

ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT HOMONEGATIVITY AND THE EFFECT ON CAMPUS  
CLIMATE

By

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To my brother Jeff

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
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By

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Researchers have well documented how campus climate has affected students. The campus climate has affected a student's ability to persist through college and ultimately has impacted his or her entire life. Many campus climate studies have been conducted at universities, and most of these studies have focused on racial climate implications.

The purpose of this study was to explore attitudes toward gays and lesbians expressed by community college students, and to determine the impact that these attitudes had on students' perceptions of the campus climate. A two-phase, sequential mixed-methods case study format was used to investigate the experiences of college students at a Florida community college. Quantitative investigation, applying the Modern Homonegativity Scale, was used to determine the level of homonegativity, also known as attitudes toward gays and lesbians, as expressed by community college students. Qualitative investigation was used to determine how community college students perceived their campus climate and how the level of homonegativity could have impacted campus climate.

The four research questions included:

1. Do differences in attitudes exist toward gays and lesbians between male and female community college students?
2. Do community college students of different racial/ethnic backgrounds have different attitudes toward gays and lesbians?
3. Do community college students of different age groups have different attitudes toward gays and lesbians?
4. What effects do these attitudes toward gays and lesbians have on the overall perception of campus climate on a community college campus, as perceived by the students?

This study indicated that students at a Florida community college had slightly above neutral attitudes toward gay men and lesbian women. The study results also found that the slightly above neutral attitudes were reflected in the students' perceptions of campus climate.

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

American communities expect colleges and universities surrounding them to create an environment rich with diversity, awareness, and acceptance. Leaders at these institutions have tried to create campus climates which reflect the diverse society around them. The term “diversity” has various meanings to different people. To create an inclusive campus climate that accepts diverse backgrounds, college and university administrators, faculty, and staff have needed to become more knowledgeable and supportive of gay and lesbian issues. In turn, they have needed to create an environment where all students feel welcome, and they have needed to become more accepting of different types of students.

Campus climate has been studied for many years and for different reasons. The term “campus climate” was not defined in the same way by all the researchers who used this phrase, although common themes pervaded this research. Different aspects of campus climate were analyzed for various groups, such as disability, sexual orientation, gender, race, or ethnicity, but much of the research on higher education was conducted on racial campus climate (Hurtado, Arellano, Griffin, & Cuellar, 2008). The framework which was used to understand campus racial climate was considered a multidimensional construct. The framework was also said to be shaped by the behaviors, practices and policies of those within and outside the institution (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998). In an analysis of more than 90 campus climate surveys used over the years to study campus climate, four dimensions of climate were found to be a common thread: historical, structural, psychological, and behavioral (Hurtado, et al., 2008). These dimensions are discussed later in Chapter 2.

Campus climate can be assessed in many ways, but it has always pertained to groups that have been consistently marginalized. Although most campus climate surveys were conducted in regard to racial issues, results from a major national study were published in 2010 by Rankin, Weber, Blumenfeld and Frazer. This study specifically focused on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) individuals and campus climate.

Rankin et al. (2010) found that campus climate assessments were carried out for a variety of reasons. Some evaluations were conducted in response to a trend in anti-gay behavior on campus, others were to assess where the institution was in terms of its support of diversity. Hurtado et al. (2008) found that over time, institutions began to assess campus climate to be proactive about issues affecting marginalized groups rather than be reactive concerning these issues.

Little consensus existed on how to study campus climate, although common themes were found among the results. Hart and Fellabaum (2008), in a study of 118 campus climate studies, showed that campus climate was not assessed in the same way. They stated that the studies were usually conducted by someone from within the institution and that the results were not often shared with anyone outside the college or university. Overall, evaluating campus climate has played an important part of the assessment of institutional practices and progress. Evaluation helped to identify areas in need of improvement and the best way to achieve educational goals for a diverse student population (Hurtado et al., 2008).

The literature suggested a variety of ways to ensure a positive campus climate for all students. Most of the research emphasized the importance of positive interaction

with diverse peers, building support networks, availability of courses related to diversity, variety of inclusive policies, and institutional commitment (Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Rankin et al., 2010). Campus climate was shown to have an impact, whether positive or negative, on all students' persistence in college. Research indicated that members from different racial and ethnic backgrounds experienced campus climate in different ways (Rankin & Reason, 2005). White students most often reported a campus climate with little racial tension and respect toward diversity (Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000). White students did not seem to recognize interracial tension. African American students reported the most negative experiences on campus, as compared to Latino, Asian, or White students, especially in regard to unfair treatment by faculty and staff (Ancis et al., 2000).

Rankin (2003) studied the effects of negative attitudes and harassment towards gay and lesbian students on campus, and she found that students who identified as "gay" or "lesbian" were more likely to isolate themselves. These students often experienced higher levels of depression, anxiety, a loss of confidence, and had more sleep problems. Any student who experienced a negative campus climate typically had greater difficulty persisting in college. Longerbean, Inkelas, Johnson, and Lee (2007) also found that gay and lesbian students who experience a hostile campus climate were less likely to "come out" due to feeling uncomfortable and unsafe. The negative effects, which a hostile campus climate could have on gay and lesbian students, had typically impacted their ability or desire to develop or recognize their sexual identity, and therefore affected their performance and enjoyment of college.

A positive campus climate could have the opposite effect on students. Hurtado and Ponjuan (2005) found that when Latino students experienced positive interactions with diverse peers, they developed a higher sense of belonging and greater confidence. When gay and lesbian students experienced a positive college climate, those students were more likely to feel comfortable enough to come out, explore their sexual identity, and develop meaningful relationships. When new students, who identified as “lesbian,” “gay,” “bisexual,” or “transgender,” saw that their college campus had accepted them, that is, with Safe Zone stickers, gay and lesbian support offices, and student organizations, they felt validated. A positive campus climate brought about a feeling of connectedness and increased the confidence of LGBT students. It also helped these students to move through the coming out process more quickly because they did not have a fear of negative attitudes and consequences toward their coming out (Evans & Herriott, 2004).

Exposure to LGBT issues had positive benefits for all students, of any sexual orientation. Evans and Herriott (2004) confirmed this exposure in their study of first-year college students. Their study involved having first-year students of varying sexual orientations explore the campus climate toward gay and lesbian students. Their research indicated that when students of any sexual orientation were exposed to the issues that gay and lesbian students faced, they became more aware of their own identities. They were also potential advocates or allies for these students. Evans and Herriot also suggested that promoting interactions between gay and lesbian student groups and other student organizations improved campus climate for gay students.

D'Augelli and Rose (1990) also showed a direct link between acceptance of homosexual relationships and contact with gay and lesbian individuals.

Studies have indicated the importance for creating a positive campus climate for all students, including LGBT students. Based on this research, administrators need to consider developing opportunities for meaningful interactions between heterosexual and homosexual students, students of different genders, as well as racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore community college students' attitudes toward homosexuality, and the effect that those attitudes had on campus climate, as perceived by the students. By deepening the knowledge about issues that gay and lesbian students faced while attending college and how campus climate was perceived by students, this researcher demonstrated that more actions need to be taken to better serve this population of students. A two-phase, sequential mixed-methods case study format was used to explore college students' attitudes toward homosexuality. Quantitative methods were used to assess levels of homonegativity. Qualitative methods were used to further investigate what these results meant to students, and what these results could possibly indicate about the overall campus climate.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The purpose of this study was to assess the attitudes expressed by students enrolled in a community college in Florida and to determine what effects those attitudes had on the overall campus climate toward gays and lesbians, as perceived by students. This study sought to answer the following four questions:

## Research Questions

**Research Question 1:** Do differences exist in attitudes toward gays and lesbians between male and female community college students?

- **H<sub>0</sub>1:** No significant difference exists in the level of homonegativity between male and female students.
- **H<sub>A</sub>1:** A significant difference exists in the level of homonegativity between male and female students.

Research indicated that male students were typically more negative toward gays and lesbians than female students (D'Augelli & Rose, 1990; Lambert, Ventura, Hall, & Cluse-Tolar, 2006). Quantitative methods were used to determine if male students enrolled in a Florida community college were more homonegative than female students.

**Research Question 2:** Do community college students of different racial/ethnic backgrounds have different attitudes toward gays and lesbians?

- **H<sub>0</sub>2:** No significant difference exists in the level of homonegativity between the different racial/ethnic groups of students.
- **H<sub>A</sub>2:** A significant difference exists in the level of homonegativity between the different racial/ethnic groups of students.

Some research has indicated no differences in attitudes toward gays and lesbians among students of differing racial groups such as Black, White, American Indian, Latino, or Asian (Jayakumar, 2009). The research on this issue was conflicting, with most of it focused on the differences in attitudes of Blacks and Whites toward gays and lesbians. Loftus (2001) found that Black college students were more negative than White students and Schulte (2002) found that both groups were equally homophobic. Finlay and Walther (2003) showed no consensus on the differences between these two groups so more research was warranted. In a more recent study, no differences were found in their attitudes toward gays and lesbians (Jenkins, Lambert, & Baker, 2009).

**Research Question 3:** Do community college students of different age groups have different attitudes toward gays and lesbians?

- **H<sub>0</sub>3:** No significant difference exists in the level of homonegativity between the different age groups of students.
- **H<sub>A</sub>3:** A significant difference exists in the level of homonegativity between the different age groups of students.

The research was also mixed about these differences. Some research indicated that older students were more negative toward gays and lesbians (Wills & Crawford, 2000), and other research found no significant differences between age groups (Cotten-Huston & Watie, 2000; Lambert et al., 2006).

**Research Question 4:** What effects do these attitudes toward gays and lesbians have on the overall perception of campus climate on a community college campus, as perceived by the students?

The qualitative phase of this study explored how students actually perceived the campus around them. This evaluation helped to further understand how homonegativity can impact a community college campus climate.

### **Definition of Terms and Abbreviations**

For the purposes of this study, the following terms and abbreviations are defined:

**Homonegativity:** Contemporary negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians (Morrison & Morrison, 2003, p. 15).

**LGBT or LGBTQ:** Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender; or lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning.

**Campus climate:** Institutional practices supportive of and overall attitude and actual behavior toward, respect for, and inclusion of gay and lesbian individuals.

**Community college:** In Florida, the community college has been structured differently than in most other states. Many community colleges have moved to a four-year model and provided a Bachelor of Arts or a Bachelor of Science degree in critical shortage areas. The community colleges that have already transitioned to offering these degrees have nevertheless maintained their open door, traditional community college mission. They have served a majority of two-year degree-seeking students and have still met the needs of the community's workforce.

### **Significance of the Study**

A majority of campus climate research has concentrated on campus racial climate (Hurtado et al., 2008). Of the studies that focused on LGBT campus climate, most have targeted on universities rather than community colleges. In a major study conducted by Rankin et al. (2010), 5,081 students, faculty, staff, and administrators--from all different classifications of higher education institutions--were surveyed to determine campus climate toward LGBT students. Of those 5,081 students, only 4.9% were from two-year institutions (personal communication, S. Rankin, February 9, 2011). This low percentage speaks to how often community college students were left out of important research regarding LGBT issues.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The main limitation of this study, which was a two-phase, sequential mixed-method case study of a single community college in Florida, was the inability to generalize findings from a single case. However, to provide an in-depth study of campus climate on a community college campus, this limitation was appropriate. Another limitation was the many facets that could be studied in regard to campus climate; this study looked only at attitudes and perceptions.

## **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to assess both quantitatively and qualitatively the attitudes or homonegativity expressed by students enrolled in a community college in Florida, and to determine what effects those attitudes had on the overall campus climate toward gays and lesbians, as perceived by the students. The study utilized a two-phase, sequential mixed-methods case study research design to investigate in-depth the attitudes that community college students expressed toward gays and lesbians. This study also investigated their perceptions of how these attitudes impacted their respective institution's campus climate.

This study contributed to the body of knowledge regarding LGBT student experiences on college and university campuses. Since most of the research conducted to date has been conducted on university campuses, this study added a different perspective and provided insight into the different experiences that community college students could have had.

## CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Definitions of the term “campus climate” have varied greatly because this complex concept has been difficult to study and define. All definitions have tended to revolve around a central theme of student comfort with the college campus environment. Campus climate measures always looked to measure how the climate affected underrepresented student populations. Hurtado et al. (2008) defined campus climate as “part of an intricate web of relations, socially constructed by individuals in an environment” (p. 204). Rankin and Reason (2008) defined campus climate as “current attitudes, behaviors and standards and practices of employees and students of an institution” (p. 264). Peterson and Spencer (1990) compared climate to culture, and they found campus climate to be “more concerned with current perceptions and attitudes rather than deeply held meaning, beliefs, and values” (p. 7). For the purposes of this study, a combination of these multiple definitions was used to define one aspect of campus climate: institutional practices supportive of, and the overall attitude and actual behavior toward, respect for, and inclusion of gay and lesbian individuals.

Research on gay and lesbian students on community college campuses was very sparse compared to research done on university campuses perhaps due to the transitory nature of community college students (Ivory, 2005). Students at community colleges did not typically live on, campus and they were not usually as involved in on-campus activities as university students. Community college students have also been shown to be 1) be more diverse in age and ethnicity, 2) be less prepared academically, 3) come from a lower socioeconomic level, and 4) typically spend less time on campus, as compared to university students (Tinto, 2006). Tinto also found that community

college student learning primarily occurred in the classroom as a result of work and other off campus commitments (Tinto, 2006). Less time spent on campus has narrowed the opportunity to get involved on campus and have meaningful interactions with diverse groups to potentially improve attitudes toward others and enhance the overall campus climate. The research also indicated that less time spent on campus may negatively impact a student's sense of belonging, due to less social and academic integration (Thompson, Orr, Thompson, & Grover, 2007).

Much of the research done on campus climate, which was specific to gays and lesbians, was conducted on university campuses. More research needs to be conducted on community college campuses and the environments that are created on those campuses. Community colleges have a different mission than universities. They usually have an open door policy and, provide access to more nontraditional students. Gleazer (1980) stated, "The mission of the community college is to encourage and facilitate lifelong education with community as process and product" (p.140). With an increasing number of students attending community colleges due to budget constraints at the universities, this population was worth studying.

In studies conducted on community college campuses in California, researchers found that 34% of students admitted to engaging in hateful behavior toward gays or lesbians, and 10% admitted to physically assaulting or threatening to assault gay or lesbian individuals (Franklin, 2000). Similarly, in the study conducted by Rankin et al. (2010) across universities and community colleges, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer/questioning (LGBQ) respondents were reported to be 13% more likely than heterosexual students to fear for their physical safety.

The data regarding gay and lesbian students were more limited than other minority groups, as a result of being able to identify sexual minorities. If, for example, an administrator wanted to know the percentage of Hispanic/Latino students who enrolled in one particular semester, he simply needed to look at that section on the admissions applications (Eyermann & Sanlo, 2002). A question usually does not appear on an admissions application related to sexual orientation, although it is a point that could be considered by higher education leaders.

Another challenge in tracking gay and lesbian students dealt with terminology. Using terms such as “gay,” “lesbian,” “bisexual,” or “transgender” was too explicit for some students (Eyermann & Sanlo, 2002). For example, if a student, who identified as gay, lesbian, or bisexual, also identified as a member of another marginalized group, such as students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds, then that student could not identify with these terms to describe his sexuality. In fact, some studies have found that those terms were seen as constructed by White people (Boykin, 2005; Rankin, 2006). Also, a student who was in a different stage of identity development could not have seen himself or herself as being in one of these categories, and he or she could have seen himself only as “non-heterosexual” because he did not engage in same-sex activity. One way to try to identify these students was to inquire not only if they were gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or straight, but also ask to whom they were attracted (Eyermann & Sanlo, 2002). This difference in terminology made tracking and studying LGBT students more challenging for researchers and college administrators.

### **Intersections of Racial/Ethnic and Sexual Identity Campus Climate**

Many studies on the topic of campus climate were conducted regarding issues of race and ethnicity. In general, researchers consistently found that students of color

experienced more racism, and they perceived a more hostile campus climate than did White students (Rankin & Reason, 2005). Specifically, Black students perceived more discrimination and racial conflict than White, Latino, and Asian students (Suarez-Belcazar, Orellana-Damacela, Rowan, & Andrews-Guillen, 2003). Race, ethnicity, and culture were often not considered within models of homosexuality identity development or when looking at sexual orientation issues in general. Themes in the research of campus climate as a whole indicated that groups that were historically seen as “advantaged,” such as White students and male heterosexual students, often reported a greater sense of belonging on campus and described more positive perceptions of campus climate (Johnson et al., 2007; Rankin & Reason, 2008). This research indicated that a welcoming and positive campus climate was important for all groups that were typically seen as marginalized or underrepresented, and that a welcoming climate should be taken seriously by higher education administrators.

As noted in the research conducted by Hurtado et al. (2008), existing campus climate research has been studied in different ways. Dating back to 1985, more than 90 surveys have been administered to assess campus climate. The goal of the research conducted by Hurtado et al. (2008) was to provide a framework to summarize trends and features of research available to assess the dynamic aspects of diversity on college campuses. Among the 90 instruments which were assessed, 18 were administered on multi-campus settings, 29 were given to a single institution, and 13 were given to specific groups, such as Latino, African American, and LGBT.

When Hurtado et al. (2008) synthesized and analyzed the assessment of campus climate studies from the past; they discovered some commonalities among those

studies. They found four dimensions of campus climate: historical, structural, psychological, and behavioral. Although these four dimensions were a common thread among campus climate studies, it was uncommon for all dimensions to be present in one campus climate study because each dimension was studied in a different manner (Hurtado et al., 2008). Another main finding of their research indicated that regardless of how this research was conducted, it was meaningless if not linked to educational outcome and practice.

The historical legacy of an institution looked at the influence of and the inclusion or exclusion toward underrepresented populations. In the few campus climate studies that looked at aspects of this dimension, qualitative methods were mainly used. The reason this dimension was not typically assessed was because to study it properly a more in-depth and involved research on norms was required, and these norms were often embedded in campus culture, politics, mission, and traditions (Harper & Hurtado, 2007).

Structural diversity involved looking at the number of underrepresented groups that were physically present on campus: race, ethnicity, and culture of faculty, staff, and students. The central question of structural diversity would be to ask if the ethnic and racial makeup of the student population was reflected in the faculty, staff, and administrators the students encountered on a daily basis. It was also important to assess if the ethnic and racial community surrounding the college was reflected in the student population. Essentially, could a student identify with the students, faculty, staff and administrators around them? Although it is an important factor to structural diversity, simply increasing the number of underrepresented groups on campus may not

have a large impact on behavior, perceptions, or intended outcomes for improving the overall campus climate (Hurtado et al., 2008).

The psychological dimension found by Hurtado et al. (2008) was seen as a way to assess a student's perceptions of discrimination on campus. In a study of Latino students' perception of campus climate, Hurtado (1994) found that experiencing racism and the perception of a hostile campus climate were two separate issues to be studied within this psychological aspect of climate. Overall, the two themes that emerged from the analysis of the psychological dimension of campus climate were 1) individuals experienced campus climate differently from one another, and 2) students from all racial and ethnic groups experienced their campuses in different ways. However, students were all negatively impacted by an unfriendly or hostile campus climate, even if experienced in different ways (Hurtado et al., 2008).

Another dimension found in campus climate research was the behavioral dimension. This dimension looked at intergroup relations and was typically assessed by looking at interactions and contact between different groups, specifically, the level of participation in on-campus programs, enrollment in diversity courses, and participation in diversity activities (Hurtado et al., 2008). Examples of campus-facilitated diversity initiatives included: academic support, co-curricular initiatives, Safe Space also known as Safe Zone initiatives, integrative learning, and institutional strategic initiatives (Hurtado et al., 2008). Regarding the ways in which this dimension was assessed, Hurtado et al. (2008) found it important to look at frequency of interaction with diverse peers, as well as the quality of these interactions.

The study of attitudes was another aspect of the psychological dimension of campus climate to explain levels of group conflict and contact experiences on campus. Based on this research by Hurtado et al. (2008), an important way to increase student knowledge about inequality in the United States, increase tolerance for living in a pluralistic society and increase student knowledge about various social groups was to change student attitudes. This posit was also confirmed in a study by Engberg, Hurtado, and Smith (2007) that looked at freshmen's initial attitudes toward their LGBT peers. Engberg et al. (2007) found that these attitudes were strongly impacted by interacting with LGBT peers, thus changing the students' initial attitudes toward LGBT individuals. The research in this case study of campus climate can be seen as a first step toward understanding attitudes and beliefs that have created conflict and resistance on campus (Hurtado et al., 2007).

Many dimensions of campus climate could be researched: external forces to the institution, history of inclusion and exclusion, and structural, behavioral, and psychological dimensions. An important part of the psychological dimension is the study of attitudes, which was relevant to this study. Although these dimensions were found among all types of campus climate studies, the study of any one of them is an important tool for an administrator to begin assessing campus climate.

### **Campus Climate: Sexual Identity**

Rankin et al. (2010) conducted a national campus climate assessment specific to gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender individuals. In this major study, 5,159 students, faculty, staff, and administrators were surveyed in all 50 states and at all levels of institutions, based on the Carnegie Basic Classifications of Institutions of Higher

Education. Of these surveys, 4.9% were two-year colleges (Rankin, personal communication, February 9, 2011).

Despite the lack of studies conducted and information available on two-year institutions and campus climate, some major findings occurred in relation to the students as a result of the study conducted by Rankin et al. (2010). They found that LGBQ students experienced more harassment than straight students. The most common forms of harassment toward LGBT students were derogatory remarks, staring, exclusion or isolation, and being bullied or intimidated. Of all the respondents, 61% reported derogatory remarks and 37% reported being stared at. These occurrences of harassment typically occurred on campus, with 52% reporting that these incidents occurred in the hallway and 42% in the classroom.

Research indicated that creating a positive campus climate allowed for LGBT students to feel comfortable enough to come out, explore their sexual identity, and develop meaningful relationships (Evans & Herriott, 2004). When new LGBT students could see that their college campus was accepting of them with Safe Space stickers, LGBT support offices, and student organizations, they typically felt validated. A positive campus climate also brought about a feeling of connectedness and increased the confidence of LGBT students (Evans & Herriott, 2004). This positive climate also helped gay students to move through the coming out process more quickly because they did not feel the need to delay it or hide their identity due to fear of negative attitudes or harassment.

“Coming out” was often seen as a positive occurrence for LGBT students, but not often recognized as a complex process by other students. Again, the campus climate

played a large role in whether or not a person chose to come out. Research showed the positive and negative sides to coming out, and the campus climate needed to be considered before encouraging homosexual students to come out. Cooper (2008) found that students felt a greater sense of self, experienced increased self-esteem, and became more open and relieved once they came out to family and/or friends. By not coming out, students increased their risk of suicide, depression, and chances of dropping out of college. Rasmussen (2004) found a great sense of empowerment that follows the act of coming out, also seen as a primary way for gay and lesbian students to combat prejudice and increase awareness.

Some of the research also indicated that coming out was viewed as potentially negative for students. Gay and lesbian students typically refrained from coming out if the campus climate was hostile (Longerbeam et al., 2007). A negative campus climate also potentially caused a gay student, who previously came out, to hide his or her identity from those who did not already know about it. For example, a student could have come out in high school, but could have found that the climate in his or her college was negative. He or she would go back to hiding his or her identity. Since coming out was a process that could continue for many years, hiding it inevitably prolonged the entire process.

Patton (2011) found that coming out was viewed as a potential threat to students' future professional aspirations. Students sometimes felt the need to keep quiet until they were able to prove themselves in a profession. Students also felt that it was better to keep quiet about their identity rather than deal with the stereotypes that come along with being "out" (Patton, 2011). Other research by Cooper (2008) indicated various

negative contexts related to coming out. She found that students who came out put themselves at a higher risk of discrimination. These students also put themselves at an increased risk of being rejected by friends, family, and their religion. Events on campus such as National Coming Out Day (NCOD), held every October 11, could also potentially cause those students—uncomfortable-- with coming out- to feel shame. The NCOD event sometimes has caused these students to feel dishonest and powerless (Rasmussen, 2004). These negative feelings reinforced the recommendations in the literature of the importance of creating a welcoming campus climate. If students encountered a welcoming climate with support clearly available, they could potentially feel safer coming out on campus and maybe build up confidence to come out.

Rankin (2003) found that students who experienced negative attitudes and harassment toward themselves and other LGBT students were more likely to isolate themselves. In a campus climate survey, Rankin (2003) also discovered that 60% of gay and lesbian faculty, staff, and students concealed their identity to avoid intimidation. She also found that these students experienced higher levels of depression, felt an increase in anxiety, had a loss of confidence, and had more sleep difficulties. All these negative effects impacted the students' ability or desire to develop or recognize their sexual identity.

Attacks against gay and lesbian students or anti-gay behaviors often were unreported. Not communicating these incidents was a result of fear and of being treated poorly by those to whom the report was made. Maybe it was the first time this student revealed his or her sexuality to anyone, which brought up many other issues. In a study of community college students specifically, Franklin (2000) found that students who

participated in anti-gay harassment did so due to four main reasons. The first reason was to prove their heterosexuality to their friends and feel closer to them. The second reason was boredom and the desire to feel strong. The third reason for anti-gay behavior was a result of negative attitudes toward gays and lesbians, which included disgust, hatred, and religious and moral values. The fourth reason for these behaviors was self-defense from perceived sexual advances or flirtation (Franklin, 2000). Again, Franklin's (2000) study found that men were the primary offenders, and these behaviors could be a result of dominant culture values. Higher education is a way to change these values.

Rankin (2003) revealed in another campus climate survey that 61% of students, faculty, and staff felt that gay men and lesbians were likely to be harassed. This same survey showed that 43% of respondents felt that the overall campus climate was homophobic. The anti-gay behaviors previously mentioned could contribute to negative campus climates. These negative behaviors needed to be addressed by faculty, staff, and administrators to reduce or eliminate the behaviors altogether.

Assessing the campus climate has been viewed by researchers as a complicated task. Feedback from students was based on real experiences with victimization, discrimination or negative perceptions stemming from individual insecurities related to the process of identity development (Tomlinson & Fassinger, 2003). As previously mentioned, many facets of campus climate could be assessed although the majority of evaluations conducted were on racial climate. Of the many campus climate studies conducted, Hurtado et al. (2008) found many common elements among them, whether or not they were conducted on racial or sexual identity issues. In regard to an

assessment of climate for gay and lesbian students, the dimensions used in campus racial climate surveys could also be applied--with careful consideration of differences in needs and barriers--to obtaining the information. In addition to the dimensions found by Hurtado et al. (2008), that is, historical, structural, psychological, and behavioral, external forces impacting an institution and attitudes (as part of the psychological dimension) will be further discussed in this chapter. External forces will be used in relation to campus climate for sexual minorities, as well as related to the institution in this case study.

### **External Forces to Campus Climate**

Government policy and laws were acknowledged in the literature as important influences on institutional diversity (Hurtado et al., 2008). These policies and laws present a challenge for institutions of higher learning because the laws did not specify sexual minorities as a protected class. However, as citizens of the United States, everyone is entitled to a variety of rights, and one important right is the guarantee of equal education opportunity. Several federal and state laws break down equality into nondiscrimination, anti-violence, and safe-school protection. Government has been slow to extend to colleges, the application of laws such as Title V of the Education Amendments Act of 1972, the Equal Access Act of 1984, or the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, to gay and lesbian students. As previously mentioned, these laws were not enacted with protections for sexual orientation, and they did not grant any special privilege. Colleges and universities have interpreted these laws in their own way, with some implementing support services and creating positive, welcoming campus environments for gay and lesbian students. Other colleges and universities have chosen to act as if no problem or need existed for these students.

The only law that explicitly protects gay and lesbian persons is the Local Law Enforcement Hate Crimes Prevention Act, also called the Matthew Shepard Act of 2009. This act has allowed prosecutors to pursue an offender who commits a violent crime or act against a person based on his or her perception of or a person's actual "race, color, religion, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or disability." Twelve states have hate crime laws which specifically have included the wording "sexual orientation and gender identity," while 18 states have hate crime laws, which included only "sexual orientation" (NGLTF, 2009b). Florida was included on the list for having hate crime laws with the wording of "sexual orientation" only. But 20 states have no hate crime laws pertaining to sexual orientation or gender identity, and 5 of those states have no hate crime laws at all (NGLTF, 2009b).

Thirteen states have nondiscrimination laws that have banned discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity and/or expression (NGLTF, 2009a); Florida was not one of these states. An additional eight states had laws banning discrimination based on sexual orientation alone. Florida was not on this list either (NGLTF, 2009a). Not having any anti-discrimination laws in the state has not set an example for college and universities to follow. Leaders at higher education institutions have had to take it upon themselves to make sure they include sexual orientation and gender identity in their policies regardless of what the state does.

A common misconception among many Americans is that the U.S. Constitution bans all discrimination pertaining to race, religion, or ethnicity and does not allow these groups to be faced with discrimination. In fact, the U.S. Supreme Court has found that the government is allowed to discriminate in certain circumstances; however the Court

has limited this discrimination with respect to the class of persons that it is directed toward. For instance, the government applied a more exacting form of strict scrutiny review for statutes that discriminate with traditionally suspect classes of persons (see *Graham v. Richardson*, 403 U.S. 365, 372). With this class, the law allowed for discrimination to occur so long as a compelling government interest existed, and the discrimination was narrowly tailored to meet that need (see *Plyler v. Doe*, 457 U.S. 202, 217).

Other groups of persons not considered a protected class, such as homosexuals, would be considered a non-suspect class (see *Restigouche Inc. v. Jupiter*, 59 F.3d 1208, 1214 (11<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1995)). With this class of people, the government applied what is called a “rational basis” test (see *Restigouche Inc. v. Jupiter*, 59 F.3d 1208, 1214 (11<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1995)). This rational basis test allowed for discrimination to occur so long as a legitimate government purpose existed and a rational basis existed for the legislation to achieve that purpose (see *Restigouche Inc. v. Jupiter*, 59 F.3d 1208, 1214 (11<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1995)). Beginning in the mid 1990’s the court began to establish what laws and regulations violated the rational basis test, with respect to homosexuals. In the case of *Romer v. Evans*, the U.S. Supreme Court stated that an amendment enacted by the Colorado Legislature which prohibited all legislative, executive, or judicial action designed to protect homosexual persons from discrimination, was in violation of the Equal Protection Clause of the U.S. Constitution because the amendment was designed specifically to make homosexuals unequal, and did not advance a specific legislative agenda. (see *Romer v. Evans*, 517 U.S. 620, 635).

In Florida, particularly, the use of discriminatory policies against homosexuals has been clearly seen in the rules and regulations against homosexual couples' adoption of children. While these laws are not specifically related to community colleges, it can be argued that they have had an effect on Floridians because they have shown how the Florida Legislature and its leaders perceive homosexuals. The Third District Court of Appeals, which covers Monroe and Miami-Dade counties, recently overruled a state statute banning homosexuals from adopting altogether (see Fla. Dept. of Children and Families v. In re Matter of Adoption of X.X.G. and N.R.G., 45 So.3d 79, 92 (Fla. 3d DCA, 2010)). The Third District Court of Appeals ruled that the statute served no rational purpose and violated the Equal Protection Clause of the Florida Constitution (see Fla. Dept. of Children and Families v. In re: Matter of Adoption of X.X.G. and N.R.G., 45 So.3d 79, 89-92 (Fla. 3d DCA, 2010)). Part of this ruling was based on the fact that the state allowed for homosexuals to be foster parents, but excluded them from being parents solely because of their homosexuality (see Fla. Dept. of Children and Families v. In re: Matter of Adoption of X.X.G. and N.R.G., 45 So.3d 79, 86-92 (Fla. 3d DCA, 2010)). This same exclusion applied even though the parents were deemed "fit," and, conversely, did not apply to those applicants with criminal histories or histories of substance abuse, as they would be considered on a case by case basis (see Fla. Dept. of Children and Families v. In re: Matter of Adoption of X.X.G. and N.R.G., 45 So.3d 79, 92 (Fla. 3d DCA, 2010)) at 83. This ruling was in line with the trend, especially in South Florida, of residents becoming more accepting of homosexuality and supporting objective evidence of homosexuals being capable as

parents. The decision to allow homosexuals to adopt should not be outweighed by any subjective belief that they could be bad parents because of their sexuality.

In 2004, a Federal Circuit Court ruled that this same adoption policy did not violate the equal protection rights of two gay men in South Florida who wanted to adopt three children who had been in their care for many years; nobody else wanted to adopt these children because of health concerns caused by their biological parents (see *Lofton v. Secretary of the Department of Children and Family Services*, 377 F.3d 1275).

A number of cases have supported gay student organizations and their rights to be protected under the law. As early as the 1970's, a student organization was successful in challenging its school's discrimination policies. This school refused to grant recognition to this group as an official organization; the school's policy violated this group's rights, as given in the First and Fourteenth amendments (see *Gay Alliance of Students v. Blanton*, 544 F.2d 162, 163, 167). Another case decided in the U.S. Supreme Court focused on a student religious organization that wanted to ignore a law school's policy of nondiscrimination, claiming that the school violated the organization's First and Fourteenth amendment rights (see *Christian Legal Society v. Martinez*, 130 S.Ct. 2971, 2973-2974). This case dealt mainly with viewpoint discrimination and whether or not a school, which is providing recognition and funding to an organization, could prevent an organization from discriminating against another group even if that discrimination is consistent with the deeply held beliefs and ideals of that organization (see *Christian Legal Society v. Martinez*, 130 S.Ct. 2971, 2973-74). In this case the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the school was allowed to discriminate so long as the discrimination was not directed toward one particular view point. In this case because

the school required all school sponsored organizations to include all groups, this did not amount to discrimination of the Christian organization's view point. (see *Christian Legal Society v. Martinez*, 130 S.Ct. 2971, 2973-2974) at 2995. In this instance, the school's policy was for each group to allow access to all persons and not discriminate against any group, including those person(s) with a different sexual orientation. Just as the Christian group would be required to allow homosexuals, any group supporting homosexuality could not deny entrance to a Christian person who opposed that belief. This case was settled in 2010 and was not decided on equal protection rights, but rather the ability of the school to implement a non-discrimination policy that was neutral to all parties and was not limited one particular viewpoint.

As is the case with most states, the laws, which are established on a national and state level, typically carry over into the communities as a matter of consistency and in keeping with trends. The community college in this study had a policy of equal opportunity and nondiscrimination toward all students. This policy was based in large part on Florida statutes and the Broward County Human Rights Act (see Broward County Code and Ordinance Chapter 16½). The County Ordinance, Chapter 16 ½, states, that the definition of a discriminatory classification includes race, religion, sexual orientation, and gender identity among other classifications (see County Ordinance, Chapter 16 ½, section 16-2(a)2). While the ordinance does not state when it was enacted, the purpose of this chapter is to provide execution of the policies furthered in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and other state anti-discrimination laws (see County Ordinance, Chapter 16 ½, section 16-2(a) 1).

On January 15, 1993, the Attorney General of Florida issued an advisory opinion stating that the county could enact ordinances that extended a recently passed legislative act of nondiscrimination, prohibiting discrimination on the basis of race, religion, and so forth (My Florida Legal, 2011). The advisory opinion stated essentially that the county could not amend the special act of the Florida Legislature itself. However, the county could in essence enact an ordinance that included other groups, based on sexual identity, protected in the county. This county ordinance was good so long as its terms were consistent with the special act of the Florida Legislature (My Florida Legal, 2011). This shows that as early as 1993, the county was moving toward acceptance of sexual identity in seeking to protect them under newly passed non-discrimination laws.

The laws governing a community, which surrounds an institution of higher learning, have been shown to have an impact on that institution. As more laws have been passed providing rights to the LGBT population, the hope was that the community would become more accepting. Despite the impact that laws could have had on an institution, much could have been done to improve the experiences that all students had on campus.

### **Structural Dimension of Campus Climate**

Structural diversity is another dimension of the campus racial climate found in an analysis of multiple campus racial climate assessments in the study conducted by Hurtado et al. (2008). These evaluations were considered one way to study campus climate. Structural diversity was simply the physical presence of populations that were typically underrepresented (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1999).

Structural diversity must be present if students are going to change their perceptions of

campus climate in addition to changing their behavior toward minority populations in general (Hurtado et al., 2008). Although structural diversity was an important dimension of campus climate assessment and change, it was not the only dimension and should not have been considered as the only way to improve campus climate.

Structural diversity could be assessed in two ways: 1) by actual numbers, for example, how many students from underrepresented populations are enrolled; and 2) by looking at salaries for underrepresented faculty, staff, and administrators to make sure those salaries were equal across the board. Bensimon (2004) developed equity scorecards which worked well to assess part of structural diversity by analyzing: 1) access to programs and resources; 2) rates of retention in academic programs and degree completion; 3) institutional receptivity, which meant representation of minorities at all levels of the institution and excellence; and 4) representation of minority students in competitive majors, which often led to graduate studies.

Colleges and universities could have changed their structural diversity by initiating policies and programs to attract a more diverse student body. This implementation could also have been done as a way to attract more sexual minorities. The LGBT-friendly policies at an institution of higher education, such as same-sex domestic partner benefits and anti-discrimination policies specific to LGBT persons signaled to prospective employees and faculty that the institution values diversity (Cook & Glass, 2008). This recognition might have attracted more LGBT and ethnic/racial minority faculty and employees and in turn create an environment in which students saw themselves reflected. As previously mentioned, it was often difficult for colleges and universities to measure the number of gay and lesbian students on campus. It therefore

was equally as challenging to ensure that more sexual minority faculty and staff be hired and be visible enough to make students feel more comfortable.

At the community college where this case study was conducted, an adequate level of structural diversity was in place. The nondiscrimination and harassment policies included the wording “discrimination based on sexual orientation.” Domestic partner benefits were also offered, such as health insurance. The domestic partner benefits have been in place since 2001, and “sexual orientation” has been listed in the college catalog’s Equity Statement since 2004.

### **Psychological Dimension of Campus Climate**

As previously mentioned, the psychological dimension of campus climate was the most often studied dimension of campus climate, and studies were typically conducted using qualitative methods. This dimension specifically looked at a student’s encounters with and perceptions of discrimination on campus (Hurtado et al., 2008). In a study of Latino students’ perception of campus climate, this researcher found that experiencing racism and the perception of a hostile campus climate were two separate issues, but both issues could be studied in the psychological dimension of campus climate (Hurtado et al., 2008). Students from all racial and ethnic groups experienced their campus in different ways, and students were all negatively impacted by a negative campus climate, even if impacted in different ways.

Researchers have consistently found that students of different racial/ethnic backgrounds experienced more racism and perceived a more hostile campus, harassment, and discrimination than did White students (Rankin & Reason, 2008). Rasmussen (2004) discovered that consideration of race and racism in relation to coming out was also essential. In Rasmussen’s interview of a female African American

college student, she noticed that it was easier for this student to be accepted into the Black community if she chose not to come out. To this particular student, having the support of her community was more important than the need to come out. Another important point the student brought up was that by not coming out, she would not have to face additional discrimination based on sexuality, whereas she cannot control the discrimination she endures because of her race. Patton (2011) discerned that even Black students at a historically Black college felt it was better to keep their sexuality to themselves so that they could establish and prove themselves in their profession, then once their sexual orientation was found out, it would not matter. Patton (2011) also found that as a result of not coming out, students would avoid stereotyping, that is they were expected to be flamboyant, loud, and wild.

Stevens (2004) learned that gay men of color, who experienced racist attitudes, struggled with identity development and also experienced homophobia in racial communities, as well as racial prejudice within the gay community. Also, Stevens (2004) often found that students of color did not recognize their own prejudices and stereotypes and how these were influenced by their family (Getz & Kirkley, 2006). This lack of self-awareness was a result of being constant targets of discrimination. However, with regard to sexual minority students, when comparing gay students of color to gay White students, both groups reported that the primary reason they experienced harassment was based on their sexual identity, not their race (Rankin et al., 20010).

### **Assessment of Attitudes Toward LGBT Students**

Student attitudes were another dimension to assess when studying campus climate. The study of student attitudes on a variety of topics has been thoroughly researched (Engberg et al., 2007). Studies of college student attitudes, specifically

toward gays and lesbians, have often been focused on the impact that religion, age, gender, and education had on their attitudes (Brown, Clarke, Gortmaker & Robinson-Keilig, 2004; Hart & Fellabaum, 2008; Jenkins, Lambert, & Baker, 2009).

As previously mentioned, Hurtado et al. (2008) posited that the study of attitudes was part of the psychological dimension of campus climate studies. College student attitudes could have been used to explain the different levels of group conflicts and experiences related to direct interactions on campus. Based on this research by Hurtado et al. (2008), changing student attitudes was an important way to increase student knowledge about inequality, increase tolerance for living in a multicultural society, and increase student knowledge about various social groups.

This assessment of student attitudes was also reflected in the study conducted by Engberg et al. (2007). This study looked at students as they entered college and assessed their initial attitudes toward LGBT persons. Engberg et al. found students' attitudes were strongly impacted by their interactions with LGBT peers, and their attitudes improved as a result of these interactions. Lambert et al. (2006) also discovered that interactions with LGBT peers improved attitudes. In their study of upper and lower division students, they found that upper division students, in general, had more positive views toward LGBT students than lower division students. They also observed that upper division students were more likely to support gay rights, such as marriage and adoption. These two studies showed that the length of time in college will most likely have a positive impact on a student's attitudes. These two studies also indicated that increasing interactions with diverse peers, as well as facilitating on-campus learning opportunities, could improve overall attitudes of college students,

specifically upper division students. These findings may also have indicated that community college students were going to be more negative toward LGBT students because they spent less time in college. They were considered lower division students, thus possibly creating a more hostile campus climate.

Newman (2007) conducted a study of college student attitudes toward lesbians specifically, and found that personal acquaintances, more than just a classroom interaction with LGBT individuals, also decreased the level of negativity expressed by students. Newman's (2007) study indicated that fostering interactions between diverse peers, specifically LGBT peers, could help to increase positive attitudes and potentially improve overall campus climate for everyone. Also, understanding attitudes of heterosexual students specifically could be another way to understand campus climate and potentially improve it by these interactions with LGBT peers (Liang & Alimo, 2005).

Overall, many dimensions were studied concerning campus climate. All the dimensions were important to assess and understand before making the decision to implement change at a community college or a university. Each dimension was interconnected, and all impacted each other and in turn impacted campus climate.

### **Behavioral Dimension of Campus Climate**

The behavioral dimension across campus climate studies looked at intergroup relations. This dimension was assessed by looking at interactions and contact between different groups, involvement in on-campus programs, enrollment in diversity courses, and participation in diversity activities (Hurtado et al., 2008). Themes found in the literature assessing campus behavioral climate included: academic support, co-curricular initiatives, community outreach, "Safe Space" initiatives, integrative learning, and institutional strategic initiatives (Hurtado et al., 2008). Also, in a study by Hurtado

(2003), 10 institutions produced data pertaining to these initiatives, stating that they have campus programs, courses, and events that promote diversity. Common themes within those 10 institutions were similar to those already mentioned: institutional strategic initiatives, academic support initiatives, community outreach, curricular and co-curricular initiatives, Safe Spaces and integrative learning initiatives.

Academic support referred to programs, such as mentoring, advising, and tutoring. Co-curricular initiatives included workshops, retreats, and students clubs. Community outreach included connecting members of the college to the community around them with volunteering opportunities and internships to serve underserved populations. Safe Space initiatives were important to provide a level of comfort for underrepresented populations on campus with support and also learning and resource centers dedicated to them. Integrative learning included intrapersonal and interpersonal development of students with activities such as service-learning, high school to college initiatives, or study abroad. Finally, institutional strategic initiatives were created from top administrators for campus-wide changes to policy, curriculum, and employee training (Hurtado et al., 2008)

Academic support included services such as mentoring, advising and tutoring. The college in this case study had a small mentoring program for new students or for any other student who wanted a mentor. The college also had academic advising available to everyone. One-on-one tutoring was cut back due to budget constraints, but group tutoring was still available. Advising was only for academic and career-related reasons. Any issue related to more personal issues was referred off campus to a local mental health company.

Co-curricular initiatives included workshops, retreats, and student clubs (Hurtado et al., 2008). The college in this case study had an active student life department with a variety of student clubs related to minority students. This college also permitted students to start clubs based on their interests. Only one campus of the college had an active Gay Straight Alliance (GSA), which put on periodic events, such as guest speakers or panels of community members, related to sexual orientation. The other campuses did not have active clubs, and they rarely had any events related to gay and lesbian issues on their campus.

Safe Space initiatives were usually created on university campuses, and universities were usually a model for best practices when creating a Safe Space. The goal of Safe Space initiatives was always to provide a level of comfort for underserved populations with support and learning centers (Hurtado et al., 2008). Most Safe Spaces or Safe Zones were created so that faculty, staff, and administrators could participate in training on issues faced by minority or sexual minority populations and then designate their office or work space as a “Safe Space” or “Safe Zone.” Even if these Safe Spaces did not work out, as intended, merely having a presence on campus showed students that they were welcome on campus (Sanlo, Rankin, & Schoenberg, 2002). Not only was this type of program important to implement, but Sanlo et al. (2002) also found that professional development related to gay and lesbian issues, a comprehensive curriculum, and inclusive language in policy and practice were also essential.

The institution presented in this study had a slightly active Safe Zone. However, the Safe Zone was created only because faculty and staff had the desire to form it and put the time and effort into this program. The Safe Zone was generated to show gay

and lesbian students that people on campus were showing support. An office or work space, designated as a “Safe Zone,” was considered a designated space where a gay or lesbian student could feel comfortable being out and open about their sexual identity. To be able to designate an office or space as a “Safe Zone,” the faculty, staff, or administrator had to voluntarily elect to go through Safe Zone training. These types of trainings sessions were each different, depending on who presented them, but they all provided information on gay and lesbian issues and presented strategies and resources. The goal of each session was that whoever went through training could assist LGBT students. Anyone could go through Safe Zone training, but that person was not expected to be a counselor or help students with personal problems. The level of support by the college’s administration for the Safe Zone program was considered “minimal and superficial” by the Safe Zone committee members. The level of support was deemed superficial by the Safe Zone committee due to the fact that the program had no financial support, or had no college-wide committee dedicated to the further development and continuation of the Safe Zone. The literature indicated that what happened at this college was a common occurrence among other institutions of higher learning. The push for change at an institution typically came from gay and lesbian faculty, staff, or students, and straight allies. As supportive faculty, staff, or students left the institution, the efforts and programming created by them usually died off (Messinger, 2009).

Integrative learning was defined as intrapersonal and interpersonal development of students, such as service learning, high school to college initiatives, or study abroad (Hurtado et al., 2008). In relation to minority groups other than sexual minorities, the

institution in this study did well with offering study abroad opportunities, as well as service learning opportunities. Intergroup dialogue was also implemented for faculty, staff, and administrators to interact with each other. Students were also allowed to attend, but intergroup dialogue was more directed and marketed toward faculty, staff, and administrators.

Finally, institutional strategic initiatives included campus-wide change related to policy, curriculum, and employee training (Hurtado et al., 2008). The institution in this study had anti-discrimination policies in place related to sexual orientation, and also offered domestic partner benefits. The school offered beginning diversity courses in the curriculum, but as a community college, students did not expect a large selection of diversity courses due to lower division curriculum requirements. In relation to employee training, the Safe Zone committee was often asked to present at college-wide days dedicated to diversity celebrations. But the members of the Safe Zone committee consisted of only a small group of people who volunteered their time and efforts. It would be interesting to see what would happen to these initiatives if the Safe Zone committee members left the institution or decided not to continue their efforts.

In regard to the policies related to equality and domestic partner benefits, the college in this study had “sexual orientation” in the equal opportunity statement in its college catalog, and domestic partner benefits were available beginning around 2001. However, the inclusion of “sexual orientation” in the equity statement did not appear in the college catalog until 2004. Interestingly, this wording showed up in the *Student Handbook* under the “Rights and Responsibilities” as early as 2001. In student handbooks dated 2009-2010 and 2010-2011, a change in wording was included. The

words “sexual orientation” were not present; instead, reference to a policy was made about discrimination and equal opportunity, rather than the policy wording itself. If the college were to include the wording “sexual orientation,” as was previously included in the catalog and *Student Handbook*, would have sent a more positive message than to just refer to a policy number, which many students did not likely look up.

As outlined in this chapter, many dimensions were found in the research which makes up campus climate: 1) external forces; 2) history of inclusion/exclusion; 3) structural dimension; 4) psychological dimension, including attitudes; and 5) behavioral dimension (see, Figure 2-1). Each of these dimensions was important for an institution of higher learning to assess to create a campus climate welcoming for all students.

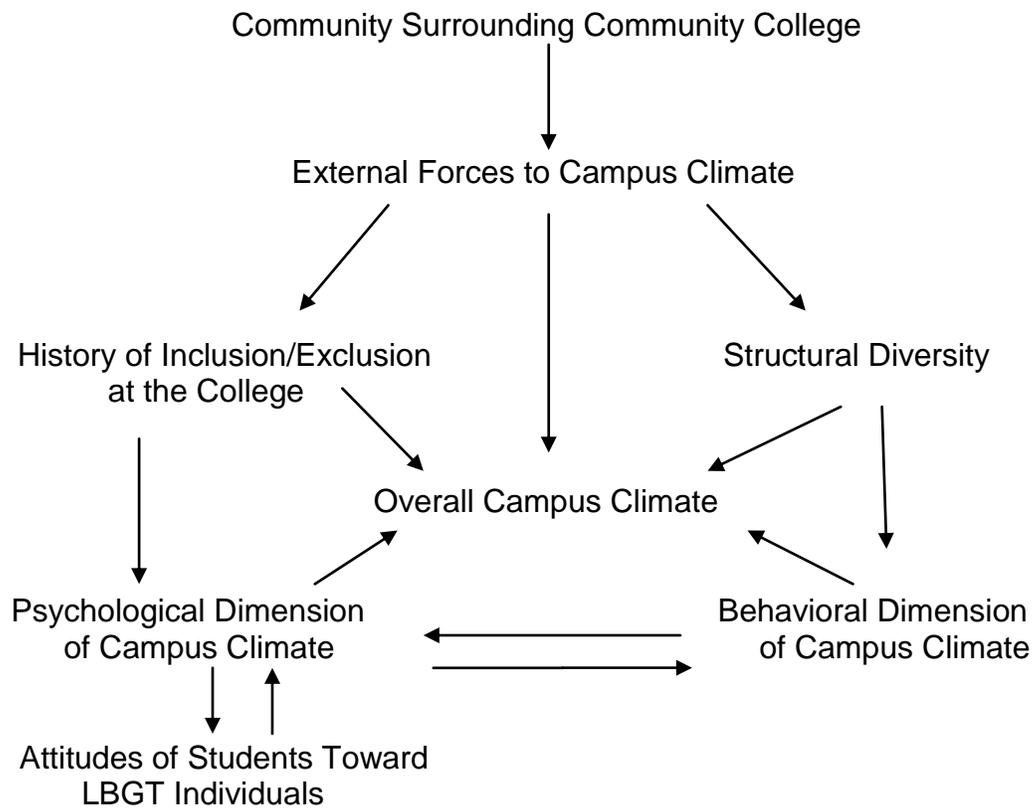


Figure 2-1. Conceptual framework. (Source: Hurtado et al., 1999)

## CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore the level of homonegativity expressed by students enrolled in a community college in Florida and to determine what effects attitudes had on the overall campus climate toward gays and lesbians, as perceived by students. A two-phase, sequential mixed-method study was used to explore the attitudes of students toward gays and lesbians and how those attitudes impacted the overall campus climate. Phase 1 was a quantitative study to evaluate the level of homonegativity expressed by community college students (Creswell, 2009). Phase 2 of the study utilized qualitative interviews to explore how the themes mentioned by the students explained why the students demonstrated those attitudes toward gays and lesbians. These qualitative results “assist in explaining and interpreting the findings of a primarily quantitative study” (Creswell, 2003, p. 215). This study sought to answer the following research questions:

- **Research Question 1:** Do differences exist in attitudes toward gays and lesbians between male and female community college students?
- **Research Question 2:** Do community college students of different racial/ethnic backgrounds have different attitudes toward gays and lesbians?
- **Research Question 3:** Do community college students of different age groups have different attitudes toward gays and lesbians?
- **Research Question 4:** What effects do these attitudes toward gays and lesbians have on the overall perception of campus climate on a community college campus, as perceived by the students?

### Research Hypotheses

- **H<sub>0</sub>1:** No significant difference exists in the level of homonegativity between male and female students.
- **H<sub>A</sub>1:** A significant difference exists in the level of homonegativity between male and female students.

- **H<sub>0</sub>2:** No significant difference exists in the level of homonegativity between the different racial/ethnic groups of students.
- **H<sub>A</sub>2:** A significant difference exists in the level of homonegativity between the different racial/ethnic groups of students.
- **H<sub>0</sub>3:** No significant difference exists in the level of homonegativity between the different age groups of students.
- **H<sub>A</sub>3:** A significant difference exists in the level of homonegativity between the different age groups of students.

### **Description of the Modern Homonegativity Scale**

The Modern Homonegativity Scale (MHS) was developed by Morrison and Morrison (2003) to measure modern forms of attitudes toward gay men and lesbian women. The MHS is a 13-item scale designed to examine modern forms of homonegativity. In studies on college students conducted by Morrison and Morrison (2003), conflicting conclusions were found when studying students' attitudes toward gays and lesbians. For example, using older scales, such as the Attitudes Toward Gay (ATG) Men Scale or the Attitudes Toward Lesbians (ATL) Scale, it appeared that college students were portraying neutral or positive attitudes, whereas other indicators were showing that the students were actually negative. On these same campuses, homophobic remarks, graffiti, or attacks on gay and lesbian students were present. Morrison and Morrison (2003) concluded that older scales, such as the ATG or ATL, were outdated. The old-fashioned wording of the Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gay (ATLG) Men Scale was seen as inappropriate to use by college and university students. Some statements used within these scales were simply old fashioned, for example, "Lesbians are sick." As a result, Morrison and Morrison (2003) developed the Modern Homonegativity Scale and found that the MHS had adequate reliability.

Morrison and Morrison (2003) and Morrison, Kenny, and Harrington (2005) conducted multiple studies to demonstrate reliability and validity for the MHS. In the first study using this instrument, a preliminary scale was developed that contained 50 items. These 50 items were constructed by asking students to come up with questions or statements that would reflect prejudicial attitudes that more liberal individuals may hold against gay men and lesbians. The goal was to create more modern forms of prejudice in the instrument, more modern than the first Homonegativity Scale, and also to produce a shorter instrument. The content validity was assessed at this point by a member of a local gay and lesbian organization. Next, in this preliminary study, construct validity was measured by correlating measures of prejudice with political conservatism. The researchers hypothesized that political conservatism, measures of religious behavior, and perceptions of religious behavior were perceived would all positively correlate with scores on the MHS. To assess political conservatism and religious behavior, participants were asked to indicate their political orientation and to state whether or not they attended religious services. The construct validity, which the researchers had previously hypothesized, was proven because the scores correlated positively for both areas (Morrison & Morrison, 2003).

In the second study conducted to further develop this instrument, a 13-item version of the MHS was created. The researchers wanted to broaden the instrument's construct validity. For this second study, the researchers hypothesized: 1) Modern homonegativity and modern sexism had a stronger correlation than modern homonegativity old-fashioned sexism; and 2) Modern homonegativity and modern sexism had a stronger correlation than old-fashioned homonegativity and modern

sexism. To demonstrate these two hypotheses, the Attitudes Toward Women Scale (ATWS), Homonegativity Scale (HS), Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (MC-SDS), Neosexism Scale (NS), and the MHS versions MHS-G (pertaining to gay men) and MHS-L (pertaining to lesbian women) were given to 308 participants. The MHS-G was given to male participants, and the MHS-L was given to female participants. The reason for the two different MHS forms was to test the theory that people have more negative attitudes toward homosexuals of the same sex. Factor analysis and inter-correlations were conducted on the results. Results showed that modern homonegativity strongly correlated to modern sexism, and a stronger correlation existed between modern homonegativity and modern sexism than between modern homonegativity and old-fashioned sexism. Finally, a stronger correlation existed between modern homonegativity and modern sexism than between old-fashioned homonegativity and modern sexism. The researchers contended that these results demonstrated that both versions of the MHS contained high levels of reliability.

The third study addressed the limitations of the second study, that is, that the second study did not determine if a correlation existed between more negative attitudes toward the same sex. The Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gay (ATLG) Men Scale, which is considered an old-fashioned measure of homonegativity, was given along with the MHS-L and MHS-G. Also, due to a factor analysis on each of the previous items, two “modern” items were found to measure the same idea, or had “comparable loadings.” The researchers therefore reduced the MHS to 12-items (Morrison & Morrison, 2002, p. 28). They discovered that the MHS had adequate reliability and that participants seem to respond with greater modern homonegativity than old-fashioned

homonegativity. The 12-item MHS was used to assess attitudes of students toward gay men and lesbian women in this study.

The fourth and final study to test the reliability and validity of the MHS was meant to study behavioral expression of modern homonegativity. The experiment involved observing participants to see if they would avoid sitting next to someone with a pro-gay t-shirt on and then comparing that with their scores on the MHS. The study showed that participants who scored high on the MHS had a greater tendency to avoid sitting next to students wearing pro-gay t-shirts.

These four studies, conducted by the researchers to validate and demonstrate the reliability of the Modern Homonegativity Scale, proved that the MHS is “unidimensional, possesses high levels of reliability, and is factorially distinct from a measure of old-fashioned homonegativity” (Morrison & Morrison, 2002, p. 33). As a result, the MHS was chosen as the best way to measure modern forms of prejudice against homosexuals at a community college in Florida.

### **Methods**

The MHS was distributed via email to more than 805 community college students at one institution in Florida. This institution was categorized in 2010 by Carnegie Classifications as a very large, exclusively undergraduate two-year, public, urban-serving multi-campus institution, with a large population of part-time students. It is important to note that Florida community colleges have been moving toward a four-year college model to better serve their communities by offering four-year degrees in critical workforce need.

Many states, including Florida, cited that they had a need for a better educated workforce, and therefore supported the push for community colleges to transition to

four-year colleges (Townsend, Bragg, & Ruud, 2009). Florida Statute 1001.60, which was part of SB 1716 (2008), directed that the 28 community colleges and now the four-year colleges would continue their original missions of open door admissions for their two-year degrees, continue to provide workforce education, and continue to offer remedial education. In addition to their original missions, the community colleges would now offer baccalaureate degrees based on the workforce needs of the state and, in particular, of the surrounding community. Therefore, the institution in this study, was considered a four-year college by Carnegie, but, for purposes of this study, was nonetheless viewed as a community college because the institutional mission still had an open door, community college philosophy. This philosophy catered to 1) students who might not typically attend a university, 2) students who are changing careers, 3) nontraditionally aged students, and 4) students from the workforce needing retraining.

Once the MHS survey results were collected, the data were cleaned to remove any incomplete surveys. The SPSS statistical analysis package, version 17, was used to analyze the data. Of the 128 surveys returned, only 122 could be used.

Professors from different subject areas were asked to send out the survey to their classes. Students from a variety of courses, including psychology, advanced psychology, sociology, macro and micro economics, human sexuality, and freshman seminars, were asked to participate. Students in two student clubs, GSA and Hispanic Unity, were also sent the survey link and asked to participate. The survey was sent to multiple sections in each course type, and each course had between 30 and 35 students enrolled for the semester. Each student club had 40 to 50 active members.

Results from the survey were anonymous and recorded through an encrypted website; students were informed of this. They were notified that if they proceeded past the first page of the web-based survey, they had expressed their consent to continue. Students were asked to indicate their age, sex, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, and marital status. They were also asked to indicate the number of credits they were currently taking and what type of degree they were seeking: Associate of Arts, Associate of Science, Associate of Applied Science or Certificate.

Once the survey data were collected, follow-up emails were sent to the same lists of students who completed the original web-based survey. Students were asked to participate in a qualitative study as a follow-up on the survey they had previously completed. Of those students who were asked to participate, 25 students expressed interest in setting up an appointment, and 16 students actually made an appointment. Of the 16 students who made an appointment, only 14 showed up and completed an interview.

Among the 14 students, 9 identified as gay, lesbian, or bisexual, and 5 identified as heterosexual. Of those students, 9 were enrolled full-time, taking 12 or more credits and 5 were part-time students, taking less than 12 credits. Six students identified their race/ethnicity as White, 2 identified as Black, 3 identified as multi-cultural, and 3 identified as Hispanic or Latino. Of those students interviewed, 2 students had not earned any credits yet (it was their first semester), 1 student had earned between 13 and 24 credits, 5 students had earned between 25 and 36 credits, 3 students had between 49 and 60 credits, and 3 students had just over 60 credits. Finally, of the students interviewed in person, 12 were seeking an Associate of Arts degree and 2

were seeking an Associate of Science degree. It was important to look at the demographics in the community surrounding the college in this study in comparison to the students who participated in interviews. The last reported data on demographics was from 2009 and indicated that the county population consisted of 68.6% White persons, 25.9% Black persons, 0.5% American Indian persons, 1.5% persons reporting two or more races, and 24.6% Hispanic or Latino persons (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009).

Each student was asked eight open-ended questions to assess their perceptions of the overall campus climate for gay and lesbian students at this Florida community college which they attended. Some of the results from the MHS were also shared with the students to get their reactions to the overall attitudes of the general student population toward gays and lesbians. All of the interviews conducted with students were recorded, transcribed, and coded to determine what themes were common among them. The themes mentioned by the students were used to help understand how this community college's student population demonstrated a slightly above neutral attitude toward the LGBT population.

### **Limitations**

As previously mentioned, one of the major limitations of this study was that it was conducted at one community college in Florida. This limited the generalizability of the findings. Another limitation was that only one dimension of campus climate, student attitudes, was studied. More aspects of the campus climate could be examined for further research. Also, the students who participated in the study could have created a self-selection bias because they volunteered to answer the survey and be interviewed in person. More students volunteered, who identified as gay, lesbian, or bisexual, to be

interviewed in person, than students who identified as heterosexual, which also created a limitation in the ability to obtain a fuller perspective.

## CHAPTER 4 RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to assess the level of homonegativity expressed by community college students at one community college in Florida and to determine the impact of homonegativity on campus climate as perceived by the students. This researcher hypothesized that a difference in levels of homonegativity would exist among male and female students. This researcher also hypothesized that different levels of homonegativity would exist among racial/ethnic groups and different age groups. To test the hypotheses, quantitative and qualitative methods were used. Of the 805 surveys sent out, only 128 were returned and only 122 were fully completed. The incomplete surveys were removed.

Quantitative analysis was used to determine the attitudes of students at the community college. Descriptive statistics were used to determine the overall level of homonegativity among students. The Modern Homonegativity Scale (MHS) has 12-items with responses, set up on a Likert-type Scale. These responses were placed in the following format: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree (neutral), 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree. After three of the items were reversed scored, the scores were summed. The scale midpoint was 36, so any score above 36 meant respondents were more homonegative, demonstrating negative attitudes, with a score of 60 being the most negative. Scores on the MHS less than 36 were considered more positive, indicating more positive attitudes, again with 12 being the lowest point of the scale.

Alpha for this study was found to be 0.9 (see Table 4-1). The entire sample (N=122) was tested for an average score of homonegativity. The scores ranged from 12

to 53, with a mean score of 31.63 (SD = 9.883) (see Table 4-2). This score indicated that students had slightly above neutral homonegativity. Students who identified as heterosexual or primarily heterosexual were separated from those who identified as homosexual or primarily homosexual. The mean for heterosexual students only (N = 102) was 33.37 (SD = 9.073). Again, this score is only slightly above neutral. To determine if a significant difference existed between these two groups, an independent sample t-test was conducted to evaluate if a difference existed in attitudes between homosexual and heterosexual student attitudes. The test was significant,  $t(20.95) = 4.97$ ,  $p < .001$  (see Tables 4-3 and 4-4). Heterosexual students (M = 2.79, SD = 0.74) on average had a higher homonegativity score than homosexual students (M = 1.78, SD = 0.78). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means ranged from 0.58 to 1.42 (see Figure 4-1).

**Research Question 1: Do differences exist in attitudes toward gays and lesbians between male and female community college students?** An independent sample t-test was conducted to compare the homonegativity scores of males and females. A significant difference existed in scores for males (M = 34.93, SD = 10.02) and females (M = 30.60, SD = 9.66), (see Table 4-5);  $t(120) = 2.088$ ,  $p = .04$ , (see Table 4-6). The magnitude of the differences in means was large (eta squared = .035). This score indicated that males were more negative than females.

**Research Question 2: Do community college students of different racial/ethnic backgrounds have different attitudes toward gays and lesbians?** A one-way ANOVA was used to determine if race and/or ethnicity was a factor in levels of homonegativity. These findings failed to reject the null hypothesis, indicating no

significant difference was found between the different race/ethnicity categories of students,  $f(4, 107) = .824$ ,  $p > .05$ , (see Table 4-7). Race and/or ethnicity did not make a difference in whether a person was more negative or positive toward gays and lesbians.

**Research Question 3: Do community college students of different age groups have different attitudes toward gays and lesbian?** A one-way ANOVA was used to determine if age was a factor in homonegativity,  $f(3,121) = 7.761$ ,  $p < .05$ , (see Table 4-8 and Table 4-9). The null hypothesis was rejected. A significant difference existed in homonegativity among students of different age groups. The significance was between the age groups of 17 to 22 year olds and 29 to 34 year olds according to Scheffe's test (see Table 4-10). It is important to note that a harmonic mean sample was used to determine these differences. Age was to be a factor in levels of homonegativity, with younger students demonstrating more positive attitudes.

**Research Question 4: What effects do these attitudes toward gays and lesbians have on the overall perception of campus climate on a community college campus, as perceived by the students?** In the qualitative phase of the study, students from the original sample were asked to participate in a short interview related to their perceptions of campus climate. Of the 805 students who were sent a follow-up email, 25 expressed an interest in participating, 16 set up an interview appointment and 14 showed up for an interview. The interview consisted of 13 questions: 5 questions used to determine key demographic information, and 8 open-ended questions pertaining to results from the MHS, which allowed the students to provide their opinions on the campus climate concerning LGBT students.

Students were asked about their perception of the college's campus climate and were read the definition of campus climate: overall attitude and actual behavior toward, respect for and inclusion of gay and lesbian individuals. They were also asked about their opinion of how supportive the college climate was toward LGBT students. Three students were unaware of the college climate, 4 students thought the climate was "fine" or "neutral," 1 felt it was negative, 3 sensed it was positive because of the GSA, and 3 said it was positive because they had not observed any negativity.

Of the students surveyed, 3 did not know what the overall attitude was. One male student, who identified as heterosexual, stated, "Honestly I don't stick around the college enough to observe things of this nature."

A female student, who identified as bisexual, stated, "I haven't really observed anything and have not been looking, so if it's out there, I just don't know."

Other students described the overall attitude as "fine" or that "people don't care." Another student, who identified as lesbian, stated, "It's fine. Not as bad as high school. There is no bullying that I see. So I think it's pretty good. Safe." When asked what she meant by "safe," she responded, "Yeah, safe. Uncomfortable is another thing, so yeah, safe. Sometimes I feel uncomfortable; they stare a lot so I guess they are still not used to it."

Another student, who identified as lesbian, stated, "The school in general, people just don't care. You go about your business. I go about my own. It's kind of like, whatever!"

Yet another student, who identified as lesbian, indicated similar feelings:

I think as long as you make people feel comfortable, they're fine with it. But I think the more you put yourself out there, obviously, the more. ...For me,

I'm pretty open and I have not had any troubles. But I've seen, for example, some members of the GSA [Gay Straight Alliance], mainly boys have a rougher time at this school. Like when they are holding their boyfriend's hand, stuff like that. They'll get looks, they'll get comments. Definitely.

Overall, gay and lesbian students said that they needed to keep quiet about their sexuality, except when involved in GSA club events. The same student, previously mentioned, that identified as lesbian, indicated that if a student was not out of the closet, then he or she would not have a hard time on campus:

In general the student population, I'd say, is fine with it. But I think it depends on, like we have a wide demographic here. For me, I have not had trouble, personally; no one has said anything to me. But at the same time, I have not put myself out there. People don't really notice. I think a lot of girls and boys who are in relationships and you can kind of see that, it is a lot more difficult. It's different when you are single and in a relationship and trying to be open on campus and in a relationship. But for people who are in relationships, it is a lot more difficult.

This perception could be indicative of a more hostile climate for coming out. The above student perceived that if a gay student stayed in the closet, then he or she would be OK. Other students also stated that gay students kept to themselves. One student, who identified as a lesbian, said, "I even have exes that go here, and they were very open in high school, and they are not very open here. And that was surprising to me."

Three of the students who were interviewed felt that the campus climate was positive, but all of them, except one, were highly involved in student life by being members of the GSA. Even though the one student was not in GSA, she was aware of the club's presence. One of these students stated:

I feel that [this institution] has an overall positive attitude and behavior towards lesbian and gay staff and students. The GSA is a great organization that makes itself known throughout the campus and seems to be accepted campus-wide. ....mainly because we have an active GSA with an advisor who does their best to keep the rest of the school body informed.

Another male student who identified as homosexual, stated:

The Gay Straight Alliance is proof that this college is supportive towards gay and lesbian students. Our advisor for the club [faculty advisor] is the main person that creates an environment of equality for gay and lesbians on campus. The club creates a positive environment.

This comment demonstrated that students, who are highly involved on campus, tended to feel more positive about the climate. They felt that having a student club, such as GSA, helped improve perceptions of campus climate.

Generally, most students were not aware of a Safe Zone on campus, so the Safe Zone signs that the faculty and staff placed on or in their offices were going unnoticed. Only one student mentioned the Safe Zone, and she had only become aware of it because of her involvement in the GSA.

A heterosexual male student indicated that he felt the campus climate was neutral:

In my years attending [this institution] I would describe their behavior as neutral. I have yet to see anything that would make me think that they discriminate and/or offer special privileges to gay and lesbian individuals.

This statement reaffirmed what the MHS results indicated: Student attitudes were neutral to slightly positive toward LGBT individuals.

Only one student, who identified as bisexual, found the climate to be negative, despite being involved in the GSA and despite thinking that the GSA was a positive aspect of campus:

I would describe the overall attitude and behavior for LGBTQI [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, and Intersex] individuals as poor. Aside from the GSA, there are no prominent teacher/administrative role models for students to observe. I believe that may be due to a poor attitude towards the LGBTQI community and lack of respect for such people as well. Although there are some teachers in the Sociology department who are educated enough (and progressive enough) to give a good hard look into objectively observing the LGBTQI community, for the most part the other professors I have had either never brought up LGBTQI issues or people, or never did it in a positive light.

Again, this statement correlated with the overall scoring of attitudes on the quantitative survey, which showed that students are neutral to slightly positive. The gay and lesbian students indicated that they were seeing these attitudes reflected in the campus climate, while the heterosexual students tended not to observe anything related to these issues.

Next, students were asked about incidences of harassment and negativity that had occurred on campus. Five students indicated that they had not observed or experienced anything negative toward LGBT students or themselves on campus, but six students either experienced harassment or saw it. One student commented:

Yes. In a Juvenile Delinquency class last semester, one young man said, he was referring to the bringing up of homosexual activity pertaining to part of our class, that it is disgusting and we don't need to hear that in class. Also, my human sexuality professor said that many hurtful and derogatory words were spoken in her class when she was presenting the chapters on LGBT people.

Derogatory remarks and staring were the most reported incidences of harassment. One student heard of harassment from fellow GSA members and stated, “He was holding hands with his boyfriend. And people were really mean to him, saying that’s disgusting, what are you doing, etc.”

A similar incident reported by another student, who identified as lesbian, stated, “Sometimes I feel uncomfortable, they stare a lot, so I guess they are still not used to it [hand holding].” This same student reported derogatory remarks as well: “Just a little bit of the facial expressions and if they don’t know you are gay, they think that we will hit on them or something just because we are gay. They’ll be like ‘Oh she is gay’ and they don’t know I’m gay, and they’ll be like ‘She is going to hit on me.’”

Other types of remarks were often made, but the students who identified as homosexual did not seem to think it was negative toward them or they only thought of it as “annoying.” These remarks included:

The little phrase “no homo” and “that’s so gay” it’s gotten very popular nowadays, you can hear it in almost every conversation. It’s kind of annoying. But I don’t think the people who use it know what they are saying, that it is negative toward gays.

Another student, who identified as lesbian, stated,

Well, the guys, they’ll be like “fag this,” “faggot that.” But it’s not like towards the gay community even though they use that word. They are using the word in a buddy to buddy way, like “You’re such a fag” but I don’t go around telling them to stop. It doesn’t bother me.

One male student, who identified as heterosexual, also indicated that he had heard these types of comments from other male students. He said, “Comments like ‘you’re a fag’ or ‘stop being a faggot,’ guys use those lines all the time. It doesn’t mean they are directing them toward gay people.” These derogatory comments were congruent with some of the literature on this topic.

In a study of negative behavior toward gay men on a Canadian university campus, Jewell and Morrison (2010) found that although students told anti-gay jokes, they did not consider them to be anti-gay behavior and felt that the comments were meaningless. Today, it seems to have become normal to use these words as a slant toward someone, yet the people who use them may not necessarily realize that it is negative toward a gay person. Again, research was consistent with these findings. Burn (2000) discovered that heterosexual males used terms such as “fag” or “queer” to ridicule one another. Surprisingly, half of the heterosexual males in that study who took part in those negative behaviors were actually not anti-homosexual. These behaviors

could be a way to be socially expressive or win acceptance from their peers, and they could also be the result of mindless conformity (Burn, 2000).

The students who reported acts of harassment or derogatory remarks during the interview stated that no faculty, staff, or administrators did anything or said anything about these derogatory comments. The students indicated that these incidents usually occurred in the hallways on campus. The negative remarks that had taken place in the classroom were only because the professor was conducting a lecture on something related to LGBT issues. These types of behaviors were consistently found in the literature. Rankin et al. (2010) found that 61% of respondents reported derogatory remarks and 37% reported being stared at, with 52% of the incidences occurring while walking on campus.

During the in-person interviews, students were presented with some of the findings from the MHS survey results. The statistics presented to the students indicated either stronger negativity or positivity toward gay men and lesbian women. The first statistic which the students saw was: About 65% of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed with these statements: “Gay men and lesbian women do not have all of the rights they need” and “Gay men and lesbian women still need to protest for equal rights.” These students were then asked, “What do you think this says about the students at this college?” Students felt that these results were positive, but overall, students at the college were still neutral. One student stated:

I think that is very encouraging. I think anytime you are looking at any situation and kind of recognize that people don't have the same rights as other people and you just look at it like that and you're neutral about it, then yeah, you should support people protesting for equal rights. But like if you say, “How comfortable are you with people making out in front of you,” it's like different.

A female student, who identified as heterosexual, also stated:

People can easily agree that everyone deserves equal rights of some kind. I don't think they, I mean, obviously, they don't agree with adoption and that is sad, but I think other basic rights they want to see.

The student, who felt that the campus climate was negative, also saw these results as a positive sign:

This means that they may actually be getting a decent amount of education. Even though they may have hypocritical issues within themselves, they can see the blatant inequalities that remain in our society.

These results were congruent with a previous study where college students who were surveyed agreed that gays and lesbians should have the same civil liberties as everyone else, except for marriage rights (Lambert et al., 2006; Wills & Crawford, 1999). Prior research also found that although 68% of college students felt that gays and lesbians should have the same rights as everyone else, only 52% felt that gay couples should be permitted to become foster parents and allowed to adopt children (Lambert et al., 2006). Although the MHS did not ask about marriage between same-sex couples, most research found that although the respondents agreed with basic rights, they did not agree to marriage rights for gays and lesbians (Lambert et al., 2006; Wills & Crawford, 1999).

More of the positive results from the quantitative study were shared with students during the in-person interview. This researcher found that approximately 58% of students either strongly agreed or agreed with this statement: "Gay men and lesbian women who are 'out of the closet' should be admired for their courage." Research indicated that coming out is a difficult process, which could be created, either in a positive or negative way, by the campus climate (Longerbeam et al., 2007). It should be considered a positive sign that more students at this institution saw coming out as

courageous, and possibly more attitudes will change for the positive as they further their education. Students presented with this data during the in-person interviews felt that this information also was a positive sign. A male student, who identified as heterosexual, responded:

No, this does not surprise me. Coming out of the closet is a very hard thing to do, and in some cases people choose not to "come out" at all. Because in some cases these people are not accepted by their peers and face rejection. So those that do should be admired. I'd say it is a positive thing that students responded this way.

Another student, who identified as lesbian, also felt the results were positive and stated:

It's good. I think it is good. I mean, you have a lot to lose or risk when you are out, and I don't think it is like something that should be taken lightly and it gives hope to other people, and like, you're putting visibility on, so yeah, it's a good thing.

Students at this institution seemed to be aware that community college students are typically different types of students than university students. This awareness was reflected in their perceptions of campus climate by one student:

I think people at this school are very apolitical, and people are very like not aware. So I would say it is more kind of like a climate where people work, go to school, and leave. People aren't that involved. It's like different when you go to schools like [major Florida public university] or the big schools where people are super involved, and people are like signing petitions every day. I think it is just a different climate here, and it doesn't attract the same type of student. I mean, you do get your political students here and students want to get super involved, but most of the time, I mean we probably have thousands and thousands of LGBT people here and 15 people in GSA. So what does that say? People either don't know about GSA, people don't want to get involved, or people don't have time. So I think that is kind a reflection on the type of student, rather than the issue.

Another female student, who identified as heterosexual, saw the difference between the community college and university setting as well and stated:

I mean, I know at [the local university] they are more supportive of gay people. There are more advertisements for the clubs, more events. It just seems more positive. I don't know why you don't see that here.

An additional statistic from the MHS results was also presented to the students who were interviewed in person: 41% of the respondents either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement: “Gay men and lesbian women should stop shoving their lifestyle down people’s throats.” Students who identified as homosexual also tended to agree with this statement:

It doesn’t surprise me. I even have that opinion a little bit of other gays and lesbians. Even though to us it is normal, other people don’t see it that way and I think, as a lesbian or gay, you should at least respect how they were raised and stuff. But around this campus, I don’t see that, I mean pushing it and making out in public. I never see that. So I think the lesbian and gays on this campus are very respectful toward other students.

Another student, who identified as lesbian, also agreed:

I mean, I can understand why that would be offensive to anybody, whether you’re gay or straight you don’t want to see that. And if that’s what you mean by shoving it down your throat, then yeah. But at the same time, I think it brings visibility. I think it can be a good thing as well, just, I guess, you have to have boundaries.

A male student, who identified as heterosexual, did not feel that gay people shoved their lifestyle down anyone’s throat: “I do not feel that gays do this in the first place. So, I guess it is surprising.”

Another male student, who identified as heterosexual, also seemed to share similar views as some of the other students previously mentioned:

This means that they don’t like people pushing a lifestyle on them. It doesn’t surprise me, because as a heterosexual, I don’t like heterosexuals shoving their lifestyle down mine or anyone else's throats.

In general, it could be said that most students felt that anyone—gay or straight—who shoved his or her lifestyle, down anyone else’s throat should stop. The attitudes of the 41% who agreed, while not the majority, were reflected in the qualitative sample.

Finally, when the students were asked if they had anything else to say about the campus climate at this Florida community college, five students had nothing more to add. Four students added: 1) “No, I mean things around here are just OK. It’s not positive or negative, I guess. It could be better, like I said at the university;” 2) “No, I think they are doing a good job. They can’t force people to be OK with it. Maybe the club can be out there a bit more, do more events;” 3) “Not really, I have had nice experiences so far because of the GSA;” 4) “No, but I think more needs to be studied about transgendered people, more attention brought to them and what they go through.”

One student, who felt that the college campus climate was overall negative, added:

I feel like this college, especially considering its prime location in South Florida, is not nearly as progressive as it should be. I feel that with the rise in numbers of certain cultures in our area, we have to face the discrimination that is so rampant in those cultures. I believe that a hefty portion of [name omitted] College students are complacent and apathetic towards progress for our community.

One of the female students, who identified as lesbian, appeared unsure about the overall campus climate, commented, “I go to school, go home, that’s all. That’s my day. I don’t care what you do or say. I don’t care. If you want to be transgender, straight, bisexual, your sexual preference is your sexual preference. That’s it.” These statements again outlined the transitory nature of community college students. They don’t stay for long periods of time on campus, and they have other life obligations to tend to.

One student, seeing the trend of the campus climate as simply “fine,” continued:

I think if you want to get involved, it’s really great and you can get something out of it. But if you don’t want to get involved and you are just going to class, you’ll never know how supportive or not supportive this school is. Because it really is supportive to like wanting to get involved and wanting to appreciate diversity and stuff like that, but when it comes to gender identity, it is not even close. It is like years and years away. You

have to make the effort or you're not going to know. But I mean, you will probably be fine. If you are single and you are someone who is not totally out there, someone who is not wearing rainbows to school every day, you're going to be totally fine. I mean, if you want to be that student who kind of pushes boundaries, wants to add visibility to an issue, I mean, you are going to get opposition like you'd get opposition to anything.

All these comments reinforced the findings demonstrated through the MHS results of the slightly above neutral attitudes of students.

The in-person interviews are congruent with the findings from the MHS survey: a balance of positive, negative, and neutral responses from the students interviewed about their perceptions of the campus climate and how well students are treated and welcomed on campus.

Table 4-1. Cronbach's Alpha

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.900	.899	12

Table 4-2. Mean homonegativity score

Mean	Variance	Std. Deviation	N of Items
31.63	97.673	9.883	12

Table 4-3. T-test for equality of means homosexual and heterosexual comparison

		t-test for Equality of Means		
		Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Homonegativity Means	Equal variances assumed	121	.000	1.00463
	Equal variances not assumed	20.949	.000	1.00463

Table 4-4. Confidence interval homosexual and heterosexual comparison

		t-test for Equality of Means		
		95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
		Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Homonegativity Means	Equal variances assumed	.19523	.61812	1.39114
	Equal variances not assumed	.20198	.58454	1.42472

Table 4-5. Descriptive statistics male and female comparison

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Homonegativity	Male	29	34.93	10.021	1.861
	Female	93	30.60	9.664	1.002

Table 4-6. T-test for equality of means for male and female comparison

		t-test for Equality of Means		
		Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Homonegativity	Equal variances assumed	.039	4.329	2.073
	Equal variances not assumed	.046	4.329	2.114

Table 4-7. ANOVA for ethnicity/racial comparison

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1.864	4	.466	.824	.513
Within Groups	57.669	102	.565		
Total	59.531	106			

Table 4-8. ANOVA for age groups

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	7.086	3	2.362	7.761	.000
Within Groups	35.608	117	.304		
Total	42.693	120			

Table 4-9. Descriptive statistics for age groups

(I) Age	(J) Age	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
17-22 years	23-28 years	-.41165*	.13600	.031	-.7974	-.0259
	29-34 years	-.59737*	.17137	.009	-1.0835	-.1113
	35+ years	-.52237*	.17137	.030	-1.0085	-.0363
23-28 years	17-22 years	.41165*	.13600	.031	.0259	.7974
	29-34 years	-.18571	.19963	.834	-.7520	.3806
	35+ years	-.11071	.19963	.958	-.6770	.4556
29-34 years	17-22 years	.59737*	.17137	.009	.1113	1.0835
	23-28 years	.18571	.19963	.834	-.3806	.7520
	35+ years	.07500	.22522	.990	-.5639	.7139
35+ years	17-22 years	.52237*	.17137	.030	.0363	1.0085
	23-28 years	.11071	.19963	.958	-.4556	.6770
	29-34 years	-.07500	.22522	.990	-.7139	.5639

\*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 4-10. Scheffe<sup>a,b</sup> age group comparison

Age	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05	
		1	2
17-22 years	76	2.8026	
23-28 years	21	3.2143	3.2143
35+ years	12	3.3250	3.3250
29-34 years	12		3.4000
Sig.		.054	.802

Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.

a. Uses Harmonic Mean Sample Size = 17.587.

b. The group sizes are unequal. The harmonic mean of the group sizes is used. Type I error levels are not guaranteed.

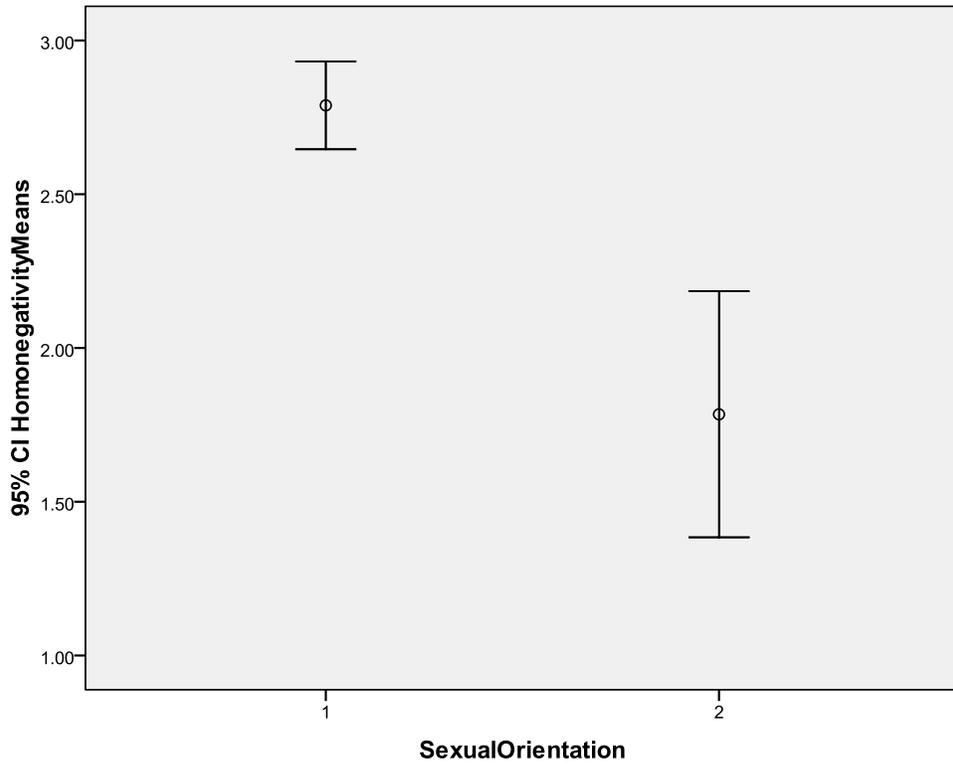


Figure 4-1. Confidence interval heterosexual and homosexual comparison

## CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSIONS

The attitudes of college students toward gays and lesbians and their overall perception of campus climate toward gays and lesbians on college campuses have been discussed through the literature review and quantitative and qualitative analysis. This chapter included the results of this study, provided implications for community college leaders, and recommends areas for future research.

### **Discussion of Results**

The purpose of this study was to determine the level of homonegativity expressed by community college students, and to examine the effect that the level of homonegativity had on students' overall perception of campus climate. The researcher hypothesized that 1) students from different ethnic/racial backgrounds would demonstrate different attitudes toward gays and lesbians, 2) males would be more homonegative than female students, 3) older students would be more homonegative than younger students, and 4) the survey results would be reflected in what the students encountered on campus on a daily basis.

The hypotheses were tested through a two-phase, sequential mixed-method case study at a community college in Florida. Quantitative analysis was used to determine overall attitudes of community college students. This researcher found that 1) students held attitudes which were slightly above neutral, 2) heterosexual students were more homonegative than homosexual students, 3) male students were more negative than female students, 4) no statistical difference existed between racial and ethnic groups, and 5) younger students held more positive attitudes than older students.

Qualitative measures were used to see if the overall attitudes of the students had an effect on and matched how students perceived the campus climate toward gay and lesbian students. This researcher found that students either did not know what the campus climate was like toward gays and lesbians or that students perceived it as neutral toward gays and lesbians.

The attitudes of the students in this study, as determined by the MHS, were slightly above neutral, with the overall score on the MHS being a 31.63. Looking specifically at the average score of students who identified as heterosexual, the overall score was 33.37. Again, the midpoint of the scale was 36, and scores above 36 indicated negative attitudes, while scores between 35 and 12 indicated positive attitudes. These slightly above neutral results were consistent with other findings in the literature. Newman (2007) also found that, on average, student attitudes toward lesbians were slightly above neutral. Lambert et al. (2006) discovered that lower division students were more negative than upper division students. Since community college students are typically lower division, this could possibly have accounted for the community college students' levels of homonegativity not being overly positive.

Again, these results could also have been indicative of the level of students at the community college, meaning their experiences in higher education. Much of the previous research demonstrated that upper division students had more positive attitudes toward gays and lesbians than lower division (Jenkins et al., 2009). Previous studies have also ascertained that a null environment was equal to a hostile environment, thus this score should be considered as needing improvement (Cass, 1979). Also, being neutral or remaining silent about issues, such as the ones gays and

lesbians face on college campuses, only reinforced the heterosexual norm. For changes to occur, these norms have to be challenged (Rankin, 2005).

A significant difference was discovered in homonegativity between male and female students. This difference was consistent with prior research on this topic. A majority of the research found strong connections between gender and negativity toward gays and lesbians, with men expressing stronger anti-gay attitudes (Hart & Fellabaum, 2008; Wills & Crawford, 2000). Studies found that men have more negative attitudes toward gays and lesbians than women, both in the general population and in college (Burn, 2000; D'Augelli & Rose, 1990; Jenkins et al., 2009; Lambert et al., 2006). More research should be conducted to determine if sample size had an impact on these findings.

No significant difference was found between the different racial/ethnic groups in this study. This finding was consistent with some of the previous research results, but also inconsistent with other research. Loftus (2001) discovered that Black students were more negative than White students. Other research suggested that different racial groups, such as Black, White, American Indian and Asian, had no significant differences in attitudes between them (Jayakumar, 2009).

A significant difference was found between levels of homonegativity between the different age groups of students. Compared to all age groups, students between the ages of 17 and 22 had a more positive attitude overall. The statistical significance was noted between students ranging in age from 17 to 22 and 29 to 34. These results could change with future research as more students are denied entry into state universities due to budget constraints.

In the qualitative interviews, many of the students, especially the heterosexual students, indicated that they were unaware of the campus climate attitude toward gays and lesbians. Some stated they had not observed any harassment, although harassment had taken place on campus, as was stated by the gay students. This was consistent with findings by Brown et al. (2004), which stated that first-year students perceived a lower incidence of anti-gay and lesbian attitudes on campus than third year students. This difference between attitudes could be a result of their lack of knowledge of issues faced by LGBT students, and not an indication that negative behaviors were not occurring.

In general, the statements made by students in person were congruent with the findings from the MHS, that is, findings slightly above neutral. These neutral attitudes could be a result of not being in college long enough to learn about LGBT issues or, not being exposed to enough student diversity. These neutral attitudes could also be due to the differences in ages between community college students and university students.

### **Summary**

The attitudes of students at a community college in Florida were found to be slightly above neutral toward gay men and lesbian women, using the Modern Homonegativity Scale. Differences in attitudes were discovered between male and female students, with males being more negative than females. No differences discerned in attitudes between various racial and ethnic groups. Also, a significant difference was found in the attitudes between students with ages ranging from 17 to 22 and 29 to 34. Students in the age group of 17 to 22 were more positive than those aged 29 to 34. No further differences in attitudes were noticed among the other age groups. The qualitative phase of this research found that students perceived the overall campus

climate as neutral to slightly positive and in general they agreed with the results from the MHS.

### **Conclusions**

The results from this study were mostly consistent with findings in the literature. The first conclusion was that students at this community college demonstrated slightly above neutral attitudes toward LGBT persons. Previous research indicated that lower division students held more negative attitudes toward LGBT persons than upper division students (Lambert, et al., 2006; Engberg et al., 2007). This research indicated that time spent in college positively influenced student attitudes. Community college students were considered lower division students, and would typically be within their first two years of college. Because the students were lower division, this was a direct correlation to why the attitudes of the students in this study were only slightly above neutral. Although the scores from the survey were within the positive range in regard to attitudes toward LGBT persons the scores were still only slightly above neutral, possibly from the difference in age, background, and school involvement/presence. Prior research indicated that neutral attitudes could be just as harmful as negative attitudes, and could create an unwelcoming campus climate for students (Rankin, 2005). This finding would account for why the students, who were interviewed in person, indicated that they saw a more negative campus climate around them.

Campus climate studies, mostly conducted at universities, were found to contain common dimensions including historical, structural, psychological, behavioral, and external forces impacting an institution, such as laws (Hurtado et al., 2008). This conceptual framework could be adapted for the study of community college campus climate to include more emphasis on the community and county surrounding the

college. The community and county surrounding a college could greatly impact all of the dimensions found in studies of campus climate. Whether a community population was considered rural, suburban, or urban, all would impact the college in different ways. This was a main difference between universities and community colleges, the community had an impact on the community college, whereas with large universities there was little to no impact from the surrounding community.

The amount of time spent on campus was another factor that impacted student attitudes toward LGBT persons. Community college students did not typically live on campus, and they did not often spend extra time on campus after their classes ended. Interactions with LGBT persons beyond those interactions in the classroom were considered a vital part of decreasing negativity toward LGBT persons (Newman, 2007). Community college student's lack of time spent on campus could again explain why the attitudes of the students in this study were not more positive. As a result, more should have been done in the classroom setting to allow for positive interactions with LGBT individuals. This could have included guest speakers or open discussions within the classroom about LGBT issues. Additionally, requiring the completion of a diversity course, as part of general education would have increased student awareness of those issues.

This study found that male students were more negative toward LGBT persons than female students. These findings were congruent with the literature. Previous studies ascertained that not only were males in the general population more negative toward LGBT persons, but male students at universities and community colleges were also more negative than female students (D'Augelli & Rose, 1990; Lambert et al., 2006).

Male students could be a target group for LGBT specific programming at community colleges. For example, targeting male dominated groups by conducting workshops, which were related to LGBT issues on an all-male sports team, could be an effective way to improve overall attitudes of male students.

The findings of this study showed no differences in attitudes toward LGBT persons among different racial/ethnic groups. The literature on this topic was mixed, with some researchers uncovering that Black students were more negative than White students toward LGBT persons; other research found that no difference in attitudes among groups, such as Black, White, American Indian, Latino, or Asian students (Jayakumar, 2009; Loftus, 2001; Schulte, 2002). The findings of this study were congruent with the literature overall. More research needs to be conducted on various racial/ethnic groups to determine the differences in attitudes.

Age was discovered to be a factor in attitudes toward LGBT students. Some of the previous research was congruent with the results of this study. Younger students were more positive than older students (Wills & Crawford, 2000). Other studies found no significant difference between age groups (Cotton-Huston & Waite, 2000; Lambert et al., 2006). Community colleges typically served non-traditionally aged students, whereas university students were typically a younger population. Community college students' attitudes in this study were only slightly above neutral, and they could have been a result of the wider range of student ages attending there.

Community college student perceptions of campus climate at the college in this study were overall consistent with the findings from the MHS and the previous research on this topic. Many students were unaware of anything related to LGBT issues. The

literature was also congruent with these findings and indicated that first-year students perceived a lower incidence of negative attitudes toward LGBT than third-year students (Brown, et al., 2004). Lower division students were not only more negative toward LGBT persons, but also were unaware of any negativity on campus toward this population.

The results of the qualitative phase of this research also indicated that the community college campus was more hostile toward those students coming out. Many of the students interviewed said that they felt the need to hide their identity as a result of the negativity they experienced on campus. The literature on this topic showed that a more positive climate would allow gay students to be more open about their identity. So although the attitudes of the students at the community college campus were slightly positive, their attitudes were not positive enough to have a stronger impact on the campus climate (Longerbeam, et al, 2007).

Many dimensions created a welcoming or unwelcoming campus climate for LGBT students at community colleges and universities (Hurtado et al., 2008). Attitudes were only one part of those dimensions which could be studied. It was the main dimension which was studied in this research. The students at the community college in this study demonstrated similar attitudes toward LGBT persons as university students, as well as what the general population demonstrated. Gay students felt it necessary to hide their identity if they were not taking part in club-related activities where they knew they were supported. Although community college students did not have the same exact demographics as traditional university students, they still held similar attitudes toward LGBT persons.

## **Implications for Policy-makers**

The results of this study suggested that much needs to be done on many levels to improve the lives of LGBT men and women everywhere. On the federal and state levels, gays and lesbians lack some of the basic rights that straight people have. One major basic right is being considered a protected class of people so they do not have to experience discrimination. Other basic rights include marriage and adoption. As LGBT people continue to fight for and win these rights, changes in policies at community colleges have to be made. On college and university campuses, programs were gradually being done to protect sexual minority students. Even though no specific laws forced them to do so, many institutions have changed the wording in their anti-discrimination policies to include sexual orientation, and some institutions have extended employee benefits to same-sex couples. These proactive actions have conveyed a positive message to perspective and current students, as well as faculty, staff, and administrators.

Despite the progress, more programs need to be put into place, specifically at community colleges, to raise awareness about LGBT issues. Students did not seem to know much about the issues and negativity that LGBT students face. This lack of knowledge was due to the fact that they are new to college and are typically commuter students, that is, not living on campus. Although the institution in this study had support programs in place, such as anti-discrimination policies, same-sex partner benefits, student clubs such as the Gay Straight Alliance, and a Safe Zone, the overall attitudes of the students were still only slightly above neutral. The homosexual students still felt the need to keep to themselves to some extent, and the heterosexual students seemed unaware of issues facing gay students on campus. If attitudes were only slightly above

neutral at a place with support programming already in place, then community colleges, which did not have this type of programming, have had very negative campus climates.

The overall strategic plan for improving campus climate should contain 1) well-defined goals, 2) specific intervention actions, 3) clearly identified people at the institution responsible for carrying out those actions, 4) identifiable participants involved in the actions, 5) a time-line, 6) costs assessment, 7) outcomes expected, and 8) a process to assess the results and accountability (Rankin & Reason, 2008). It is also important to link campus climate to key educational outcomes (Hurtado et al., 2008).

As previously mentioned, community college students are transitory in terms of their enrollment in college, with variances in their sustained enrollment (Ivory, 2005). Since community college students are transitory, it is difficult to connect with other sexual minority students, which in turn makes it difficult to create viable campus climates. To establish a more inclusive campus climate, leaders at community colleges should strive not only to create anti-discrimination policies and diversity statements, which are inclusive of sexual orientation, but ensure that these policies are widely distributed to students through the college catalogue, student handbook, and admission and orientation materials (Ivory, 2005). Although the institution in this study had support available, the students were only aware of the student club, the Gay Straight Alliance. Student affairs professionals need to be trained on LGBT issues and become knowledgeable about local resources to better make referrals. These professionals also need to understand the importance of documenting and reporting acts of violence, harassment, or discrimination reported to them by the students.

College stakeholders must realize the importance of understanding students' perceptions of campus climate and their experiences to create a more positive climate. Each college or university will have various problems, and students will have different views of campus climate. Also, among the various campuses within a college or university, different perceptions of campus climate and diverse attitudes toward LGBT persons will arise. Even if climate studies have to be conducted by members of each college's staff, faculty, or administration due to budget constraints, the issue is still important and warrants a closer look by policy makers. Without understanding the students' perceptions, whether in regard to campus racial climate or sexual identity climate, the appropriate changes and services cannot be properly implemented.

Recruiting and retaining gay and lesbian faculty, staff, and students, as well as heterosexual students and staff who are supportive of gay and lesbian equality is another way to foster a positive campus climate for gay and lesbian students (Rankin, 2003). Offering same-sex partner benefits is one way to recruit these individuals as well as a signal to students, faculty, and staff, that diversity is valued (Gortmaker & Brown, 2006). The Human Rights Campaign's employer database, using self-reported data, showed that in the United States, 573 universities and colleges have discrimination policies based on sexual orientation and gender identity, 419 of which offer domestic partner benefits. In Florida, only 11 universities and colleges reported anti-discrimination policies based on sexual orientation and gender identity, 10 of which offer domestic partner benefits. In Florida, this is not a large percentage of institutions. College leaders need to consider these anti-discrimination policies as part of attracting diverse faculty and staff along with a varied student body.

Evans and Herriot (2004) suggested that institutions should provide opportunities for “awareness” days on campus, integrate gay and lesbian topics into coursework, show gay-and-lesbian themed movies, or have gay and lesbian guest speakers on campus. The university where they conducted their research had an active LGBT student organization and an LGBT student services office. This office sponsored visible support programs for gay and lesbian students, such as a Safe Zone program and a Lavender graduation, which recognized gay and lesbian students and their allies in a way that included their identity. Openly recognizing gay and lesbian students in this manner had a positive effect on their identity development and should be considered by community college leaders.

Even after implementing initiatives such as LGBT resource centers, creating Safe Zones, and adding sexual orientation to anti-discrimination and diversity policies, some of those institutions studied by Rankin (2005) still reported less than welcoming campus climates. These unfriendly campuses spoke to the urgency of community colleges and universities needing to make campus climate a priority because so many institutions do not have any of these support services, especially community colleges.

University programs, such as the ones previously mentioned, were commonly researched in the literature because universities are usually the first institutions to offer these programs. The reason universities offer programs first is due to the fact that students are living on campus and are creating more of the need for the programs. But despite this fact, community college leaders need to be aware of university best practices, and then incorporate them into what is the most beneficial for community college students.

Community college leaders could also utilize great resources. The Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals has offered a resource on its website to assist leaders in creating LGBT resource centers, Safe Spaces, student clubs, training for staff and faculty, and procedures on how to handle negative attacks on campus (Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals, 2011). These suggestions were some of the available topics on its website called “LGBTQArchitect.” Resources are available on this website for college leaders to ensure that the proper standards are being adhered to for LGBT-related programming and services. These guidelines were set by the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS), and they were available only to Consortium members (Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals, 2011). Community college leaders, who are serious about providing services and programs for LGBT students, should consider obtaining a membership in the Consortium or in a similar organization. It is also important for leaders to continually assess the programming and services currently in place for LGBT students, as well as any future programming to ensure that the programming and services are meeting some type of standard. The institution in this study was weak in assessing programming and services related to LGBT individuals. At the time of this study, no formal funding, committees, support, or assessment of the programming were in place.

Liang and Almino (2005) found that creating more opportunities for interaction of diverse students was important. These interactions could be best conducted in the classroom since community college students are difficult to track down anywhere else on campus. Interactions with gay and lesbian students in the classroom have been

found to be an important part of changing attitudes. Once a gay man or lesbian woman becomes a known individual, rather than identified for his or her sexual orientation, stereotypes are diminished and attitudes changed (Cotten-Huston & Waite, 2000). Developing curricula to include diversity across all subjects could potentially allow for community college students to experience diversity without having to encounter it while being on campus for extended periods of time. Another way to experience diversity is requiring diversity courses as part of general education. These courses have been shown to improve attitudes and reduce prejudice against gays and lesbians (Case & Stewart, 2010).

The literature raised concern in regard to LGBT students, about drug and alcohol use. Studies have indicated an increased amount of drug and alcohol abuse among LGBT students. Campus representatives therefore need to implement campus-wide efforts to decrease substance abuse among all students, with specific concern for LGBT student programming (Reed, Prado, Matsumoto, & Amaro, 2010). If college leaders are making efforts to reduce drug and alcohol use among all students, as well as improving campus climate for all students, a greater chance will occur of decreasing the use of these drugs overall.

Brown et al. (2004) found that first-year students and male students were important target groups for programmatic efforts in enhancing the learning and development of all students. Their research suggested that first-year seminars and other first-year courses were important places to discuss gay and lesbian issues and topics. Brown et al.'s research was consistent with the findings of this study in which, male students held more negative attitudes toward gays and lesbians. Integrating gay

and lesbian issues into existing courses was a helpful way to enhance learning for all students (Rankin, 2003). Leaders of curriculum change at community colleges need to remember that diversity courses are an important part of the general education for students. But they also need to realize that more policies need to be implemented to make a larger and more positive impact. Including topics of diversity in every course, even those courses where diversity is never discussed, such as a math course, is another way to infuse a culture of respect on campus

To address the issue of derogatory remarks being used in socially expressive ways among students who may not necessarily mean them in a negative way, leaders need to again create awareness about the harmful nature of these remarks. Educational and awareness campaigns about the negativity that these remarks create need to be a part of any effort to create a campus climate that is positive toward gay and lesbian students (Burn, 2000). Zero tolerance from the administration, as well as faculty and staff when these remarks occur, is a must. Students need to be made immediately aware that these statements are not tolerated, even if the student's intent was not to degrade an LGBT individual. This message of zero tolerance could be spread through new student orientation, student handbooks, a college's website, and also in classrooms when classroom etiquette is discussed on the first day of class.

Finally, leaders need to remember to create a climate which welcomes transgender individuals, by making their campuses gender neutral. A more gender neutral would send a positive message to everyone, but especially transgender students. Community colleges could send these messages in many ways. One of the first steps could be changing the restrooms. The issue of not knowing which restroom to

use or being harassed if transgender persons are perceived by others as being in the wrong restroom can cause much stress for a transgendered person. Simply creating a unisex restroom, such as a lockable, single stall restroom which is open to all genders, would eliminate this stress for a transgender person (Beemyn, 2005; Beemyn, Domingue, Pettitt, & Smith, 2005).

Faculty and staff also need regular training in regard to LGBT issues, and they need to be trained how to respond when negative incidents occur in their classroom or on campus. The difficulty that a leader could face would include getting the full participation of the faculty, staff, and other administrators, as sexuality is an issue that people have strong opinions about. If the goal is to increase student knowledge and acceptance of LGBT people, then extensive training has to be conducted to get the majority of faculty, staff and administrators on board and willing to help. Again, even at the community college in this study, negative feedback occurred when the Safe Zone committee was conducting activities or students were participating in club events without any hard support from the administration existed, especially funding. Community college leaders may face the challenge of first getting the high level administration to make campus climate a priority, as well as to follow through with actual support.

In conclusion, community college leaders need to be proactive in their efforts to create a welcoming campus climate instead of reactive concerning these issues. It is important to assess the climate before any hate incidents occur to possibly prevent these situations from happening. Initiatives to create welcoming campus climates for everyone should be an important part of the community college mission and administration goals. Although community college students continued to be commuter

students and do not spend as much time on campus as university students, they still need to see themselves reflected in their surroundings, be exposed to different types of diversity, and interact with people unlike themselves to become better citizens. Many institutions of higher learning are already doing an excellent job in this regard, but much more needs to be done throughout the country.

### **Directions for Future Research**

The nature of this study has provided opportunities for future research in community colleges. First, more studies need to be conducted on community college students as a whole. Even large and more recent studies of campus climate have included university students, not community college students, as part of those who were surveyed. Specifically, in a national study by Rankin et al. (2010), only 4.9% of students surveyed were two-year college students. This lack of research about community college students brought into question the generalizability of the majority of research on community college students. With the number of students enrolling at community colleges increasing due to budget cuts at large universities, the need to study how LGBT students are treated on community college campuses becomes more necessary.

In addition to studying campus climate more on community college campuses, studies need to be conducted on the external influences that impact campus climate, not just the internal influences occurring on campus. For example, it would be important to study the impact that a rural county has on the community college campus climate versus an urban county. This community impact is one of the major differences between a university and a community college. The impact that the community has on the college is far greater than the impact, if any, that is felt at the university.

Another area for future research is focusing on the differences between upper division and lower division students and their attitudes toward the LGBT population. Much of the research indicated that upper division students were more positive toward gays and lesbians than lower division students (Lambert et al., 2006). More research should be conducted at community colleges to study these upper and lower division differences, which may be a result of the variation in age, with more traditionally aged students typically attending universities. Again, as more and more students go to community colleges, it would be interesting to know if these attitudes change or possibly improve because of the increase in the number of traditionally aged college students attending community colleges. As this study indicated, the more traditionally aged students, 17 to 22, had the most positive attitudes toward gays and lesbians, possibly indicating that with time students' views would change.

Most of the research on the LGBT population in general studied the entire group of lesbian women, gay men, bisexual, and transgender persons together. It is important to understand that sexuality is just one of many identities for a person. More research needs to be conducted on each of these groups, as they usually have different experiences (Geiger, Harwood, & Hummert, 2006).

More studies should be done on how a person's race, ethnicity, and/or culture affect his or her views of sexuality, and how those factors impact an LGBT individual's ability to come out. Although no significant differences were found among the different racial/ethnic groups in this study, other research has found differences in attitudes. Also, another minority population, gay students with disabilities, was an often forgotten subgroup that warrants extra attention in future research. Most college professionals are

not equipped to deal with the multiple identities. For example, usually one department was designated to assist students with disabilities and another department, such as counseling, might work with students regarding sexuality issues (Henry, Fuerth & Figliozi, 2010). Gender, gender roles, race, culture, age, and being “out” versus being “closeted” were all areas which warrant future research when it comes to LGBT students’ experiences (Gortmaker & Brown, 2006; Newman, 2007).

This study was primarily focused on students’ attitudes toward gay men and lesbian women, but more attention needs to be paid to bisexual, transgender, and intersexed individuals. Gays and lesbians are highly popularized in the media. People tend to know more about these two groups, but bisexual and transgender issues are sometimes forgotten. Studies should be conducted on university campuses, as well as on community college campuses, to determine how to make transgender individuals more comfortable and what experiences they have. In this study, students were interviewed who did not observe much in regard to gays and lesbians. It would be interesting to see how little students observed with regard to bisexual and transgender issues.

Another area for future research at community college campuses is the perception of campus climate by faculty, staff, and administrators. It would be important to study how they feel they are treated compared to their heterosexual colleagues and what services or benefits are tailored toward them. Faculty, staff, and administrators could also be indicators of the difficulties in coming out in a hostile campus climate. They could play an important role in helping to create a campus climate which is welcoming for all LGBT persons.

One of the limitations to this study was the self-selection bias of the students who completed the online survey and of those who chose to be interviewed in person. More needs to be studied to determine better ways in which to engage students in these surveys in order to get honest feedback. Using terms such as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender may discourage a student from participating in a survey. One way to encourage more participation may be to include questions regarding sexuality in a larger, more comprehensive survey and advertise it as a survey about campus climate for the benefit of all students.

Future research needs to be ongoing because the difficulties that LGBT students face constantly change. As more laws are created to protect LGBT people and to provide equal rights, the more accepting the entire community will need to become. As the younger, more tolerant individuals grow older, the environment will hopefully become friendlier, and college campuses will become even more welcoming to students of different identities.

APPENDIX A  
INFORMED CONSENT

Renee Pleus, MHS  
Graduate Student  
University of Florida  
297 Norman Hall  
PO Box 117049  
Gainesville FL 32611

**Informed Consent**

**Assessment of Modern Homonegativity**

**Please read this consent document carefully before you decide to participate in this study.**

**Purpose of the research study:**

The purpose of this study is to measure attitudes of community college students towards gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender individuals.

**What you will be asked to do in the study:**

Complete a brief survey on attitudes toward gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender individuals.

**Time required:**

Less than 20 minutes

**Compensation, Risks, and Benefits**

There are no anticipated risks, compensation or other direct benefits to you as a participant in this interview. You are free to choose whether to complete the survey or not.

**Confidentiality:**

Your identity and answers are anonymous. This survey is conducted through a secure server and neither your names nor emails will be recorded or associated with your responses, so that their information will be anonymous

**Voluntary participation:**

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. There is no penalty for not participating. You do not have to answer any question you do not wish to answer.

**Right to withdraw from the study:**

You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence.

Whom to contact if you have questions about the study:

Renee Pleus, Graduate Student or Dr. David Honeyman, Professor  
Educational Administration and Policy, 297 Norman Hall, PO Box 117049,  
Gainesville FL 32611, (352) 273-4333

**Whom to contact about your rights as a research participant in the study:**

IRB02 Office, Box 112250, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611-2250;  
phone (352) 392-0433

**Agreement:**

If you consent to complete this survey and proceed to answer the survey questions, you are agreeing that you have read the procedure described above and voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

APPENDIX B  
MODERN HOMONEGATIVITY SCALE

1. Many gay men/lesbian women use their sexual orientation so that they can obtain special privileges.
2. Gay men/lesbian women seem to focus on the ways in which they differ from heterosexuals, and ignore the ways in which they are the same.
3. Gay men/lesbian women do not have all the rights they need.
4. The notion of universities providing students with undergraduate degrees in Gay and Lesbian Studies is ridiculous.
5. Celebrations such as “Gay Pride Day” are ridiculous because they assume that an individual’s sexual orientation should constitute a source of pride.
6. Gay men/lesbian women still need to protest for equal rights.
7. Gay men/lesbian women should stop shoving their lifestyle down other people’s throats.
8. If gay men/lesbian women want to be treated like everyone else, then they need to stop making such a fuss about their sexuality/ culture.
9. Gay men/lesbian women who are “out of the closet” should be admired for their courage.
10. Gay men/lesbian women should stop complaining about the way they are treated in society, and simply get on with their lives.
11. In today’s tough economic times, Americans’ tax dollars shouldn’t be used to support gay men’s/lesbian women’s organizations.
12. Gay men/lesbian women have become far too confrontational in their demand for equal rights.

*Note.* From “Sexual Orientation Bias toward Gay Men and Lesbian Women: Modern Homonegative Attitudes and their Association with Discriminatory Behavioral Intentions,” by M. A. Morrison and T.G. Morrison, in press, *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, in press. Adapted with permission.

APPENDIX C  
QUALITATIVE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How would you describe this college's overall attitude and actual behavior toward, respect for, and inclusion of gay and lesbian individuals?
2. Is this college supportive of gay and lesbian individuals? If so, how do you know?
3. Have you ever heard of or seen any behaviors which you felt were negative toward gay and lesbian individuals?  
If so, was there any faculty, staff, or administrators around who did anything about it?
4. The results of the survey I recently conducted indicate that students are on average, either neutral or only slightly positive toward gay and lesbian individuals. Do these results surprise you?
5. About 41% of the respondents either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement: Gay men/lesbian women should stop shoving their lifestyle down people's throats. What do you think this means about the students attending this college? Does this surprise you?
6. About 58% of the respondents either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement: Gay men/lesbian women who are "out of the closet" should be admired for their courage. What do you think it says about students at this college? Does this surprise you?
7. About 65% of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed with these statements: "Gay men/lesbian women do not have all of the rights they need" and "Gay men and lesbian women still need to protest for equal rights. " What do you think this says about the students at this college? Does this surprise you?
8. Is there anything else you would like to add about your experiences at the college?

APPENDIX D  
TYPOLOGY ANALYSIS SAMPLE TRANSCRIPT CODING

**Protocol 1**

**Student:** Identifies as Lesbian, almost 60 credits, Part-time Student, Associate of Arts, Identifies as Multi-cultural

**Themes:** Neutral Climate observed, Negative behaviors observed, Positive climate perceived, Importance of involvement, Hiding identity behaviors, Type of student at CC, and Lack of support observed.

**Neutral Climate: Observed lack of concern or behaviors which weren't negative or positive**

I think as long as you make people feel comfortable, they're fine with it. But I think the more you put yourself out there obviously, the more...for me I'm pretty open and I have not had any troubles.

The general student population, I'd say, is fine with it. But I think it depends on, like we have a wide demographic here. For me, I have not had trouble, personally, no one has said anything to me. But at the same time, I have not put myself out there. People don't really notice.

They don't surprise me, but at the same time, neutral people, to me, they are people who don't care. Who like, if there was a situation where someone is being beaten up, they would probably walk by. I think when people are neutral like that, it is just like just as bad as not caring, it's like saying it's not an issue of their concern, it's not an issue that affects them at all. So I would say neutral is really bad.

I think people at this school are very apolitical and people are very like not aware. So I would say it is more kind of like a climate where people work, go to school and leave. People aren't that involved. It's like different when you go to schools like UCF or

the big schools where people are super involved, and people are like signing petitions every day. I think it is just a different climate here, and it doesn't attract the same type of student. I mean you do get your political students here and students want to get super involved, but most of the time...I mean, we probably have thousands and thousands of LGBT people here and 15 people in GSA. So what does that say? People either don't know about GSA, people don't want to get involved or people don't have time. So I think that is kind of a reflection on the type of student, rather than the issue.

But, I mean, you will probably be fine, if you are single and you are someone who is not totally out there, someone who is not wearing rainbows to school every day, you're going to be totally fine.

**Negative Behaviors: Observed or experienced behaviors which were considered anti-gay, such as derogatory remarks or other harassment**

But I've seen, for example, some members of the GSA (Gay Straight Alliance), mainly boys have a rougher time at this school. Like when they are holding their boyfriend's hand, stuff like that, they'll get looks, they'll get comments.

I think a lot of girls and boys who are in relationships and you can kind of see that, it is a lot more difficult. It's different when you are single and in a relationship and trying to be open on campus and in a relationship. But for people who are in relationships it is a lot more difficult.

Remarks and even if you're kind of with a girl and it's not necessarily in a bad way, everyone is watching you and it's uncomfortable

In a bad way, like people aren't being mean to you, people aren't like oh you are disgusting, you are going to hell. But they are looking at you like "Oh" you know, in a kind of way that is objectifying or kind of disrespectful. So it's like people are like it's

more acceptable to be lesbian than gay, well it's not really, you are still being exploited and disrespected in a different way.

For example, I was in a human sexuality class, and you would assume that people are pretty open-minded when it comes to like, but not always the case. It was a sociology class so opinions were encouraged. But, at the same time, it was kind of like saying that it is OK that you hate gay people, it's your right, kind of a way. But at the same time, it was kind of complicated because we were in a class, it was very different, the demographic at this college is different, we have a lot of Caribbean students and Caribbean students tend to be pretty homophobic from what I have seen and we have a large population of Caribbean students here.

Here it seems like people are more socially conservative. Depending on the demographic, like what I was saying about the Caribbean students tend to be more homophobic, more religious, and tend to be more sexist.

Yes, well I had a friend who was a pretty involved member in the GSA, he was holding hands with his boyfriend. And people were really mean to him, saying that's disgusting, what are you doing, etc. They were really strong though, they didn't really react, they were just like "This is my life, this is who I am."

I volunteered to play a part. And then she was like calling on people randomly and she was like "Oh you have a gay character to someone else." Because she was saying that I had to do all these accents for my character so she was like, to the other kid, "Oh yeah you have a gay character you kind of have an accent, too." And then she said, because I was right there too, and just like, "How do you have a gay accent, how do you act gay?" And like they didn't say anything, but, even like a teacher in a drama

department would say something like that. Because you expect people in the drama department and the arts to be more open-minded and she is an open-minded person, but she still came out with a stereotype. Even in the play that is supposed to be progressive, it's like your typical gay character that is all about fashion, it is still perpetuating stereotypes.

**Positive Climate: Support services, programming or behaviors on the part of students, faculty, staff or administrators which is viewed as positive.**

Student Life is very supportive. They supported the GSA and its events, and they are supportive toward student clubs. As far as I know, there are discrimination policies that pertain to LGBT [lesbian, gay bisexual, transgender]. So I would say it's pretty supportive in that way.

It's good. I think it is good. I mean you have a lot to lose or risk when you are out and I don't think it is like something that should be taken lightly and it gives hope to other people and like you're putting visibility on...So yeah it's a good thing [When given statistics from MHS on coming out].

I think that is very encouraging. I think anytime you are looking at any situation and kind of recognize that people don't have the same rights as other people and you just look at it like that and you're neutral about it, then yeah you should support people protesting for equal rights.

**Importance of being involved: Students emphasize the importance of being involved on campus in order to feel supported by the institution.**

I think if you want to get involved it's really great and you can get something out of it. But if you don't want to get involved and you are just going to class, you'll never know how supportive or not supportive this school is.

**Hiding Identity: Any behaviors observed or recommended to hide one's sexual orientation**

Like me, I'm open but I'm not like all over someone all the time. I mean, I can understand why that would be offensive to anybody, whether you're gay or straight, you don't want to see that. And if that's what you mean by shoving it down your throat, then yea.

If you are single and you are someone who is not totally out there, someone who is not wearing rainbows to school every day, you're going to be totally fine. I mean, if you want to be that student who kind of pushes boundaries, wants to add visibility to an issue, I mean, you are going to get opposition like you'd get opposition to anything.

**Type of Student: Speaks to the transitory nature of the community college student**

I think people at this school are very apolitical and people are very like not aware. So I would say it is more kind of like a climate where people work, go to school and leave. People aren't that involved, it's like different when you go to schools like UCF or the big schools where people are super involved, and people are like signing petitions every day. I think it is just a different climate here, and it doesn't attract the same type of student. I mean you do get your political students here and students want to get super involved, but most of the time...I mean we probably have thousands and thousands of LGBT people here and 15 people in GSA. So what does that say? People either don't

know about GSA, people don't want to get involved or people don't have time. So I think that is kind of a reflection on the type of student, rather than the issue.

**Lack of support observed: Areas where the college is lacking in support as observed by the student**

But I think when it comes to issues like gender identity I would say definitely not. We don't have gender neutral bathrooms, we don't have protection for people who are transgender, or gender non-conforming people.

For example, health insurance policies don't cover certain operations and a lot of other schools do. At the University of Arizona they have a policy that you have the right as a student to walk into the bathroom that you want to go, the one you feel like you identify with. A lot of schools have policies that every new building will have gender neutral bathrooms or family bathroom or even some colleges fully cover sex reassignment surgery.

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Renee Cato Pleus was a third-generation Floridian, and grew up in Plantation, Florida. She graduated from South Plantation High School in 1999. She attended Broward College in her senior year, an early admissions program, and then transferred to the University of Florida in 1999. She received her Bachelor of Arts degree in sociology from the University of Florida in 2002 and then obtained her Masters of Health Science in rehabilitation counseling from the University of Florida in 2004.

Upon graduating from the University of Florida in 2004, Renee was hired as an academic advisor at Broward College and was eventually promoted to faculty counselor, as an interim in 2005 and then permanently in 2006. During this time, she also served as an adjunct instructor for Student Success courses at the college. While in her position as faculty counselor, Renee served an important role for LGBT students. She helped to get the Safe Zone project started again in 2005, became a leader of the Safe Zone team, and coordinated and facilitated Safe Zone training for professors, departments, and college events. She was also the faculty advisor for the Gay Straight Alliance, a student club.

In 2008, Renee became an online adjunct professor for St. Johns River State College, teaching Career Exploration courses for the Allied Health and Social Sciences departments. In August 2010, Renee left her position as faculty counselor to teach additional online courses for Broward College and St. Johns River State College and also to work for her family in the insurance field. Renee currently resides in Ft. Lauderdale with her husband Sean.