and psychological assistance. As a result, these implications should be taken into account when deciding how to specifically combat the stigma and stereotypes that these targets contain.

It is widely believed that the social stigma existing on homosexuality differs between the different aged groups [11]. However, throughout this online research, the data shows a different result. The analyzed data in this research indicates that there is no remarkable difference between different aged populations. Nonetheless, the survey result of "Homophobia is worse for men" indicates that bullying incidents or discrimination against homosexuals might be carried out mostly by males. The research result may clarify the gender of the groups of people who put pressure on homosexuality. Moreover, only a very few studies compare college students' attitudes toward homosexuality with those of high school students. Only establishing one online research might not be able to deny the impact of age on the attitude towards homosexuality. Overall, researchers should analyze and study data separately for males and females, in order to get a more precise and more accurate result. According to the survey result, the model of "discrimination against the gay community" will need to be more finely divided by gender.

The study is limited by the following factors. First of all, the sample size is small, and the sampled groups are those who are easy to reach. The questionnaire is only published on social media platforms (WeChat and QQ), so it is not widely disseminated, resulting in a low response rate. Second, since this study used convenience sampling and the sample group may be more homogenous, which may lead the authors to not achieve the expected results — the authors assume that college students have more open attitudes toward homosexuality and lower prejudice. Despite these limitations, the authors made progress. By analyzing the factor of gender, the author discovered significant differences in men's and female's attitudes toward the homosexual community, with the male having significantly higher prejudice against homosexuality than females. Although not getting the desired results — high school and college students have different attitudes toward homosexuality – the authors discovered that males and females have significantly different attitudes toward homosexuality.

5. Conclusion

This study looks at whether high school and college students in China have different views on homosexuality and whether college students are more supportive of homosexuals than high school students. The authors used a two-way ANOVA to assess differences in homosexual attitudes between high school and college students, in addition to whether homosexual opinions differed by gender. The findings demonstrate that homosexual sentiments among Chinese students are correlated with gender rather than educational attainment, with men having considerably negative opinions toward the homosexual population. Previous research found no significant gender differences in homosexual attitudes, which contradicts the findings of this study. No prior research has compared the opinions about homosexuality among Chinese high school and college students. There has been no prior research comparing the differences in attitudes regarding homosexuality between high school and university students in China, therefore this study addresses that need. The sample size in this study may not be sufficiently reflective of the actual situation of high school and college students across China, and the convenience sampling method may have produced a highly homogeneous sample. Future research might employ a larger sample size and, if feasible, randomly pick people from different regions of China to complete the questionnaire.

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