Civil Right or Corrupted Institution?:

Student Attitudes towards Same-Sex Marriage

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Abstract

Although there has been an increasing acceptance towards homosexuals as well as increased rights for these individuals in recent years, there is still significant homophobia towards this group. This discrimination can range from disagreement with homosexuality to more serious cases of physical, psychological, and emotional harm. In addition, many rights are still withheld from homosexuals. In this study, attitudes towards same-sex marriage within the Mercer University undergraduate population were examined. In order to research these attitudes, a representative survey was distributed to 121 students at Mercer University. Variables such as race, gender, class status, religion, economic class, and whether or not the respondents live on campus were taken into consideration while determining factors that may affect attitudes towards homosexuality. SPSS was used for the data analysis, and measures of strength of association were tested. Religiosity was the most influential variable on attitudes towards same-sex marriage with a moderate association. This association could be a result of literal interpretations of the Bible as well as conservative values that are found in particular denominations. Since religiosity plays a significant role in student attitudes towards same-sex marriage, it is important to understand how religiosity functions in order to prevent homophobia and discrimination. More research should be completed in order to better understand the influence of religiosity on attitudes towards same-sex marriage.
This research is concerned with attitudes towards homosexuality, particularly towards same-sex marriage. As of March 2013, a CBS News Poll shows that 53% of Americans support same-sex marriage, 39% of Americans oppose it, and 8% of Americas remain undecided about the issue. Homosexuality has been a heated debate for many years, especially concerning religious beliefs. In this study, the different variables that affect attitudes towards same-sex marriage will be examined in order to provide a better understanding of these attitudes. This study is significant because numerous people experience the effects of homophobia and discrimination on a daily basis. This discrimination can lead to serious cases of physical, psychological, and emotional harm. In addition, homosexuals are prevented from obtaining the right to marriage. By completing this study and understanding these attitudes, some of the negative effects of homophobia and discrimination can be eliminated by learning how to eliminate them.

A significant amount of research has addressed attitudes towards homosexuality, but this research is not specifically limited to attitudes towards same-sex marriage. Jenkins, Lambert, and Baker (2009) found that treatment of homosexuality does not vary according to race. In addition, studies have also shown that females are more likely to have accepting viewpoints of homosexuality than males (Whitehead 2010; Davies 2004). Whitehead (2010) also found that (1) Christians, (2) members of conservative denominations, (3) frequent attendants of religious services, and (4) biblical literalists are more likely to be condemning of homosexuality. Attitudes towards homosexuality are also impacted by socioeconomic class. Diaz and McVeigh (2009) concluded that opposition to same-sex marriage tends to be higher in counties with (1) low percentages of women working in the labor force, (2) lower median incomes, and (3) lower educational attainment. In addition, education can affect attitudes towards homosexuality in a
different way. Chonody, Siebert, and Rutledge (2009) found that in college courses that incorporate an exposure component, such as discussing homosexuality, affect attitudes towards these topics. They concluded that upperclassmen are more likely to have had more of these exposure courses; therefore, upperclassmen are more likely to have accepting attitudes towards homosexuality than lowerclassmen.

The purpose of my research is to better understand attitudes towards homosexuality in order to prevent some of the discrimination and homophobia that arises from some of these attitudes. I focused particularly on same-sex marriage because of the rights that are still denied to numerous people. In the spring of 2013, I distributed questionnaires to 121 undergraduate students to obtain a representative sample of Mercer University’s undergraduate population (see appendix). The survey measures the relationship between attitudes towards same-sex marriage and six factors: race and ethnicity, gender, class status, whether the student lives on or off campus, degree of religiosity, and parental income. I measured the strength of association between these factors and attitudes towards same-sex marriage using Lambda, Somers’ $d$, and Goodman and Kruskal’s Tau.

This paper will review the literature on attitudes towards homosexuality and discuss previous research on the six independent variables examined in the study. An in-depth description of the data and methods of this study will be given. Each hypothesis and variable will be described, and the details of the research method will be provided. The results will then be presented and analyzed. The conclusion of this paper will summarize the findings of this research and discuss the policy implications of the findings and how these policies will benefit Mercer University’s population and society as a whole.
Review of the Literature

This review of the literature focuses on issues related to attitudes towards homosexuality. In particular, this review examines the attitudes towards homosexuality demonstrated by American college students as well as the factors that affect their attitudes towards homosexuality.

There have been many debates regarding homosexuality that were grounded in religion, biology, and psychology. These disputes have resulted in significant homophobia and discrimination. For instance, Grimes (2011) writes that homosexuality was considered a mental illness until 1973 when Alfred M. Freedman, president of the American Psychiatric Association, declared that it was not. Another form of homophobia is shown when some conservative religious groups have condemned the practice of homosexuality as “animalistic.” On the other hand, Smith (2004) finds that many people state that homosexual behavior occurs in animals, so it is natural. Much of the debate concerning homosexuality has made its way to the political scene. Berke (1998) shows that most conservative Republicans are particularly uncomfortable with homosexuality and allowing gays and lesbians to marry while Democrats are more likely to embrace gay rights. Vietnam (2010) finds that films have raised awareness of the struggles that homosexuals face on a daily basis. For this reason, understanding the factors that contribute towards attitudes about homosexuality is significant because of this heated conflict and rising awareness. Therefore, this review of the literature will target sociological factors in order to determine how some of these attitudes are formed in order to prevent the resulting homophobia and discrimination.

It is important to examine the perception of homosexuality in college students because perceptions change according to generation. This issue is significant due to the homophobia and discrimination that homosexuals encounter on a daily basis at college as well as in society as a
whole. Despite this homophobia, there is some research that shows that perceptions are changing. For instance, Rosenbloom (2006) finds that many students seek campuses that have policies, programs, and practices such as nondiscrimination statements and housing options that positively affect homosexual students. This review of the literature examines several factors that contribute towards students’ attitudes about homosexuality such as (1) race, (2) gender, (3) class status, (4) religiosity, and (5) socioeconomic status.

**Race**

One variable that researchers have examined is race. There are mixed views regarding whether or not race has an impact on attitudes towards homosexuality. In Jenkins, Lambert, and Baker’s (2009) study at a public Midwestern university with over 20,000 students, a nonrandom, systematic convenience sampling design involving twenty academic courses was used, and a total of 611 usable surveys were returned. Results show that the treatment of homosexuality does not vary according to race.

One common perception that some Americans have that was mentioned in the literature is that blacks have a more negative view of gays and lesbians than whites. However, Jenkins, Lambert, and Baker’s (2009) findings displayed that there was no statistically significant difference between black and white students regarding attitudes towards homosexuality. This source is beneficial to this research project because it uses a similar research method as well as provides important information about the variable of race.

**Gender**

Gender is considered a significant factor when examining an individual’s attitude towards homosexuality. Studies show that females are more likely to have accepting viewpoints of homosexuality than males (Whitehead 2010; Davies 2004). This idea is shown in Davies’ (2004)
study which was completed at an undergraduate university in the northwest of England. A questionnaire asked students to rate how they felt about certain situations such as two males kissing in public. The students were also asked to indicate their attitudes towards gender roles. The questionnaire was collected from 517 respondents. The findings of Davies’ (2004) study suggest that men’s attitudes towards gay men are generally more negative than their attitudes towards lesbians. Davies concludes that male gender roles are more clearly defined in society than female roles; therefore, there are more sanctions imposed on men who appear to violate these roles. This source is beneficial to this research project because it uses specific situations in order to gauge attitudes towards homosexuality. In addition, it examines gender roles which are important when discussing homosexuality.

Class Status

Many studies have shown that the views of older individuals tend to be more negative towards homosexuality than the views of younger individuals. For instance, Diaz and McVeigh (2009) found that median age was a determining factor that influences an individual’s attitude towards homosexuality. For instance, they found that counties with a higher median age tended to have more negative attitudes toward homosexuality. Other studies have examined age differences among college students. For instance, Chonody, Siebert, and Rutledge (2009) examined 211 students enrolled in a human sexuality course in a Southeastern university to determine if this changed their attitudes towards gay and lesbians. They found that human sexuality courses that incorporate an exposure component are one way to reduce negative attitudes toward gays and lesbians. For instance, if students discussed topics such as homosexuality, then they would become more comfortable and have less negative attitudes towards the subject. Chonody, Siebert, and Rutledge (2009) concluded that upperclassman were
more likely to have more classes with exposure components than underclassmen because they were at college for a longer period of time. Despite this idea, one should question if people that have previously thought about these issues are more likely to take a class about human sexuality. For instance, someone with a positive attitude towards homosexuality might be drawn to these types of courses. Therefore, this instance might not necessarily expose a new audience to the topic of homosexuality.

Religiosity

Religious belief also influences an individual’s attitude towards homosexuality. Whitehead’s (2004) study researched the extent to which religion explains attitudes towards same-sex unions. Data for this study was collected from the second wave of the Baylor Religion Survey, a random, national sample of 1,648 United States citizens collected in 2007. In this survey, people with the most condemning attitudes towards homosexuality were: (1) Christians, (2) members of conservative denominations, (3) frequent attendants, (4) biblical literalists, and (5) those with active or angry images of God (Whitehead 2010). In addition, non-Protestants are more likely to have favorable attitudes towards homosexual civil unions and marriage (Whitehead 2010). This study is beneficial to this research project because it discusses the many ways in which religion can impact attitudes towards homosexuality. However, attitudes towards same-sex unions and same-sex marriage could differ.

Socioeconomic Status

Socioeconomic status also plays a significant part in an individual’s attitude towards homosexuality. Diaz and McVeigh (2009) examined county-level voting results in 28 states that had same-sex initiatives on the ballot from 2000 to 2008. They found that opposition to same-sex marriage tends to be higher in counties with the following characteristics: (1) low percentages of
women working in the labor force, (2) high levels of occupational segregation, (3) high percentages of traditional households, (4) weak community cohesion, (5) lower median incomes, and (6) lower educational attainment. The authors suggest that communities characterized by traditional beliefs and low economic stability are more likely to have community residents that view same-sex marriage as threatening to the community and their own interests and values (Diaz and McVeigh 2009).

In conclusion, attitudes towards homosexuality are likely to vary by factors such as race, gender, age, religiosity, and socioeconomic status. The cooperation hypothesis states that the best answer to prejudice is to bring together members of different groups, so they can learn to appreciate their common experiences and backgrounds. Therefore, since races other than whites are likely to experience prejudice, it could be that they are less likely to be prejudiced towards homosexuals since they have experienced it. As for gender, the literature states that men are encouraged to uphold traditional views about gender roles. Therefore, males will most likely have more negative attitudes towards homosexuality than female students.

Clearly, college students will experience many different situations and meet new types of people. For instance, students of various races, ethnicities, religious backgrounds, and sexual orientations will attend college. Since college students become more exposed to these new groups of people, it can be expected that upperclassmen are more likely to have positive views of homosexuality than freshmen. In addition, it can be expected that students who are more religious, particularly those who have a literal interpretation of the Bible are more likely to have negative viewpoints of homosexuality. This research aims at determining students’ attitudes towards homosexuality and identifying the factors that influence these attitudes.
Data and Methods

My research investigates factors that influence an individual’s attitude towards same-sex marriage. I will measure the association between six independent variables and attitudes towards same-sex marriage. Attitudes are defined as a settled way of thinking or feeling that is typically reflected in a person’s actions. I chose to specifically focus on same-sex marriage for my dependent variable because many people are denied the right to marry in the United States. Same-sex marriage is defined as the formal union of two people of the same sex that is recognized by the law.

My first hypothesis is that non-whites are more likely to support same-sex marriage than whites. Research has reported mixed views on the effect of race on attitudes towards same-sex marriage. However, the cooperation hypothesis states that prejudice can be lessened by bringing together members of different groups, so they can learn to appreciate their common experiences and backgrounds. The independent variable for this hypothesis refers to each student's racial or ethnic self-identification, as chosen from the following options: (1) American Indian or Native Alaskan, (2) Asian, (3) Black or African American, (4) Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, (5) White, (6) Hispanic, and (7) Other.

I also hypothesize that females are more likely to support same-sex marriage than males. Research has shown that females are more likely to have accepting viewpoints of homosexuality than males. Therefore, it can be expected that they will be more supportive of same-sex marriage. The independent variable for this hypothesis is gender, defined as the student’s self-identification as either male or female.

My third hypothesis is students who are upperclassmen are more likely to support same-sex marriage than students who are freshmen. Research shows that human sexuality courses that
incorporate an exposure component are one way to reduce negative attitudes toward gays and
lesbians. Upperclassmen are more likely to have taken more classes than underclassmen because
they have attended college for a longer period of time. Therefore, they have had more time to
take classes that incorporate an exposure component. The independent variable is class status,
defined as the number of hours of college credit an individual has taken.

My fourth hypothesis is students who live on campus are more likely to support same-sex
marriage than students who do not live on campus. By living on campus, students are more likely
to be involved on campus and interact with students of different backgrounds of religion, race,
and sexuality. By being exposed to students of different backgrounds, they are more likely to
have more accepting attitudes of people who are different from themselves. The independent
variable is if the student lives on or off campus as indicated by the respondent on the survey.

My fifth hypothesis is that students who are less religious are more likely to support
same-sex marriage than students who are more religious. It has been shown that (1) Christians,
(2) conservative denominations, and (3) biblical literals tend to be the most condemning of
homosexual behavior. In addition, some people who are more religious believe that
homosexuality is a sin and unnatural. I will measure the independent variable of religiosity by
asking students to report how much of a role religion plays in their lives, how often they pray,
and how often they attend religious services.

My final hypothesis is that students who are from the middle or upper incomes are more
likely to support same-sex marriage than students who are from lower incomes. There have been
studies that support the idea that people of the middle or upper socioeconomic status are less
likely to be threatened by homosexuality. For instance, Diaz and McVeigh (2009) found that
communities where traditionalism and low economic stability are prevalent, these conditions
increase the change that the community residents view same-sex marriage as threatening to both
the community and their own interests and values. I will measure the independent variable of
socioeconomic status by asking students to indicate their parents’ annual income for the year of
2012.

I gathered my data by distributing surveys to 121 students within the population of
undergraduate students at Mercer University. By doing so, I obtained a representative sample of
Mercer University’s population. I surveyed an upper-level English course as well as an upper-
level Great Books course in order to reach upperclassmen. I also surveyed a pre-calculus as well
as two lower-level English courses in order to reach underclassmen. To address my hypothesis
about non-white attitudes towards same-sex marriage, I surveyed an African studies course. In
order to obtain enough males, one of the English courses I surveyed was a graphic novels course
that attracts a predominantly male audience. The two other English courses I surveyed were
composed of mainly females. I also surveyed a biology class in order to have a mixture of
science, math, and humanities.

My sample is comprised of 47.93% females and 52.07% males, and therefore, differs
slightly from Mercer’s population, which is actually 58% females and 42% males. When
examining class status, 25.62% of my sample is freshmen, 18.18% sophomores, 31.40% juniors,
and 24.79% seniors. I did not obtain enough surveys from lowerclassmen because Mercer
University’s population is actually composed of 32% freshmen, 24% sophomores, 22% juniors,
and 21% seniors. The general education English classes can have students of any class status;
therefore, this most likely prevented my sample from being more accurate. Regarding race and
ethnicity, 57.50% of respondents from my survey were White, 22.50% were Black, 8.33% were
Asian, and 1.67% were Hispanic. This compares to Mercer University’s population with 55% White, 22% Black, 10% Asian, and 4% Hispanic.

I analyzed my data using SPSS. In particular, I examined the strength of associations between the dependent and independent variables using cross-tabulations and three statistical tests: Lambda, Somers’ $d$, and Goodman and Kruskal’s Tau.

**Results**

In order to measure student viewpoints towards homosexuality, I asked respondents to indicate how strongly they support or do not support same-sex marriage. Figure 1 depicts the distribution of their responses. This figure indicates that a higher degree of students are likely to support same-sex marriage than not support it. Students are more likely to support same-sex marriage with 53.07% either strongly supporting or supporting marriage between two people of the same sex. Students are less likely to not support same-sex marriage with 28.93% either strongly not supporting or not supporting marriage between two people of the same sex.

My first independent variable is race and ethnicity. For the independent variable of race and ethnicity, respondents were asked to identify their race and ethnicity from seven options: (1) American Indian or Native Alaskan, (2) Asian, (3) Black or African American, (4) Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, (5) White, (6) Hispanic, and (7)
Other. Figure 2 depicts the distribution of race and ethnicity in my sample, which is 57.50% White, 22.50% Black or African American, 8.33% Asian, and 1.67% Hispanic. Since my hypothesis focuses on attitudes towards homosexuality of whites versus non-whites, I then recoded this information. There were 57.50% whites and 42.50% non-whites.

My second independent variable is gender. Figure 3 presents the distribution of gender in my sample. 47.93% of respondents are female, while 52.07% are male.

My third independent variable is class status defined as the number of credit hours that students have taken at Mercer University. Figure 4 depicts the distribution of class status in my sample: 25.62% freshmen, 18.18% sophomores, 31.40% juniors, and 24.79% seniors.

My fourth independent variable asked the respondents if they lived on or off campus. Figure 5 depicts that 33.9% of respondents live off campus, while 66.1% of respondents live on campus.

The fifth independent variable that I examined was religiosity of respondents. In order to measure religiosity, I asked the respondents to indicate how frequently they participated in certain religious activities or viewpoints. The first question asked the respondent how important of a role religion plays in his or her life. 38.84% said religion played a very important role, 23.14% said religion played an important role, 19.83% said religion played a
somewhat important role, and 18.18% said religion did not play an important role. The second question asked the respondent how often he or she prayed. 26.45% said very often, 21.49% said often, 30.58% said they prayed sometimes, 8.26% said rarely, and 13.22% said never. The third question asked the respondent how often he or she attended religious services. 19.83% said very often, 19.01% said often, 28.93% of respondents said sometimes, 19.83% said rarely, and 12.40% said never. From these responses, I compiled an index based off on the mean of the respondents’ answers for these three questions. A value was assigned to each response, and these values for the three questions were averaged for each respondent in order to form the index.

Figure 6 depicts the distribution of the religiosity of the respondents using the religiosity index. The values range from 1.00 to 4.67. The mean is 3.1212 and the median is 3.3333 with the most frequent value being 4.00. I recoded the index values into two groups. The low religiosity group is comprised of students with religiosity values of 1 through 3.3332 (48.76% of respondents) and the high religiosity group is comprised of students with religiosity values of 3.3333 through 4.67 (51.24% or respondents) according to the median.

The final independent variable is parental income for the year of 2012. Figure 7 depicts the distribution of income in my sample, which includes 12.50% of respondents whose parents earned less than $25,000, 20.00% of respondents whose parents earned $25,000 to $49,999, 26.67% of respondents whose parents earned $50,000 to $79,999,
22.50% of respondents whose parents earned $80,000 to $109,999, and 18.33% of respondents whose parents earned $110,000 or more.

I used cross-tabulations and measures of association including Lambda, Somers’d, and Goodman and Kruskal’s Tau to examine my hypothesis.

My first hypothesis is nonwhites are more likely to support same-sex marriage than whites. Table 1 reports cross-tabulations that are contrary to this hypothesis. Respondents who are white are actually more likely to support same-sex marriage than respondents who are nonwhite. As seen in Table 1, 40.6% of whites strongly support same-sex marriage, while 23.5% of nonwhite students strongly support same-sex marriage. Moreover, 11.6% of white students are against same-sex marriage, while 13.7% of nonwhites are against same-sex marriage. There is no evidence to support my hypothesis that nonwhites are more likely to support same-sex marriage than whites.

My second hypothesis is females are more likely to support same-sex marriage than males. Table 2 reports cross-tabulations that are contrary to this hypothesis. Respondents who are male are actually more likely to support same-sex marriage than respondents who are female. As seen in Table 2, 34.9% of male students strongly support same-sex marriage, while 31.0% of female students strongly support same-sex marriage.

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<th>nonwhites</th>
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<tr>
<td>Support</td>
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<td>12.1%</td>
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<tr>
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sex marriage. Moreover, 14.3% of male students are strongly against same-sex marriage, while 19.0% of female students are strongly against same-sex marriage. There is no evidence to support my hypothesis that females are more likely to support same-sex marriage than males.

My third hypothesis is students who are upperclassmen are more likely to support same-sex marriage than students who are freshmen. Table 3 reports the cross-tabulations for this hypothesis. The more credit hours a student has taken, the more support an individual has for same-sex marriage. As seen in Table 3, 40.0% of seniors strongly support same-sex marriage, while 29.0% of freshmen strongly support same-sex marriage. Moreover, 16.7% of seniors are strongly against same-sex marriage, while 22.6% of freshmen are strongly against same-sex marriage. Somers’d is .067. This indicates virtually no association. The value of Somers’d suggests that there is virtually no evidence to support the hypothesis that students who are upperclassmen are more likely to support same-sex marriage than students who are freshmen.

My fourth hypothesis is students who live on campus are more likely to support same-sex marriage than students who do not live on campus. Table 4 reports cross-tabulations that are contrary to this hypothesis. Respondents who do not live on campus are actually more likely to support same-sex marriage than respondents who live on campus. According to Table 4, 46.3% of students who do not

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Somers’d: .067

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<tr>
<td>Support</td>
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<td>18.0%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>30.0%</td>
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According to Table 4, 46.3% of students who do not
live on campus strongly support same-sex marriage, while 26.3% of students who live on campus strongly support same-sex marriage. Moreover, 9.8% of students who do not live on campus are strongly against same-sex marriage, while 20.0% of students who live on campus are strongly against same-sex marriage. There is no evidence to support my hypothesis that students who live on campus are more likely to support same-sex marriage than students who do not live on campus.

Table 5 reports the cross-tabulations for my fifth hypothesis which states that the less religious the respondent, the more likely respondents are to support same-sex marriage. As seen in Table 5, 54.2% of students who are less religious strongly support same-sex marriage, while 12.9% of students who are more religious strongly support same-sex marriage. Moreover, 8.5% of students who are less religious are strongly against same-sex marriage, while 24.2% of students who are more religious are strongly against same-sex marriage. Somers’d is .557. This indicates a moderate association. The value of Somers’d suggests that there is somewhat strong evidence to support the hypothesis that the less religious the respondent, the more likely respondents are to support same-sex marriage.

My sixth hypothesis predicts that students who are from the middle or upper incomes are more likely to support same-sex marriage than students who are from the lower incomes. The data presented in Table 6 confirms this hypothesis. The higher the income, the more support an individual will have for same-sex marriage. As seen in Table 5, 54.5% of respondents whose...

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<tr>
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<td>8.5%</td>
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Somers’d = .557

n=59 n=62
parents earned $110,000 or more for 2012 strongly support same-sex marriage, while 26.7% of respondents whose parents earned less than $25,000 for 2012 strongly support same-sex marriage. Moreover, 4.5% of respondents whose parents earned $110,000 or more for 2012 are strongly against same-sex marriage, while 26.7% of respondents whose parents earned less than $25,000 for 2012 are strongly against same-sex marriage. Somers’d is .211. This indicates a weak association. The value of Somers’d suggests that there is weak evidence to support the hypothesis that students who are from the middle or upper incomes are more likely to support same-sex marriage than students who are from the lower incomes.

**Discussion**

Religiosity, defined as how much of a role religion plays in an individual’s life, how often he or she prays, and how often he or she attends religious services, is the independent variable that is most strongly associated with attitudes towards same-sex marriage. There was a moderate association between religiosity and attitudes towards same-sex marriage. Many religions tend to categorize behaviors associated with homosexuality as unnatural and sinful. Therefore, when people attend more religious services, interact with people of similar ideas, and are exposed to more religious literature, they are more likely to enforce these beliefs. This idea compliments the argument that Christians, frequent attends of religious services, and biblical literalists are more condemning of homosexuality. These ideas can lead to negative

| Table 3: Influence of Socioeconomic Status on Attitudes towards Same-Sex Marriage |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
|                                 | parents’ annual income for 2012 |                                 |                                 |                                 |                                 |                                 |
|                                 | less than $25,000 | $25,000 to $49,999 | $50,000 to $79,999 | $80,000 to $109,999 | $110,000 or more |
| Strongly support                 | 26.7%                           | 29.2%                           | 18.8%                           | 40.7%                           | 54.5%                           |
| Support                          | 13.3%                           | 12.5%                           | 28.1%                           | 14.8%                           | 22.7%                           |
| Neither support nor against      | 20.0%                           | 20.8%                           | 21.9%                           | 14.8%                           | 18.3%                           |
| Against                          | 13.3%                           | 12.5%                           | 21.9%                           | 11.1%                           | 0%                              |
| Strongly against                 | 26.7%                           | 25.0%                           | 9.4%                            | 18.5%                           | 4.5%                            |
| Somers’d = .211                 | n=15                            | n=24                            | n=32                            | n=27                            | n=22                            |


consequences because they justify homophobia and discrimination through religion. However, it is important to note that not all religions advocate these teachings or use their beliefs as a way to justify discrimination or homophobia. More research should be completed in order to determine which religions tend to create more negative attitudes towards homosexuality.

There is also an association between parental income and attitudes towards same-sex marriage. There was a weak association between these variables. As seen in the literature review, median income is related to attitudes towards same-sex marriage. Families with a lower median income tend to view same-sex marriage as threatening to the community and their own interests and values. This association can be related to education. There is typically a positive correlation between educational attainment and income. As people obtain more education, they are exposed to more ideas and develop a more open way of thinking. Therefore, since income tends to increase with education, this leads to an association between income and attitudes towards same-sex marriage. In addition, a higher income can lead to a more stable environment. As a result, this can lead to people from a higher income feeling less threatened by other groups of people.

Virtually no association was found between the class status of an individual and attitudes towards same-sex marriage. Previous research has indicated that class status influences attitudes towards homosexuality (Chonody, Siebert, and Rutledge 2009). My results do not support this idea. There is little difference in attitudes between students who identify as freshmen and students who identify as seniors. The somers’ $d$ value of .067 indicates that differences in attitudes seen in the cross-tabulations are not significant enough to support an association between class status and attitudes towards same-sex marriage. However, the only place where there was not an increase for strongly supporting same-sex marriage was those respondents who identified as juniors. Therefore, there could be another factor that is contributing to my results,
and class status could contribute to attitudes towards same-sex marriage as the literature suggests.

There was no association found between the variables of race and ethnicity and attitudes towards same-sex marriage. My hypothesis was that non-whites were going to be more supportive of same-sex marriage than whites due to the cooperation hypothesis. However, my findings did not support this argument. Previous research states that there is not a significant difference between black and white students regarding attitudes towards homosexuality (Jenkins, Lambert, and Baker’s 2009). One potential problem for my research, however, is that I recoded my information into non-whites and whites. Therefore, it would be more beneficial to examine this question with different races in order to better understand the variable of race and ethnicity as a whole rather than just nonwhites and whites.

There was no association found between the variables of gender and attitudes towards same-sex marriage. Previous research has found that females are more likely to have accepting viewpoints of homosexuality than males (Whitehead 2010; Davies 2004). Previous research states that this occurs because gender roles are more strictly enforced on males. However, my research did not support this statement. The variable of gender does not influence attitudes towards same-sex marriage because gender roles are as strictly enforced on females as they are on males. Therefore, since gender roles are enforced on both genders, this could affect both genders’ responses to same-sex marriage in a similar way.

There was no association found between the variables of whether or not the respondent lives on campus and attitudes towards same-sex marriage. However, when examining the category of strongly support, 46.3% of students who do not live on campus strongly support same-sex marriage, while 26.3% of those who live on campus strongly support same-sex
marriage. Although the literature states that students will be exposed to different kinds of people on campus, and therefore become more accepting of people that are different than themselves, this could also happen off campus. For instance, if an individual lives off campus, he or she will be exposed to more people that do not attend the college as well as the college population.

**Conclusion**

There is still significant discrimination that affects homosexuals on a daily basis. This discrimination can be emotional, physical, and psychological. In addition, homosexuals are denied the right to marriage. My research specifically investigates attitudes towards same-sex marriage and the various factors that can influence these attitudes.

For my research, I surveyed 121 students at Mercer University’s undergraduate campus to measure the associations between attitudes towards same-sex marriage and six independent variables: (1) race and ethnicity, (2) gender, (3) class status, (4) whether or not the respondent lives on campus, (5) religiosity, and (6) parental income. I tested my hypotheses using cross-tabulations and measures of association including Lambda, Somers’ $d$, and Goodman and Kruskal’s Tau.

My research indicates that religiosity of the respondent is moderately associated with attitudes towards same-sex marriage. There was a weak association between parental income and attitudes towards same-sex marriage. The independent variable of class status of the respondent had virtually no impact on attitudes towards same-sex marriage. Race and ethnicity, gender, and whether or not the respondent lives on campus did not seem to be influential on student attitudes towards same-sex marriage.

This study is important because it provides insight into attitudes towards same-sex marriage. By understanding the factors that influence negative attitudes towards homosexuality,
we can attempt to understand and address these attitudes in order to eliminate homophobia and discrimination. This study is also important because of the future research that can be completed in order to understand the impact of religiosity on attitudes towards same-sex marriage. Although there was a moderate association between religiosity and attitudes towards same-sex marriage, more research needs to be completed in order to fully understand the relationship. The policy implications of my findings are that we should implement more awareness programs in order to educate more students about the homophobia and discrimination that homosexuals face. In addition, discussions should take place in order to reach a common ground. These policies can be applied to society as a whole because if people make an effort to understand one another, then there will be less prejudice and discrimination. In addition, if discrimination is eliminated, then we can work towards a state of equality in which rights are not denied to specific groups.
References


