

Title: Quality of Contact: Heterosexual Men's Experiences with Sexual Minorities

Authors: Megan Smallwood, Irene Daboin, Allana Zuckerman, and John Peterson

Faculty Sponsor: John L. Peterson, PhD., Department of Psychology

Introduction: Prejudice against sexual minorities (i.e., lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals) is commonplace in our society, and the consequences on those affected by it can be devastating. Approximately 25% of sexual minorities in the United States have been victims of a hate crime based on their sexual orientation. Crimes against sexual minorities can inflict more psychological harm to the victim than other types of victimization, including a greater likelihood of anxiety, depression, or anger. Studies have shown that greater levels of sexual prejudice lead to higher rates of violence against sexual minorities. However, previous research also suggests that having contact with sexual minorities can reduce sexual prejudice. The purpose of the current study was to gather more meaningful information about heterosexual men's experiences of contact with sexual minorities, in order to address the current gap in the extant literature where no study has examined the qualitative aspects of contact. The overarching questions guiding this research were 1) how do heterosexual males describe their current and past contact experiences with sexual minorities? and 2) how do they describe the quality and nature of this contact?

Method: We gathered qualitative data from 148 heterosexual male undergraduate students. The participants were asked an open-ended question that was included in a larger quantitative survey assessing participants' previous contact with sexual minorities. In this question, participants were asked to describe their past and present contact with sexual minorities in their own words. In order to analyze their responses, we will use a modified grounded theory approach, applying an inductive open coding methodology to examine the emergence of common patterns and themes in the data. Furthermore, we will assess inter-coder reliability using percent agreement and any discrepancies among coders will be discussed and resolved.

Results: Preliminary analyses revealed five major themes of contact experiences using our inductive coding scheme: positive contact (participants use words such as good, friendly, comfortable, etc.), negative contact (participants use words such as strange, awkward, nasty, bad, etc.), both positive and negative contact, neutral contact (participants' responses are neither positive nor negative), and other (participants' responses are not substantive).

Discussion/Conclusion: This study adds to the extant literature by providing some evidence of the underlying context of undergraduate heterosexual males' contact with sexual minorities. Future studies are needed that explore the nature of these positive and negative experiences.