

## The Relationship of Homonegativity to LGBT Students' and Non-LGBT Students' Perceptions of Residence Hall Climate

By: Michael L. Fanucce and [Deborah J. Taub](#)

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### **Abstract:**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between students'—both LGBT and non-LGBT—perceived levels of homonegativity (negative attitudes toward lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals) and their perceptions of the climate and community in college and university residence halls. The study group consisted of 284 current undergraduate students at a large Midwestern research university who completed a brief instrument measuring student perceptions of residence hall climate (social support, group cohesiveness, conflict, personalization, safety, noise, cleanliness, and crowding) and another measuring student perceptions of homonegativity levels in residence halls. Negative correlations were found to exist for all students, not just the LGBT students, between higher levels of homonegativity and student satisfaction with their residence hall climate.

In addition, heterosexuals who self-identified as affirming of LGBT students were evaluated to establish whether their responses were more like those of the LGBT students or the non-affirming heterosexuals. The literature suggests that affirming heterosexuals should resemble the LGBT sample; however, data from this study suggest otherwise.

### **Article:**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Residence halls are the places where students who live on campus spend a majority of their time (Levine, 1994; Schroeder & Mable, 1994). According to Hughes (1994), "there is considerable evidence that residence halls have profound positive effects on the total college experience" (p.191). The overall impact upon students living in residence halls is profound in several areas, including involvement and satisfaction; persistence and graduation; personal growth and development; and strengthening of values, attitudes, and moral judgment (Pascarella, Terenzini, & Blimling, 1994). On-campus living status has been shown to be consistently related to increases in students' likelihood to be involved and engaged in the social, cultural, and extra-curricular realm of the institution (Pascarella et al.). Campus residents tend to be more satisfied with their college experience than do their non-residential peers (Pascarella et al.). Furthermore, students who live on campus are more likely to persist through the entirety of their education and graduate at a higher rate than do their non-residential counterparts. Finally, campus residents tend to make greater advances developmentally than do their peers who live off campus (Pascarella et al.).

Unfortunately, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students often encounter difficulties on campus due to their sexual orientation (D'Augelli & Rose, 1990; Herek, 1989; Rankin, 2003). Evans and Wall (1991) and Hughes (1994) reported that LGBT students encountered many challenges within their residence halls. Given what an important educational impact residential living can have on students, it is important to

understand how lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students fit into on-campus living settings and how they are influenced by the residential environment.

Homophobia in recent years has appeared to drop off in the United States as more of the population seems to be more accepting of LGBT individuals; however, heterosexism remains a major facet of LGBT students' experiences (Burn, Kadlec, & Rexer, 2005). D'Augelli and Rose (1990) found that in a college or university setting a large portion (nearly three-fourths) of lesbian women and gay men experienced some form of verbal abuse, whether hetero-sexist or homophobic, and nearly all expected future harassment to occur. Herek (1989) found that almost 92% of gay men and lesbian women reported having been targets of harassment on campus. D'Augelli and Rose (1990) found that among freshmen nearly "30% would prefer a college environment with only heterosexuals" and that, while every respondent showed some form of hostility toward gay men and lesbian women, nearly half believed that homosexuality was wrong and found gay men to be "disgusting" (p. 490). More recently, the Policy Institute of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force's Campus Climate for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Survey (NGLTFS) (Rankin, 2003) found that 36% of LGBT respondents had experienced harassment within the past year, with 89% of this harassment being derogatory remarks (79% of which came from fellow students). Twenty percent of LGBT respondents feared for their physical safety, while 51% reported concealing their sexual orientation. Forty-three percent of respondents reported their overall campus climate as homophobic, with over half of the respondents reporting that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students were likely to be harassed on campus. Slater (1993) established that the psychological impacts of internalized homophobia can include "self-doubt, isolation, attempt[ing to be] heterosexual... identifying with aggressors ...inability to function socially or academically, self-hatred/loathing, and self-destructive behavior" (p. 197).

Research suggests that very little has changed since D'Augelli and Rose's 1990 study, save that, as outward expressions of homophobia have become more and more taboo socially, heterosexism and forms of homonegativity have begun to replace homophobia (Steffens, 2005). Homonegativity refers to prejudice against or negative attitudes about LGBT individuals (Hudson & Ricketts, 1980). Homonegativity is considered to have cognitive, affective, and behavioral components (Hudson & Ricketts; Roderick, McCammon, Long, & Allred, 1998). The term was originally coined to move away from the notion of "phobia" or fear-based attitudes to a term that more accurately captures the phenomenon.

There have been several overarching studies regarding LGBT college students, including studies on the impact of heterosexism/homophobia on students (Burn et al., 2005; D'Augelli, 1992; D'Augelli & Rose, 1990; Home, Rice, & Israel, 2004; Liang & Alimo, 2005; Simoni, 1996), attitudes of non-LGBT students toward their LGBT peers (Engstrom & Sedlacek, 1997; Hinrichs & Rosenberg, 2002; Steffens, 2005), and the campus climate towards LGBT students (Brown, Clarke, Gortmaker, & Robinson-Keilig, 2004; D'Emilio, 1990; Evans, 2002; Evans & Heniot, 2004; Malaney, Williams, & Geller, 1997; Wallace, 2000). However, little has been published regarding LGBT students and residence hall climates specifically (D'Augelli, 1989; Evans & Broido, 1999, 2002; Robison, 1998; Sanford & Engstrom, 1995).

Hughes (1994) established that there is a strong sense of separation in residence halls between the heterosexual population and the LGBT population, which makes it very difficult for LGBT students to be treated fairly, without prejudice from stereotyping, mental illness claims, and religious beliefs. Evans and Wall (1990) listed five main issues that LGBT students face in residence hall living: coming out, lack of privacy, roommates, lack of activities, and dealing with harassment.

There is substantial literature documenting that LGBT students frequently find the college or university campus unwelcoming or even hostile (Brown et al., 2004; D'Augelli, 1992; Malaney et al., 1997; Rankin, 2003), but there is little about the specific environment of residence halls. Because residential students spend a significant amount of time in their residence halls, it is important to understand the perceptions of LGBT students about their residence hall experiences.

The research question for this study is as follows: What is the relationship between students'—both LGBT and non-LGBT—perceived levels of homonegativity and their perceptions of the climate and community in campus residence halls? Given the findings of past studies, the hypothesis of this study was that LGBT students would perceive their living environment as hostile (that is, they would perceive higher levels of homonegativity than would their heterosexual peers) and that this would in turn relate to a perception of poor community development and climate in residence halls among the LGBT population. Further, it was hypothesized that the same relationship would not be found for non-LGBT students. Finally, it was hypothesized that non-LGBT students who identified themselves as allies would respond similarly to LGBT students.

**Table 1**

Demographic Breakdown of Sample			
Demographic Categories		N	%
Gender	Male	118	41.5
	Female	142	50.0
	Transgender	1	0.4
	Unknown	23	8.1
Race/Ethnic Group	African American	7	2.5
	Asian/Pacific Islander	17	6.0
	Middle Eastern	0	0
	American Indian/Alaskan Native	1	0.4
	Chicano/Latino/Hispanic	6	2.1
	White/Caucasian	245	86.3
	Other	8	2.9
Sexual Orientation	Unknown/Uncertain	9	3.2
	Gay/Lesbian	28	9.8
	Bisexual	10	3.5
	Heterosexual	237	83.5
	# who consider themselves an Ally	105	44.3
	# who did not consider themselves an Ally	90	38.0
Outness	Out to everyone	199	70.1
	Out to family/friends	44	15.5
	Out to a few friends/family members	19	6.7
	Out to a couple of close friends	5	1.8
	Totally closeted	5	1.8
	Unknown	12	4.2
Age	17-19	99	34.9
	20-22	148	52.1
	23-25	26	9.1
	26-35	4	1.4
	35+	3	1.1
	Unknown	4	1.4
University Class	Undergraduate	250	88.0
	Professional student (law, medicine, etc.)	7	2.5
	Graduate student	19	6.7
	Unknown	8	2.8
Time Status	Full-time	250	88.0
	Part-time	4	1.4
	Unknown	30	10.6
Lived in Residence Hall	Currently	133	46.8
	Once lived in hall, no longer do	148	52.1
	Missing (did not respond to question)	3	1.05
Type of Residence Hall	Same-sex	89	31.3
	Coed by floor/tower	173	61.0
	Coed by room	4	1.4
	Gender neutral hall	0	0
	Not reported	18	6.3

## METHODS

### *Participants*

The participants for this study were currently enrolled students ( $n = 284$ ) at a large, public, Midwestern, Research I university. Overall, 118 of the respondents (41.5%) were male, 142 (50%) were female, 1 was a transgender student (0.4%), and 23 (8.1%) did not disclose gender. The sexual orientation of the sample included 237 (83.5%) heterosexual students, 28 (9.8%) gay/lesbian students, 10 (3.5%) bisexual students, and 9 (3.2%) uncertain students. Of the 237 heterosexual students, 105 (44.3%) identified as allies of LGBT students, while 90 (38%) identified as non-allies, leaving 42 (17.7%) non-reporting heterosexual students. Ages ranged from 18 to 41+ with 92% of the population aged 23 or younger ( $n = 261$ ). During the data collection stage of this study, nearly all the respondents then lived in or had formerly lived in a residence hall ( $n = 284$ ), with 46.8% ( $n = 133$ ) then residing in a residence hall and 52.1% ( $n = 148$ ) having lived in a residence hall previously (while 3 respondents did not disclose status). Additional demographic data can be found in Table 1.

### *Instrumentation*

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Residence Hall Climate Inventory (LGBTRHCI). The perceived level of homonegativity was measured using an adaptation of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Residence Hall Climate Inventory (Liddle, Luzzo, Hauenstein, & Schuck, 2004). The original scale measured the degree to which an individual's workplace climate is affirming of or stigmatizing for LGBT workers. The scale was designed to be administrable to people of any sexual orientation. The instrument is a 4-point Likert-style scale made up of 20 items to which students are instructed to respond based on how well each item describes their residence hall. The response scale ranges from 1 = Doesn't describe it at all to 4 = Describes extremely well. Cronbach's alpha scores of .96 and test-retest reliability of .87 after six to seven months suggest a strong instrument. The original scale's construct validity was established by comparing responses to it to responses to the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (.58) and the LGB Workplace Discrimination Scale (-.52). As anticipated, responses correlated positively (.58) to the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire, indicating that those who responded positively to the Climate inventory tended to respond positively to the satisfaction questionnaire as well. Also, as anticipated, responses correlated negatively (-.52) to the LGB Workplace Discrimination Scale, indicating that those who rated the LGBT climate of their workplace positively indicated less LGB workplace discrimination.

For the current study, the scale's language was altered to indicate "residence hall" instead of workplace throughout the 20-item scale. A Cronbach's alpha of .886 suggests a strong adaptation. Factor analysis of the revised scale revealed only a single factor, homonegativity, in the LGBTRHCI. In order to establish the validity of the adaptation, participants were asked to place their perception of their residence hall on a continuum from 1-9 in three separate questions. The first item established perceived support for LGBT students in the residence hall: 1 = the most supportive towards LGBT students; 9 = completely non-supportive toward LGBT students. The second item established the perceived hostility toward LGBT students: 1 = not at all hostile; 9 = extremely hostile. The final item established the perceived acceptance of LGBT students in residence halls: 1 = completely unaccepting; 9 = completely accepting. Further evidence of the strength of the adaptation is provided by positive, moderate Pearson's correlations ( $r = .424$ ,  $r = .496$ , and  $r = .540$  with  $p < .01$ ) among the three validation items (1, 2, and 3 respectively) and the adapted LGBTRHCI.

Residence Hall Climate Scale (RHCS). The climate of the residence hall in general was assessed using Kaya's Residence Hall Climate Scale (2004). The RHCS is a 30-item, 7-point Likert-style instrument designed to examine how students perceive and feel about their experiences living in a residence hall. Responses range from 1 = Not at all true to 7 = Very true. The RHCS has eight factors: "(a) social support, (b) conflict, (c) group cohesiveness, (d) personalization of residence hall room, (e) feeling of crowding, (f) disruption by noise, (g) cleanliness of the physical setting, and (h) safety" (Kaya, 2004, p. 106). No additional psychometric information on the RHCS was available. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated among respondents for the present study for each of the factors and ranged from .550 to .877 across the various factors of the RHCS, indicating moderate to strong internal consistency (a measure of reliability) of the scales.

## Procedures

Subjects were recruited for participation in the study in two separate groups in order to maximize the response from LGBT students. The first group was recruited through an e-mail sent by the Office of the Registrar to 2,000 randomly selected students who were current or past residence hall residents. Of the 2,000 solicited, 245 responded, yielding a response rate of 12.25%. The second group was recruited using the LGBT student listserv. Of the approximately 200 members of the listserv, 39 responded, yielding a response rate of 19.5%. The e-mails sent to participants directed them to the survey and provided a password for the site. Students in the LGBT listserv group received a follow-up e-mail four weeks after the first contact to remind them that the survey was available, and students who had previously completed the survey were thanked for their previous participation. No identifying information was collected on any of the students, and all of the data were stored online in a database accessible only by the researchers until completion of the study when it was relocated to a local server.

## ANALYSIS

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed to test for differences in mean scores by group (LGBT, Ally, non-Ally). The MANOVA is an omnibus test that is used when there are multiple dependent variables (in this case, the scores on the homonegativity scale and the residence hall climate scales). The advantage of using the MANOVA rather than performing several ANOVAs (analysis of variance) is that it protects against the risk of inflating Type I error from multiple tests (Warner, 2008). A significant result from the MANOVA would indicate that significant differences exist. The analysis showed significant results by group: Wilks Lambda = .78,  $F(18, 546.00) = 4.017$ ,  $p < .000$ . Next, univariate analyses of variance (ANOVA) were performed by group to determine on which scales there were significant differences. The analyses showed significant main effects by group for the following:

- homonegativity  $F(2, 281) = 16.029$  ( $p < .000$ )
- social support  $F(2, 281) = 6.225$  ( $p < .002$ )
- group cohesiveness  $F(2, 281) = 6.383$  ( $p < .002$ )
- personalization  $F(2, 281) = 6.228$  ( $p < .002$ )
- crowding  $F(2, 281) = 9.127$  ( $p < .000$ )
- cleanliness  $F(2, 281) = 5.574$  ( $p < .004$ )
- safety  $F(2, 281) = 6.598$  ( $p < .002$ )

Dependent variable	Group	Groups	Mean difference	Sig
LGBTRHCI	Ally	LGBT	-7.882*	.000
		Not Ally	-1.101	.524
Social support	Ally	LGBT	2.944*	.028
		Not Ally	-.949	.472
Conflict	Ally	LGBT	.9248	.317
		Not Ally	-.159	.934
Group cohesiveness	Ally	LGBT	1.326	.614
		Not Ally	-.759	.436
Personalization	Ally	LGBT	-2.226*	.002
		Not Ally	1.068	.075
Crowding	Ally	LGBT	3.010*	.000
		Not Ally	.927	.155
Noise	Ally	LGBT	1.045	.585
		Not Ally	-.252	.940
Cleanliness	Ally	LGBT	2.041*	.003
		Not Ally	.332	.733
Safety	Ally	LGBT	.893*	.001
		Not Ally	.302	.175

\* Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tail).

This means that there were significant differences among groups on these scales, but it does not indicate which groups differed from one another. Therefore, post hoc tests were performed.

Tukey's post hoc test revealed that hetero-sexual non-allies and heterosexual allies were not statistically different ( $p < .05$ ) on the following scales: LGBTRHCI and the social support, crowding, group cohesiveness, cleanliness, and safety subscales of the RHCS. No significant differences appeared among any of the groups on the noise and conflict subscales of the RHCS (see Table 2).

Based on this analysis and an examination of the means and standard deviations, the Ally and non-Ally groups were collapsed into a single non-LGBT group, as they were not statistically different. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed following the collapse of the group identification into two categories (LGBT and non-LGBT) and was significant: Wilks Lambda = .86,  $F(9, 274) = 4.961$  ( $p < .000$ ). Univariate analyses of variance were performed by group. The analyses showed significant main effects by group identification for the following:

- homonegativity  $F(1, 282) = 30.859$  ( $p < .000$ )
- social support  $F(1, 282) = 11.068$  ( $p < .001$ )
- group cohesiveness  $F(1, 282) = 9.674$  ( $p < .002$ )
- personalization  $F(1, 282) = 7.131$  ( $p < .008$ )
- crowding  $F(1, 282) = 14.699$  ( $p < .000$ )
- cleanliness  $F(1, 282) = 10.600$  ( $p < .001$ )
- safety  $F(1, 282) = 10.149$  ( $p < .002$ ).

These results indicate that the variables of the homonegativity scale, social support, group cohesiveness, personalization, crowding, cleanliness, and safety subscales were significant based upon LGBT or non-LGBT group identification.

**Table 3**  
Correlations Between the LGBTRHCI and Subscales of the RHCS (n=284)

	LGBTRHCI
Social support	-.301*
Conflict	-.288*
Group cohesiveness	-.331*
Personalization	-.263*
Crowding	-.283*
Noise	-.219*
Cleanliness	-.220*
Safety	-.298*

\* Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tail).

**Table 4**  
Correlations Between the LGBTRHCI and Subscales of the RHCS by Group

	LGBTRHCI
<b>LGBT (n =47)</b>	
Social support	-.355*
Conflict	-.360*
Group cohesiveness	-.462**
Personalization	-.185
Crowding	-.351*
Noise	-.419**
Cleanliness	-.195
Safety	-.360*
<b>Non-LGBT (n =237)</b>	
Social support	-.239**
Conflict	-.247**
Group cohesiveness	-.266**
Personalization	-.240**
Crowding	-.197**
Noise	-.151*
Cleanliness	-.165**
Safety	-.223**

\* Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tail).  
\*\* Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tail).

Following this analysis, Pearson correlations were performed on the eight subscales of the RHCS and the LGBTRHCI. Negative moderate correlations were found between scores on the LGBTRHCI and the social

support, conflict, group cohesiveness, personalization, crowding, noise, cleanliness, and safety ( $r = -.219$  to  $-.331$ ,  $p < .05$ ) subscales of the RHCS across the entire sample (see Table 3). Split-group correlations revealed negative moderate correlations for LGBT students between their LGBTRHCI scores and the social support, conflict, crowding, safety, group cohesiveness, and noise ( $r = -.351$  to  $-.462$ ,  $p < .05$  or better) subscales of the RHCS (see Table 4). Negative weak-to-moderate correlations occurred in the non-LGBT group between the scores on the LGBTRHCI and the noise, social support, conflict, group cohesiveness, personalization, crowding, and cleanliness ( $r = -.151$  to  $-.266$ ,  $p < .05$  or better) subscales of the RHCS. Fisher's z-tests were performed between Pearson correlation scores among LGBT and non-LGBT students on the eight subscales of the RHCS. None of these z-tests were significant, meaning that the strength of the correlations was not significantly different among the groups (Warner, 2008).

## **DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

The hypothesis that LGBT students would perceive their residence halls as having marked levels of homonegativity, which would then correlate to a perception of poor community development and climate in residence halls among the LGBT population, was supported. The same association occurred with non-LGBT students (allies and non-allies alike), which was not hypothesized.

Preliminary analyses revealed that responses from allies of LGBT students were statistically different from those of LGBT students and not statistically different from those of non-LGBT/non-Ally students. Therefore, the allies were not treated as a separate group but were included with the other non-LGBT students. For the LGBT students, as levels of homonegativity increased, the perception of their residence hall climate became more negative. Similarly, heterosexual students exhibited the same type of negative relationship, albeit a weaker one, with perceptions of residence hall climate becoming more negative as perceived levels of homonegativity increased. Prior to collapsing Ally and non-Ally groups into a single non-LGBT group, significant differences were found among the three groups—LGBT students, Ally students, and non-Ally students—on homonegativity, social support, group cohesiveness, personalization, crowding, cleanliness, and safety. The perceptions that heterosexual allies in this study had about homonegativity and the residence hall climate were found to be more similar to those of the heterosexual non-allies, rather than similar to those of the LGBT students, and were therefore included with the heterosexual student sample for analyses. Significant differences were found between the LGBT students and the collapsed group—non-LGBT students—on homonegativity, social support, group cohesiveness, personalization, crowding, cleanliness, and safety.

As was predicted, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students found their residence hall environments to be homonegative, with a moderate-to-high mean score on the LGBTRHCI. The LGBT students' mean score was 56.41 (with the possible range of scores of 20-80). The homonegative environment for LGBT students was moderately related to negative impressions of residence hall climate. The strongest negative, significant correlations between scores on the LGBTRHCI and the RHCS were found in group cohesiveness, noise, safety, conflict, and social support for LGBT students. These results are consistent with the findings of Hughes (1994), Evans (2002), Evans and Broido (1999), Evans and Wall (1991), Slater (1993), Robison (1998), and Sanford and Engstrom (1995) in regard to LGBT student perceptions of residence hall climate.

These findings make sense given how community develops in a residence hall and how often, when LGBT students perceive their residence hall climate to be negative towards them, they are unable to feel like they are part of the community. In addition, as LGBT students feel separate and left out of the residence hall community, and when this alienation is coupled with negative self-perceptions, their perceived levels of safety and conflict are affected. LGBT students' personal safety perceptions are especially impacted by homonegative attitudes when hate crimes and gay bashings continue to populate the news and heterosexism continues to remind LGBT students of the low social status imposed upon them. In considering social support, when LGBT students feel as if they do not belong to the residence group within which they live, they will not feel socially supported. This is especially apparent when they are confronted with higher levels of homonegativity, which repeatedly reminds LGBT students of their lower social status both in the residence hall and in the world at large. Finding a significant relationship between homonegativity and the noise subscale of the RHCS is particularly interesting.

LGBT students find their residence hall noisier in the presence of homonegativity. This may be due to the nature of the noise present, in the form of homonegative epithets or threats levied at all students, which may be particularly disturbing and noteworthy for LGBT students.

The weaker of the LGBT student correlations between the LG BTR H C I and the RHC S—personalization and cleanliness—may be due to additional factors influencing perceptions about residence hall climate, such as facilities, programming, and resident advisor visibility. The weakness of the score on the personalization subscale is understandable based upon an individual's desire to personalize residence hall space being limited not only by social perceptions (whether or not the personalization is potentially offensive to someone else in the hall) but also by administrative policies. That is, students may not be able to redecorate their rooms, display certain images or symbols, or hang various items on a door or wall depending on policies that govern things such as painting or use of adhesives, nails, or screws. However, the relationship with perceptions of homonegativity may be weaker because personalization remains an area more under the individual's—rather than the community's—control. Essentially, for LGBT students, the relationship is weaker with regard to personalization of residence hall space because they feel restricted by the possible social threat that may arise if something is deemed "too gay." In addition, if LGBT students are not "out" to many of their hall mates, they may feel unable to display artifacts about their lives (photos, posters, etc.), which also affects their perceptions about personalization. With regards to cleanliness, it is understandable that a psychosocial construct like homonegativity would have little effect upon this perception given that one's perception of cleanliness is dependent upon one's perception of hygienic conditions and building maintenance rather than upon a psychosocial construct.

The hypothesis predicted that only LGBT students would show a negative relationship between homonegative attitudes and their residence hall climate. Non-LGBT students were not expected to perceive a relationship between homonegativity and climate, and therefore their scores on the LGBTRHCI were expected to be unrelated to their perceptions about the residence hall climate. However, the data suggest that this relationship exists across all students in residence halls. Both LGBT students and their heterosexual peers (both allies and non-allies) perceive various portions of their residence hall climate negatively in the presence of homonegative attitudes.

Although there was a significant difference between the perceptions that LGBT students and non-LGBT students have about homo-negativity in the residence hall environment, scores on the RHCS were found to be related to homonegativity levels for both groups. For the heterosexual student group, a similar negative (albeit weaker) correlation with residence hall climate was present. This makes sense given the social stigma surrounding LGBT students' "alternative" orientation and gender expression in that heterosexual students often tease one another with terms considered to be derogatory toward LGBT people (e.g. "fag," "dyke," "fence-sitter," etc). According to Blumenfeld (2000), homonegativity affects everyone by creating layers of privilege for non-LGBT citizens, which impacts relationship formation between heterosexuals; inhibits close, intimate relationships with members of the same sex; compromises the integrity of heterosexuals by requiring them to continue to oppress and treat others who are not a member of the majority poorly; results in targeting, badgering, intimidating, and sometimes silencing those who are perceived to be LGBT but who are in fact heterosexual; prevents development of authentic self-identity for some LGBT individuals; and causes young people to become sexually active earlier in order to establish their "desired" sexual identity (thereby causing increases of STDs in young people). In considering Blumenfeld's list of numerous homo-negative impacts on heterosexual individuals, it would follow that non-LGBT students who are aware of social issues surrounding them would find that homonegativity has an important impact upon their residence hall climate, especially considering the need to avoid being wrongfully labeled.

It appears that a climate of homonegativity in the residence hall environment is both stigmatizing and problematic for all students, not just for LGBT students. When homonegativity is added into the community development equation, it appears that—for all students—the more homonegative the environment, the poorer the overall community development will seem. Students who are unable to identify with their living

environment and unable to feel socially supported due to the homonegativity present within the environment will need additional support from professionals and programmatic interventions in order to be successful both in and out of the classroom.

The stronger (more moderate) negative relationship between the LGBTRHCI scores and the RHCS subscales suggests that homonegative attitudes affect the perceptions that LGBT students have about residence hall climate more than they do their heterosexual peers. This interaction is expected and understandable considering that homonegativity targets members of the LGBT community. Although heterosexual students may be impacted by homonegative comments in their environment, they are not members of the targeted or socially oppressed group that the homonegative sentiments intend to harm. In fact, given results from the NGLTFS discussed earlier, it is surprising that the relationship was not stronger among LGBT individuals. Given this negative relationship between perceived levels of homonegativity and residence hall climate, administrators of residence life programs may find that additional diversity training, educational programming, and interventions targeted at reducing homonegativity (e.g., Safe Zone) in residence halls would be beneficial for all students.

### **LIMITATIONS**

The sample was limited to a single university, yielding findings that may not be representative of a broader population. Response rates were rather low with the registrar sample (245 responses out of 2,000 or 12.25%). Given the nature of the sampling methods used to obtain the LGBT sample, individuals who are members of the various LGBT groups and members of the listserv are arguably more willing and more comfortable responding to surveys such as this one and are more likely to participate in them given their self-identification. It is also possible that LGBT students who are members of campus LGBT groups may be more sensitized to issues of homonegativity and therefore more likely to score higher on measures related to homonegativity.

Grouping LGBT students into a single group for analysis represents another limitation of the study. Analyses by groups within the LGBT sample were not possible because of the small size ( $n = 1$ ) of the transgender group. It is possible, however, that the concerns and perceptions about climate and homonegativity may differ among lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgender students.

### **IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

The findings of this study suggest several avenues for future research. Additional large-scale studies exploring the relationship between homonegativity and residence hall climate should be pursued to verify the results. Second, additional longitudinal studies in which researchers study the long-term effects of diversity programs like Safe Zone and LGBT educational trainings would offer a deeper understanding of how student affairs professionals can better combat the effects of homonegativity in residence halls. Third, research expanded to include multiple campuses would allow researchers to better understand the unique needs of LGBT students as a whole. Fourth, more extensive studies would also allow researchers to better understand the differing relationships that may manifest differently for lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgender students when not lumped together in a single group. Fifth, additional studies will help researchers comprehend more dearly why heterosexual students also perceive their residence hall negatively in the presence of homonegative attitudes.

### **IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE**

Several implications for practice in higher education and student affairs are suggested by these findings. First, interventions designed to fight the stigmatization of LGBT individuals are essential to help counter the effects of homonegativity. Research has shown that individuals are more likely to be accepting of LGBT individuals if they know and interact with them (Cramer, 2002), especially when they are able to prove stereotypes false or inaccurate. Second, colleges and universities that currently have "soft" non-discrimination policies (policies that are verbalized in the form of writing or speech but serve only as figureheads for public viewing), including those for sexual orientation and gender expression, need to ensure that these policies are in fact upheld in order to demonstrate that they are living policies and that perpetrating homonegative behaviors will not be tolerated. According to this study's findings, this type of policy execution will help both LGBT and non-LGBT students live and coexist more easily in residence halls. Third, resource libraries and peer-counseling trainings designed

to help provide resident assistants with necessary tools for educating students in their halls about LGBT issues and the effects of homonegativity need to be developed. Using these resources and skills, resident assistants can better assist LGBT students navigate the college experience and can also learn skills to become effective peer counselors for LGBT students, as well as for non-LGBT students who may feel targeted for not fitting a preconceived mold. In addition to resident assistants, allies and Safe Zone peer counselors must be better trained to help identify more covert forms of homonegativity, while they are also supplied with adequate resources to educate all students regarding the effects that homonegativity has on the residence hall environment as a whole.

## **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

Given the heated political context within the nation at the time of this study and the evolving struggle that LGBT individuals face while fighting for equal rights and opportunities afforded to their heterosexual peers, colleges and universities are uniquely poised to become bastions of safety and inclusivity for LGBT students, if they choose to be. The evolving nature of homophobia into heterosexism and homonegativity has led to decreases in outright displays of negative bias, but more subtle seeds of discrimination and negative jibes have taken root in today's residence hall environments. Both LGBT and non-LGBT students alike in this study described their living environments as homonegative, and these biases were negatively correlated to their overall perceptions of their residence hall climate. In particular, social support and group cohesiveness development were lower for all students. This is particularly interesting given the mission of most residential life programs to build strong communities for their residents to live in; but without social support and cohesiveness, community is not likely.

## **Discussion Questions**

1. What can you do as a professional to take deliberate steps to gain knowledge, refine attitudes, and develop the skills needed to work with people who have a different sexual orientation/identity (from your own)?
2. Human beings typically fear what they do not know. In this article, Hughes (1994) notes the tendency for populations to separate themselves in the residence halls by sexual orientation/identity. What can professionals within housing/residence life do to combat the strong desire to separate by demographics and/or attitudes? Do the results of this study support consideration of a special-interest residence hall for LGBT students?
3. The authors note several psychological impacts of homophobia on LGBT students. These include a sense of internalized homophobia (self-doubt, isolation, attempting to be heterosexual, identifying with aggressors, inability to function socially or academically, self-hatred/loathing, and self-destructive behavior). What can student affairs or housing professionals do to support those who feel or experience homonegativity within their respective campus environment?
4. How can professionals in student affairs help LGBT students deal with physical and psychological forms of abuse and discrimination? What resources are available on your campus to help student affairs or housing professionals who want to counter homonegativity?
5. Adolescence and young adulthood are developmental periods in which many individuals come to terms with their sexual identity. What are the challenges faced by college-aged students as they come to terms with their sexual orientation/identity? What are the different or additional challenges faced by students who identify as LGBT?
6. What are some ethical standards in the profession associated with interactions with students from the LGBT community? Why do these standards exist? How does your respective campus integrate these standards into practice?

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