



GGGB 3223 LEARNER DIVERSITY
Semester 1 2010/2011

**SEXUAL MINORITIES AND TEACHER EDUCATION:
AN ARTICLE REVIEW AND RESPONSE
(Individual Assignment)**

LECTURER: DR. HASNAH BINTI TORAN

**LISA KWAN SU LI
A123040
TESL/3**

**Lisa Kwan Su Li (A123040)
GB 3223 Learner Diversity**

**PART ONE:
ARTICLE REVIEW**

Review of the article *Are Tomorrow's Teachers Ready to Deal with Diverse Students: Teacher Candidates' Attitudes towards Gay Men and Lesbians* by Tammy Jordan Wyatt, Sara B. Oswalt, Christopher White and Fred L. Peterson, published in the *Teacher Education Quarterly* (2008)

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The research article *Are Tomorrow's Teachers Ready to Deal with Diverse Students: Teacher Candidates' Attitudes towards Gay Men and Lesbians* written by Tammy Jordan Wyatt, Sara B. Oswalt, Christopher White and Fred L. Peterson, published in the *Teacher Education Quarterly* in 2008, seeks to assess pre-service teachers' attitudes towards gay men and lesbians.

According to studies, lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) youth are more prone to certain health-risks (victimization and mental health problems) and health-risk behaviours (substance abuse, sexual risk-taking) and suicide as compared to their heterosexual peers. Therefore special attention should be given to this group of youth.

Examining pre-service teachers' attitudes towards these sexual minorities will enable more comprehensive and effective teacher preparation programs to be set in place thus, equip teachers with the knowledge and awareness about the concerns of LGB youth that is required to provide a safe environment for learning and progress.

2.1 METHODS

A 147-item survey regarding candidates' training, education and attitudes related to sexuality issues, as well as a 10-item questionnaire on attitudes towards gay men and lesbian individuals were administered to 485 students from two South/Central Texas universities who were enrolled in a required child and adolescent development course.

Of the 485 participants, 334 were teacher candidates; 278 were female (83.5%), 55 male (16.5%) while one participant did not reveal the gender.

Attention was drawn to the 10-item questionnaire, which uses the Attitudes Toward Lesbian and Gay Men (ATLG-S) Scale (Herek 1984). The survey also uses two subscales – Attitudes Toward Gay Males Scale (ATG-S5) and Attitudes Toward Lesbians Scale (ATL-S5) – each with 5 items. Data from the questionnaire were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS).

3.1 RESULTS

The results from both the survey and questionnaire answer five specific research questions as will be discussed in the following section.

3.1.1 What are the Attitudes of Teacher Candidates towards Gay Men and Lesbians?

In general, the participants were uncertain about their attitudes towards gay men and lesbians. The mean and median scores were about mid-way of the scales. However, based on the sub-scales, ATG-S5 and ATL-S5, attitudes towards gay males was slightly more negative as compared to lesbians. Nevertheless, most of the teacher candidates are moderates in sexuality issues than liberals or conservatives.

3.1.2 Does Gender of Teacher Candidates Affect Attitudes towards Gay Men and Lesbians?

Because samples of males and females were not equal, the Brown and Forsythe's F test of equality of means was used. With respect to gender, there was no significant difference in the overall ATLG-S and the ATL-S5. However, males had a more negative attitude towards gay men, shown in the results of the ATG-S5 scale.

3.1.3 Does Ethnicity of Teacher Candidates Affect Attitudes towards Gay Men and Lesbians?

Participants were divided into three main ethnic groups: White, Hispanic and Other (which includes Asian and African American). There were no significant differences between ethnics on the ATLG-S, the ATL-S5 and the ATG-S5 scales.

3.1.4 Does the Sexuality Education Philosophy of Teacher Candidates Affect Their Attitudes towards Gay Men and Lesbians?

With regards to this research question, participants were asked to identify themselves as liberal, moderate or conservative in their sexuality education philosophy. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) procedures showed that self-identified liberals had a significantly lower mean (depicting a more positive attitude) as compared to moderates and conservatives in all three scales.

3.1.5 Does the Perceived Sexuality Education Level of Teacher Candidates Affect Their Attitudes Towards Gay Men And Lesbians?

In the survey, participants were asked to perceive themselves as either “well informed and educated” or “poorly informed and educated” regarding their sexuality education level. Based on the results, there was no significant difference between these two groups on the overall ATLG-S and the ATG-S5 scales. However, those who were “well informed and educated” had significantly more positive attitudes towards lesbians than those who were “poorly informed and educated”.

4.1 DISCUSSION

The researchers, in the article, are encouraged by the overall moderate attitudes shown by teacher candidates towards gay men and lesbians, though much is required before the issues of LGB youth are fully addressed.

Important to note from the results of the research is the negative attitudes of males towards gay males. In addition, while those who are “well informed and educated” possessed a more positive attitude towards lesbians, this did not extend to gay males. Therefore, this implies that more information and education on the issues of gay males are essential. However, this research has its flaws. The researchers admitted that the sexual orientation and religious affiliation of the participants themselves were not evaluated. Both these aspects of the teacher candidates would significantly alter the results of the research.

**PART TWO:
RESPONSE**

A personal response to the journal article reviewed in Part One

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This section of this paper is the author's evaluation of sexual minority (lesbian, gay and bisexual) issues in the context of Malaysia. The author will attempt to assess the rights of sexual minorities and sexual minority acts in Malaysia from the viewpoint of Malaysian legislation, Islam (official religion), Malaysian government and the society.

The author, in the form of a discussion, will then make a comparison between the attitudes of Americans and Malaysians towards lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) individuals, with reference to the article *Are Tomorrow's Teachers Ready to Deal with Diverse Students: Teacher Candidates' Attitudes towards Gay Men and Lesbians* written by Tammy Jordan Wyatt, Sara B. Oswalt, Christopher White and Fred L. Peterson (discussed in the previous section).

6.1 VIEWPOINTS ON SEXUAL MINORITIES

The issues of sexual minorities and sexual minority acts from the viewpoint of Malaysian legislation, Islam, the government and the society will be discussed in the following section.

6.1.1 Legislation

There is no explicit law in Malaysia regarding homosexuality. However, in Section 377 of the Malaysian Penal Code, referring to "Unnatural Offences", anyone who is guilty of voluntarily engaging in carnal intercourse "against the order of nature" with any man, woman or animal will be given the penalty of up to 20 years in prison, or be fined or whipped. (*Sodomy Laws*, 2007)

Article 377A of the Penal Code which refers to "Outrages of Decency", a jail term of up to two years will be sentenced to any male person who engages in any act of "gross indecency" with another male person. (*Sodomy Laws*, 2007) There is no mention however, of legal action against sexual relations between a female person and another female person.

Sexual acts between a male and another male person (gay acts) is considered carnal intercourse “against the order of nature” under Malaysian legislation. Although lesbian acts are not referred to, it can be safely assumed that it would also be categorized under “unnatural intercourse” as well. Therefore, it can be inferred that Malaysian legislation has no tolerance for acts of sexual minorities, with severe legal consequences.

6.1.2 Islam

In Islam, gay acts are considered a sin, or a profound mistake. All Islamic schools of thought consider homosexuality to be unlawful. Dr. Muzammil Siddiqi of the Islamic Society of North America says (as quoted in an article on the Mission Islam website),

Homosexuality is a moral disorder. It is a moral disease, a sin and corruption... No person is born homosexual, just like no one is born a thief, a liar or murderer. People acquire these evil habits due to a lack of proper guidance and education.

Islam believes that humans are not homosexuals by nature, but rather heterosexuals, as is conceded by Islamic scholars. Homosexuality therefore, is thought to be an act of will. There are several references to gay and lesbian behaviour in the Quran:

We also sent Lut: He said to his people: “Do ye commit lewdness such as no people in creation [ever] committed before you? For ye practice your lusts on men in preference to women: ye are indeed a people transgressing beyond bounds. (Quran 7:80-81)

What! Of all creatures do ye come unto the males, and leave the wives your Lord created for you? Nay, but ye are forward folk. (Quran 26:165)

Both references are in relation to gay acts. Lesbian acts are not mentioned in the Quran, but are, in the Hadith. Generally, Islam’s stance on homosexuality is that it is an act of sin deserving of punishment.

6.1.3 Government

How does the government respond to issues of homosexuality in the country? Royal Malaysian Navy Chief Mohd Anwar Mohd Nor stated that homosexuals would not be allowed admission into the Malaysian Navy. He was quoted saying that he was “opposed to such unnatural sex acts” and by prohibiting admission of homosexuals, he was “protecting the image of the Navy.” (*New Straits Times*, 2005) Similarly, gay men and lesbians would not be allowed to join the military as well.

In 2004, there was a huge uproar from the authorities as well as the people when Malaysia’s former Deputy Prime Minister, Anwar Ibrahim was charged with sodomy. Former Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamed, continued to accuse Anwar Ibrahim of his alleged homosexuality after he was released from charges. Anwar’s supposed homosexuality made him ineligible to be Prime Minister.

6.1.4 Society

Malaysian society is generally a homophobic society, fraught with religious and cultural taboos whereby one’s sexuality is rarely discussed, whether in the home or elsewhere.

As an Islamic country, Malaysia does not acknowledge any other sexual orientation besides the mainstream, claiming homosexuality to be a perverted deviation of the norm. However, awareness towards sexuality issues and equal human rights has risen in Malaysia.

This can be illustrated by a Petition for Sexuality Rights in Malaysia, initiated by Shanon Shah, Alina Rastam and Tan Beng Hui, that was circulated online beginning 1999 to 2007, encouraging people who disagreed with the violation of human rights by Malaysian laws to sign it. To date (September 2010), there is a total of 838 signatures.

The petition requested that the Malaysian government would:

- abolish all laws that criminalise sexual practices between consenting adults.
- dismantle State institutions or initiatives that were established with the purpose of regulating and monitoring people's sexual or moral behaviour in consensual situations.
- **cease all persecution of and discrimination against sexual minorities** such as homosexuals, bisexuals, intersexed, transsexuals and transvestites, and transgendered people (emphasis the author's).

(taken from the online *Petition for Sexuality Rights in Malaysia*)

This shows that the people are slowly becoming more sensitive towards the issues of sexual minorities in the country although the process of addressing and dealing with these issues is a laborious one.

7.1 DISCUSSION

The previous section provides an idea of the position of sexual minorities in Malaysia. In Malaysia, homosexuality is not tolerated, by law, or by the government. This zero-tolerance leaves no room for negotiation or the rethinking of the relevance of such laws.

One primary reason for Malaysia's uncompromising stance against homosexuality is because Islam is the official religion of the country. Former de facto Law Minister, Dr. Rais Yatim said that "developing and Islamic countries like Malaysia did not recognise sexual relations between people of the same sex."

J.J. Ray questions rather frankly, in an article published in *Malaysiakini*, "Has religion become a pre-determining factor in deciding whose human rights are protected and whose are not?" One wonders of course, if Malaysia were not a Muslim country, would her stand on homosexuality be different? Or would the leaders remain as ignorant of issues of homosexuality and homophobic tendencies in the country?

7.2 HOMOSEXUALITY IN RELATION TO TEACHER EDUCATION

Referring to the article *Are Tomorrow's Teachers Ready to Deal with Diverse Students: Teacher Candidates' Attitudes Towards Gay Men and Lesbians* written by Tammy Jordan Wyatt, Sara B. Oswalt, Christopher White and Fred L. Peterson, it is clear that America has moved past the stage of ignorance of the issues and into equipping even teacher candidates with the knowledge to deal with them.

In Malaysia however, due to religious and cultural taboos, the subject itself is more often than not ignored and hushed to silence rather than openly discussed and debated, even by the government and authorities.

Nevertheless the fact remains that these issues exist, even in our very own conservative backyard. The approach that the authorities seem to be taking – ignorance – does not eradicate, nor deal with, the problem.

The main concern here however, is the new generation. The youth of today do struggle with issues of identity and sexuality regardless of whether the society acknowledges it. Living in a homophobic society such as Malaysia where such sexuality struggles are unmentionable, these sexual minority youth suffer on their own without guidance or support.

As discussed in the earlier section of this paper, studies have shown that lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) youth are higher-risk individuals as compared to their heterosexual peers in the sense that they are more susceptible to health risk behaviours and even suicide attempts and completions.

One important point to bear in mind is that the sexual orientation of the LGB youth is not the cause of these risks per se, but the environmental response towards their sexual orientation is. Thus, seeing as the response of the Malaysian society is largely negative, LGB youth in Malaysia may be at a higher risk.

Understanding and decreasing the health risks of the LGB youth is of utmost importance. The author would like to suggest that, fundamentally, the school and educational arena is one essential platform for understanding the challenges sexual minority individuals face, with the teacher playing the biggest role.

Therefore, if the teacher is to apply an inclusive setting whereby she accommodates and deals with learners of various backgrounds, including their sexual orientation, successfully, the knowledge required has to be set from the teacher education stage itself.

The purpose of pre-service teacher education programs is to prepare future teachers to work with diverse learners by equipping them with the necessary skills and knowledge. Malaysia's teacher education programs do deal with learners of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, language and socio-economic status. It is only logical that sexual minority issues should be included as well.

The author would like to stress that, with the current struggle even with the issue of implementing sex education, implementing *sexuality* education in schools is not necessary. On the other hand, sexuality education in teacher training programs would be a good way to increase knowledge and awareness of the issues of LGB youth. When there is a higher level of awareness, future teachers are better equipped to help sexual minority learners in the classroom, even if it is as "little" help as providing moral support and acceptance.

8.1 CONCLUSION

There is a stark contrast between the attitudes of Americans and Malaysians towards LGB individuals. While the Americans are already conducting studies to put into place better teacher education programs where their teacher candidates will be equipped to aid their LGB youth, Malaysians would rather not deal with the issue of homosexuality at all.

It is exactly this attitude of “ignorance is bliss” that will further aggravate the situation for our LGB youth. Despite being mere adolescents, they have to struggle with their sexuality and suffer discrimination besides suicidal and high health-risk tendencies simply because these issues are not acknowledged, and therefore not looked into or dealt with.

With regards to the country’s youth, every individual has an equal right to a safe learning environment, including the LGB. Such an environment can only be created if the teachers are trained with knowledge and awareness of these issues. Hence, sexual minority awareness programs in teacher education should be included.

As a last thought, the author does not demand for dramatic changes in the country’s policy or a revamping of teacher education programs nationwide. Nonetheless, the author believes that attitudinal changes should be made especially with regards to the government as well society’s response towards sexual minority issues. Sexuality and individual human rights aside, society should respond to these issues not with condemnation or marginalization, but with acceptance.