

Heterosexual LPCs' Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gay Men: A Brief Social Issues Intervention

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Abstract: The present quantitative experimental study examined the amenability of attitudes toward lesbian and gay (LG) individuals by heterosexual licensed professional counselors (LPCs) after exposure to a brief intervention raising social issues awareness. The sample consisted of 142 LPCs recruited from professional organizations, listservs, and social media from across the nation, evenly divided between an experimental and a control group. Participants from the experimental group were primed using the Social Issues Advocacy Scale. The data collection source consisted of an online survey which distributed the Attitudes Toward Lesbian and Gay Men scale. Findings showed no statistically significant difference in scores on the survey, as the means of the experimental (M=38.5) and the control (M=37.94) groups differed by less than one point. The findings suggested that a brief intervention for raising social issues awareness may not be adequate in changing the attitudes of LPCs about LG individuals. However, a strong baseline level of positive attitudes toward LG individuals among heterosexual LPCs suggested that interventions for changing their attitudes may not be necessary.

Keywords: Lesbian and Gay; Licensed Professional Counselors; Social Issues Awareness

1. Introduction

The concept of conscience clauses has existed for decades to allow healthcare workers in the United States to deny various healthcare services and research-based solely on moral objections by the

individual provider, hospital, or insurance carrier (Tanne, 2004). The passage of the Tennessee “therapist bill,” also known as House Bill 1840/Senate Bill 1556, (Johnson & Howell, 2016) created a ripple effect as additional states adopted similar legislation such as Arkansas’ Religious Objection Opt-Out Rule in 2016 and Mississippi’s House Bill 1523 in 2017 (Farmer, 2017; Rose et al., 2019; Wagner, 2016). These particular conscience clause laws are counselor-specific granting civil and legal protections for licensed professional counselors (LPCs) deciding to refer or deny services to lesbian and gay (LG) individuals based on an LPC’s sincerely held belief system (Farmer, 2017; Rose et al., 2019). In a broader sense, there are presently at least 14 states that have already passed conscience clause legislation, effectively allowing legal protections for individuals and businesses to deny or refer services and products based on a deeply held belief system or moral objection citing religious justification (Rose et al., 2019).

Since LPCs are not exempt from exposure to external influences, any professional, organizational, cultural, and political factor impacts LPCs’ attitudes and related behaviors within their clinical practice (Lichtenberg, 2017; Shafaroodi, Kamali, Parvizi, Mehraban, & O’Toole, 2014). Additionally, any perceived authority within these realms significantly increases the level of influence for developing negative or positive attitudes (Keltzer et al., 2014; Pattie & Johnston, 2013). For this reason, the exposure to the negatively-valenced messages embedded in conscience clause legislation potentially promotes negative attitudes influencing the unethical referral practice of the LG population by a portion of LPCs and the underlying propaganda depicts the marginalized population as unfavorable (Domino, Wingreen, & Blanton, 2015; McGeorge, Carlson, & Farrell, 2016; Wagner, 2016).

At the same time, attitudes are not limited to a static trajectory based on predisposition (Lichtenberg, 2017). Attitudes and beliefs are malleable and can be influenced through exposure to increasing amenability over a short amount of time. The amenability of the attitudes towards acceptance through a positive depiction and exposure has been shown in previous research (Schofield et al., 2017). In the context of LG individuals, a study by Bidell (2013) showed that counseling students working with LG clients scored themselves higher on a self-efficacy and competence rating scale after being exposed to positive images of the LG population during a graduate-level course. LPCs who indicate an interest in becoming allies for LGBT clients report focusing on the knowledge, skills, and attitudes gained through interpersonal and prior experiences (Ji & Fujimoto, 2013). Since some LPCs may experience a fragmentation or disintegration from their professional identity and their attitudes and belief systems based on their religiosity, a limitation develops on their effectiveness to fully engage professionally, ethically, and effectively with sexual minorities (Scott, 2018). This predicament provided the motivation to explore how heterosexual LPCs’ attitudes towards LG

individuals may be amenable to change after brief exposure to a generalized social issues awareness intervention since research has demonstrated mixed findings on the effectiveness of brief interventions (Holbrook, Kawamoto, & Liu, 2019).

1.1. Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical foundation of this study was based on the social cognitive theory (SCT), which posits that value judgments contribute to the formation of an individual's beliefs and motivations (Domino et al., 2015). With origins in the work of Bandura (2001), who attributed an individual's purposeful accessing and processing of information as the determinant for selecting any course of action deemed most appropriate, SCT recognizes the individual as a reciprocal product from interaction in the external world instead of developing exclusively from an abstract condition (Lin & Hsu, 2015). It offers a foundational understanding of personal preference and competence as individuals select specific sustainable attitudes from a wide range of available sources influenced by external socio-structural factors (Bandura, 2001; Font et al., 2016). Its main tenet is that interactions between individuals and their social environments can be depicted as a continuous, reciprocating model involving the social environment, internal stimuli, and behavior (Swearer et al., 2014). The model becomes active when individuals cognitively evaluate and apply consequences towards observable behaviors in the social environment (Swearer et al., 2014).

As individuals imitate observable social behaviors of others, they view such action as a successful modeling process within established norms (O'Fallon & Butterfield, 2012). In achieving this imitation, individuals reveal their aligned attitudes, behaviors, and values within their defined social context (O'Fallon & Butterfield, 2012). For each decision or choice, an individual considers the consequence of the other option or unselected choice as well (Stillman, Sheri, & Ferguson, 2018). SCT is grounded in the assumption that individuals maintain motivation for evaluating their attitudes, behaviors, and values whether it be on a conscious or unconscious level (O'Fallon & Butterfield, 2012; Stillman et al., 2018). Despite individuals being inclined to evaluate the moral consequences of their behavioral modeling due to available closeness and awareness, the motivations and behaviors are still situationally relevant (Font et al., 2016). Individuals maintain selection from an extensive variety related to preferences, self-efficacy, confidence, environmental cues, and cultural factors (Font et al., 2016; Godin et al., 2008). SCT was found to be relevant to this study because of the way the theory explains the interaction of the personal and situational environment in constructing personal attitudes and subsequent behaviors (Hamilton et al., 2016).

1.2. Sexual Orientation and Mental Health

Minority groups, especially sexual minorities, continue to report noticeable disparities in accessing and receiving mental health services in comparison to the majority populations in the United States (Barnes, Hatzenbuehler, Hamilton, & Keyes, 2014; Dillon et al., 2016; Holley, Tavassoli, & Stromwall, 2016; Nam, Jun, Fedina, Shah, & DeVlyder, 2019; Tao, Owen, Pace, & Imel, 2015). Sexual minorities are 1.5 times more likely to experience depression and anxiety along with being 2.5 times more likely for suicidal ideation, plans, and attempts than the majority population (McCarthy, Fisher, Irwin, Coleman, & Pelster, 2014; Nam et al., 2019). Stigma, interpersonal difficulties, social exclusion, and even violence experienced by sexual minorities are reasons distressed LG individuals seek therapy at higher rates than their heterosexual counterparts, whether for beneficial enhancement or negative reparatory (Anastas, 2013; Meyer, 2007; Owen-Pugh & Baines, 2014). Researchers have described how the experience of discrimination related to sexual orientation remains a common occurrence for members of the LG community leading to significant reports of stress, substance use, depression, victimization, and suicide (Corrigan, Kosyluk, & Rüsck, 2009; McCarthy et al., 2014; Troutman & Packer-Williams, 2014). As individuals identify being a part of a stigmatized population, the negative impact on physical and mental health increases (Dodge et al., 2016; Molero, Recio, García-Ael, Fuster, & Sanjuán, 2013).

The stigma-related stress minorities confront due to their specific social status and negative interpersonal interactions often exasperate routine daily stressors creating disproportionate stress referred to as minority stress (Cramer, Burks, Plöderl, & Durgampudi, 2017; Rendina et al., 2017). However, research has demonstrated that attitudes toward LG individuals have shifted significantly in a positive direction over the previous decade with increased acceptance and visibility (Dodge et al., 2016; Falzarano, & Pizzi, 2015). Individuals self-identified as liberals, women, educated, young, and non-religious tend to support LG rights at significant percentages compared to those of religious and political affiliation maintaining negative attitudes (Keltzer et al., 2014; Troutman & Packer-Williams, 2014). At the same time, prior negative exposure to LG individuals, religiosity, and conservative political affiliation have been correlated with lower acceptance (Barnes & Meyer, 2012; Lazar & Hammer, 2018; Troutman & Packer-Williams, 2014). Some individuals find it easier to accept LG individuals while still maintaining mixed supportive attitudes toward other sexual minorities such as bisexual and transgender individuals from a within-group to outside-group perspective due to perceived differences (Frias-Navarro et al., 2015; Lewis et al., 2017; Lytle et al., 2017). Overall, the most significant moderators for acceptance are exposure and time with the caveat that acceptance does occur at varying levels (Twenge et al., 2016).

1.3. Counselors' Professional Practice and Multiculturalism Training

The field of counseling has faced difficulties in traversing the discrepancies between individuals holding intense religiosity and individuals identifying as members of the LG community (Sells & Hagedorn, 2016). For this reason, the American Counseling Association (ACA) included statements in their 2014 ACA Code of Ethics denying LPCs the use of value or moral discrepancy due to religiosity as a rationale for referral practices (Sells & Hagedorn, 2016). ACA also recommends counselors to manage any discomfort through seeking consultation, supervision, and additional training with a referral being a last resort to maintain professionalism (Kaplan et al., 2017). Despite the emphasis to maintain value-neutrality with all clients, some counselors view this as an insurmountable task (Farnsworth & Callahan, 2013), as LPCs carry their professional, personal, and cultural values developed from various experiences and interactions with them into every relationship (Kocet & Herlihy, 2014; Thacker & Blueford, 2018) and may at times experience difficulty balancing the integration of their values and beliefs into ethical practice to avoid imposing any values onto their clients (Kocet & Herlihy, 2014). When LPCs experience a conflict between their beliefs and values and a particular aspect of the client, it creates value-based conflicts and ethical dilemmas potentially impacting the quality of services provided by the LPC (Kocet & Herlihy, 2014; Thacker & Blueford, 2018).

LPCs who are aware of the potential risk for imposing their values or beliefs onto the clients are ethically required to seek additional training, supervision, continuing education, personal counseling, or consultation (Remley & Herlihy, 2014; Kocet & Herlihy, 2014; Thacker & Blueford, 2018). Within the advocacy competencies established by the ACA, social justice and advocacy incorporate a multilevel approach as counselors operate within their professional roles to assist clients to overcome barriers impeding access to mental health services, development, and personal growth (Ramírez Stege et al., 2017; Steele et al. 2014). An aspect of this multilevel approach is for LPCs to recognize their role in promoting public policy change as well (Grzanka, Adler, & Blazer, 2015). This role is particularly relevant in the context of multiculturalism, which has increased exposure to and interaction with diverse populations (Lee & Khawaja, 2013).

Multiculturalism has become an important part of the theoretical and empirical research literature within the field of counseling as counselors and counselor educators have acknowledged its importance (Barden, Sherrell, & Matthews, 2017). The concept of multicultural awareness refers to the LPCs ability for self-efficacy and to acknowledge the impact culture has on the experiences of their diverse clients and themselves while remaining sensitive and empathic to their clients' unique needs through culturally appropriate interventions (Cherng & Davis, 2019; Dillon et al., 2016; Ivers et al., 2016; Lee & Khawaja, 2013; Lichtenberg, 2017; Tao et al., 2015). Multicultural skills are the application of the approaches and interventions relevant to the cultural background of the clients

gained from the culmination of awareness and knowledge (Ivers et al., 2016). Counselors with such skills offer effective services to clients from diverse cultural populations, especially to those not aligned with the counselor's identities or worldviews (Clark et al., 2017; Dillon et al., 2016; Ivers et al., 2016; Tao et al., 2015). The ACA has broadened multiculturalism within the counseling and counselor educational field by publishing standards for multicultural skills (Dillon et al., 2016).

Despite multicultural education containing a wide range of political and pedagogical influences, a general agreement exists on the positive outcomes of multicultural training. Despite reports that counseling programs offer integration of knowledge, awareness, and skills into any pedagogical approach, the consistency and degree of how these components are delivered within the curriculum have posed challenges for some researchers (Celinska & Swazo, 2016). Concerns remain that future LPCs educated through counseling programs are not guaranteed to engage in social advocacy and multicultural skills to a level that will impact the various structures affecting marginalized populations or their interpersonal interactions with diverse individuals (Chenot & Kim, 2017). LPCs unable to reconcile a discrepancy between their attitudes and professional identity tend to demonstrate significantly lower competency skills and practices when working with LG clients (Bidell, 2014). In this context, it may be important to consider how priming interventions for raising social issues awareness may affect the amenability of attitudes toward LG individuals by heterosexual LPCs.

1.4. Brief Intervention

Research findings show the formation of initial attitudes about certain traits in others occurs after a brief interaction or exposure (Grossman, 2015; Kroenung & Eckhardt, 2015). Consequently, individuals adopt and maintain certain behavioral habits without developing a conscious awareness because of routine contextual triggers (Ohtomo, 2017). For example, when Hall et al. (2018) constructed a research study based on a photovoice exhibit showcasing LGBTQ-related issues among youth within a school context of a rural community, posttest results showed 81% of the participants expressed intention for changing behaviors to increase involvement and ally development, while having become aware of the struggles of LG youth such as feelings of isolation and judgment (Hall et al., 2018).

In the current study, a priming technique was used to create a quasi-experimental design. Priming is a technique defined by the use of a target stimulus presented to create a triggering process in the context of a previously encountered stimulus by passively and temporarily impacting present responses (Franěk & Režný, 2017; Shariff, Willard, Andersen, & Norenzayan, 2016). Research findings from the literature show that priming serves as a technique to examine if a conscious or

subconscious stimulus impacts subsequent behaviors and attitudes (Gerger et al., 2019; Holbrook et al., 2019; Mahmoud et al., 2018).

The priming technique that was used in this study was that of brief exposure. Intervention involving brief exposure has been found to have positive impact in reducing stigma-related negative interactions (Mahmoud et al., 2018). The particular use of brief exposure as a priming technique was made in a study by Lane et al., (2017), who showed that exposure to media impacted bodily self-image, demonstrating the effectiveness of integrating brief exposure as a priming technique for experimental research (Lane et al., 2017). Similar demonstration of its efficacy in a study by Brichacek et al. (2018), who highlighted its impact on unfulfilled body- image ideals (Brichacek et al., 2018), provided further justification for its use in the current study as a priming technique.

1.5. The Present Study

Previous researchers have shown that acceptance and advocacy toward sexual minorities are influenced by various factors such as prior positive exposure, social justice training, and multicultural education (Bidell, 2013; Hefner et al., 2015; Pattie & Johnston, 2013; Ramírez Stege, Brockberg, & Hoyt, 2017; Shafaroodi et al., 2014; Swartz, Limberg, & Gold, 2018). In the context of LPCs, previous research also focused on the development of LPCs' professionalism within their counseling programs to confront evolving discriminatory, oppressive, and privileged practices (Decker et al., 2016). Independently, research had also been conducted to examine the effectiveness of brief interventions on the malleability of attitudes and prosocial behaviors with mixed results, showing the influence of prior experiences, the level of awareness, and the level of concerns (Aldridge, Dowd, & Bray, 2017; Franěk & Režný, 2017; Ifcher & Zarghamee, 2018). A gap in the literature concerns research in which heterosexual LPCs have been studied in terms of the amenability of their attitudes of acceptance for LG individuals through brief interventions raising awareness of social issues. The purpose of this quantitative experimental study was to examine the amenability of attitudes toward LG individuals by heterosexual LPCs after exposure to a brief intervention raising social issues awareness. With this purpose, the following primary research question and hypotheses were developed to conduct this study:

RQ: Is there a statistically significant difference in scores on the Attitudes Toward Lesbian and Gay Men (ATLG-R) scale between heterosexual LPCs who complete a Social Issues Advocacy Scale (SIAS) before completing the ATLG-R and heterosexual LPCs who do not complete the SIAS before completing the ATLG-R?

H0: There is no a statistically significant difference in scores on the ATLG-R between heterosexual LPCs who complete a SIAS before completing the ATLG-R and heterosexual LPCs who do not complete the SIAS before completing the ATLG-R.

H1: There is a statistically significant difference in scores on the ATLG-R between heterosexual LPCs who complete the SIAS before completing the ATLG-R and heterosexual LPCs who do not complete the SIAS before completing the ATLG-R.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Participants

The general population for this study consisted of LPCs across the nation. The target population for this study consisted of LPCs from ACA, American Mental Health Counselors Association (AMHCA), Counselor Education and Supervision Network (CESNET) Listserv, SurveyMonkey target audience paid service, Facebook, and LinkedIn. The sample selected from the targeted population in this study included 142 self-identified heterosexual LPC with an active state-issued full or provisional licensure with the ability to communicate and understand English without third-party assistance and presently practicing in the United States. Participants were recruited over a period of 9 months. Participants were recruited through probability sampling via participant flyers representing the posts to be submitted to the ACA community and the CESNET Listserv. Additionally, the researcher solicited the SurveyMonkey target audience paid service to recruit participants, before expanding further with snowball sampling to social media pages within Facebook and LinkedIn and AMHCA.

2.2. Data Source

The present study implemented two different instruments for two different purposes. These included the ATLG-R scale, which was used for the creation of the study's dependent variable, and the SIAS, the integration of whose 21-item list helped developed the priming intervention. For the ATLG-R scale, permission was granted for duplication and implementation for not-for-profit and scientific research (Herek et al., 2015). Although the test consisted of a 5-point Likert scale serves to measure from 1 representing strongly disagree to 5 representing strongly agree to measure attitudes from extremely positive attitudes to extremely negative attitudes (Blackwell, 2007), the Likert scale was modified into a two-point dichotomous scale to avoid neutrality and adapt the scale for the purposes of this study. Regarding its reliability, Cardenas and Barrientos (2008) demonstrated an overall reliability score of .90 when adapting the instrument to a Chilean sample. Regarding its validity, Herek (2012) suggested Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of $> .85$ for most college students and $\alpha > .80$

for most adult males when self-administered. For the SIAS, permission was granted for reproduction and implementation of the instrument for non-commercial and education purposes without the need of written permission (Nilsson et al., 2011). The SIAS was used as the priming intervention and not as a variable in this study's design. It was selected to serve as the brief priming intervention in the 2-group posttest experimental design for this study. The SIAS consists of 21-items addressing political and social justice advocacy, political awareness, social issues awareness, and confronting discrimination (Fieldwisch & Whiston, 2015; Nilsson et al., 2011). For the purpose of this study, the SIAS was presented as one question containing all 21 items as individual social issues statements. Regarding its reliability, an overall coefficient of .93 was demonstrated by Nilsson et al. (2011). Regarding its validity, an overall intercorrelation of .84 was demonstrated by Nilsson et al. (2011).

2.3. Data Collection Procedure

Potential who met the eligibility criteria and who agreed to participate were granted access to the survey weblink for SurveyMonkey, which contained the informed consent agreement, the demographic section, and the actual experiment. The demographic questions provided information on participants' gender, age, U.S. region/ethnicity, licensure type, and years of experience. Following the demographic section, the survey hosting server randomly placed the participants into either the experimental group or the control group at a 50% probability. The participants selected for the experimental group were exposed to the SIAS as one question containing all 21 items as individual social issues statements. The participants were requested to select if they agreed to at least one of the twenty-one statements or if they disagreed with all before moving forward into the survey. Either response triggered the survey since the question only served as the brief exposure to the SAIS as it is the independent variable of the study. The participants randomly assigned to the control group were strictly requested to agree to continue to the survey after the demographic section. The survey portion was comprised of the ATLG-R to maintain the same scoring protocols, reliability, and validity of the original instrument. All data were transcribed by SurveyMonkey into formats for Microsoft Excel spreadsheets and SPSS statistical program. The researcher encrypted individual spreadsheet files with password protections and stored files on a password-protected cloud service through Apple. None of the information stored contained any personal information from the participants.

2.4. Data Analysis Procedure

Using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), survey data were directly exported and SurveyMonkey allowed SPSS to automatically establish designated variable names, types, titles, and labels. The researcher conducted an independent samples t-test as the initial data analysis. The

participants randomly assigned to the control group were given the label “1” and the experimental group the label “2.” The first output table, Group Statistics, displayed the descriptive statistics for the sample size, mean, standard deviation, and standard error for each of the groups. The second output table, Independent-Samples Test, displayed the results for Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances and the t-test for Equality of Means. Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances served to determine if the variances of both the control and experimental group were equal. Once the results were interpreted, the researcher engaged SPSS in creating a scatterplot. The scatterplot served to plot coordinates where two variables meet in a visual representation (Yockey, 2017). Additionally, a boxplot served to demonstrate the outliers of the data as well (Yockey, 2017). The t-test served to address the research question. The researcher used the Crosstabs feature of the SPSS to conduct the analysis (Yockey, 2017). The researcher similarly interpreted the results as the t-test using the p-value (Yockey, 2017).

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Results

Hypothesis for the research question was tested through an independent-samples t-test. The independent-samples t-test were employed to determine if the means of the two groups (experimental and control) were equal (Yockey, 2017). For a t-test, the null hypothesis is rejected if the results occur less than 5% of the time ($p < .05$) during the analysis (Yockey, 2017). The null hypothesis for the research question stated that there would not be a statistically significant difference in scores on the ATLG-R between the experimental group and the control group. An independent-samples t-test was conducted using SPSS. The number of participants randomly assigned to the control group was 85 as compared to the 57 participants assigned to the experimental group. A comparison of the means was central to determining if the null hypothesis may be rejected (Yockey, 2017). In this case, at face value, the means of both the experimental ($M = 38.05$) and the control ($M = 37.94$) groups differed by less than one point. By observation of the mean difference, the experimental group did not demonstrate a significant difference compared to the control group. This was confirmed by the p-value (.84) of Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances which was greater than .05, which meant that the variability in the two groups was about the same. The independent samples t-test results showed that the ATLG-R scores of both the experimental and control groups were not statistically different from each other: $t(140) = .15$, $p = .88$. With this, there was no sufficient statistical evidence to reject the null hypothesis.

3.2. Discussion

The researcher hypothesized that LPCs who were exposed to a brief intervention raising social issues awareness would have greater amenability of attitudes toward LG individuals compared to LPCs

who were not exposed to the intervention. The results of the data analysis did not yield a statistically significant difference between the two groups, indicating that the intervention was not effective in enhancing their amenability in terms of their attitudes toward LG individuals. For this reason, the null hypothesis was not rejected resulting in the rejection of the alternate hypothesis. The lack of statistical difference and total scores were noteworthy because of the suggestion that a brief intervention for raising social issues awareness may not be adequate in changing the attitudes of LPCs about LG individuals.

There are possible explanations for the non-significance of the findings. One possible explanation may have been that participants in the non-intervention group may have resorted to socially acceptable responses, which might have affected the true nature of the differences between the two groups. Another explanation for the lack of statistically significant difference between the groups may have been that the intervention was too brief, suggesting that changing attitudes about LG individuals would require more intensive intervention.

Concerning the effectiveness of brief interventions, previous literature had shown that these brief interventions can be effective in changing behaviors (Hall et al., 2018) and priming desired attitudes (Shariff et al., 2016). The findings did not align with these insights. However, a strong baseline level of positive attitudes toward LG individuals among heterosexual LPCs supported previous research showing attitudes toward LG individuals shifting significantly over the previous decade in a positive trajectory towards acceptance of LG individuals (Dodge et al., 2016; Falzarano, & Pizzi, 2015). In alignment with the SCT, the participants of this study, on being confronted by social issues as both a brief exposure or through the instrument itself, were triggered to evaluate their self-efficacy, personal standards, professionalism, and ambitions, leading them to answer concerning how they presently felt or preferred to ideally feel for improved acceptance of their attitudes (Bandura, 2001; Font et al., 2016). These findings may also validate the effectiveness for counselor educators and supervisors to integrate social justice and advocacy as essential components to the counseling curriculum, supervision, ethical codes, and professional identity (Steele et al., 2014).

3.3. Limitations of the Study

Since transgender and other non-binary individuals confront issues and concerns uniquely distinct from LG individuals (Moe, Perera-Diltz, & Sparkman-Key, 2018), the present study did not include non-binary gender identity such as transgender in the sample. The number of potential participants that activated the survey but did not complete the survey by not signing the agreement resulted in a disproportionate assignment into the two groups. A limitation associated with targeting professional organizations was the potential that the sample would have increased exposure to social

issues through membership benefits such as professional journals, continuing education opportunities, annual conferences, and email propaganda, which might have biased the sample. Additionally, the narrower roles associated with CESNET, which is primarily associated with counselor educators in contrast to the broad diversity of the ACA and AMHCA, created a limitation. Since the surveys relied on self-reporting, the assumption of honesty from participants introduced the possibility of participant bias. Finally, the modification of the ATLG-R scale to two-point dichotomous scale to avoid neutrality resulted in the collection of less nuanced ratings by participants.

3.4. Recommendations

Regarding recommendations for practice, the findings offer insight to the present attitudes related to LG individuals by heterosexual LPCs and may be generally extrapolated to suggest that counselor education programs are effective in selecting appropriate candidates for training and providing education and supervised experience that results in the desired student learning outcomes relative to lesbian and gay people. This suggests the need to apply similar admission and training strategies to the full spectrum of sexual minorities and other non-dominant populations. The influences and knowledge instilled through personal experiences and training should be taken into consideration when developing professional training, supervision, and curriculum involving multiculturalism and social justice advocacy. Counselor educators could assist counselor education and continuing education program developers to promote attitudes of acceptance and nonjudgment through skills training and address any negative attitudes exhibited throughout the counseling programs. Counselor educators and supervisors should promote social justice and advocacy as a movement and not a passive educational experience. In doing so, counselor educators and supervisors could activate a critical consciousness within their counselors-in-training. Counselor educators and supervisors could promote prosocial behaviors by linking them to attitudes of acceptance observed or measured via regular self-assessment.

Regarding recommendations for future research, the results of the study point to further research opportunities to expand and assess the impact of brief interventions beyond a priming effect, to extend the evaluation of attitudes by heterosexual LPCs toward sexual minorities beyond LG individuals, to explore the impact of the curriculum in comparing CACREP to non-CACREP institutions in regards to their attitudes toward sexual minorities, and to compare the attitudes of LPCs in support of conscience clause legislation to those in opposition. In relation to the limitations of the current study, future researchers could explore the impact of professional organizations through the examination of non-associated LPCs, explore a broader level of attitudes by heterosexual LPCs through a wider Likert scale for the ATLG, examine the specific roles of LPCs on the amenability of

attitudes towards LG individuals, examine the amenability of attitudes by heterosexual LPCs using qualitative designs to understand the nuances of this phenomenon that may have been neglected in this study, and examine the amenability of attitudes by heterosexual LPCs based on region. Since the intervention did not result in a significant difference in scores, it is recommended future researchers explore different instruments or broadening the application of the present instruments used in the study.

4. Conclusions

The findings of the study did not demonstrate a statically significant difference in scores on the ATLG as a result of the priming intervention. Since LPCs do not exist in a vacuum, it is difficult to gauge all of the influences that could have influenced the results (Shafaroodi et al, 2014). However, the study sought to not explore the specific influences acting upon the heterosexual LPCs but to evaluate the present attitudes and their amenability through brief intervention. As the findings revealed, a strong baseline level of positive attitudes toward LG individuals among heterosexual LPCs suggested that interventions for changing their attitudes may not be necessary. This study did not assess attitudes toward other sexual minorities or assess attitudes of heterosexual LPCs not associated with professional organizations, so these remain areas for future exploration.

Counselor educators and supervisors, the counseling profession, and all those invested in the mental health of diverse clients are needed to carry this research forward. Specifically, the counseling profession must train the next generation of counselors and counselor educators to be more keenly prepared to collaboratively combat the socio-ecological risk factors and promote the meaningful protective factors inherent to graduate education. Our standards should and do reflect the value counselors place on advocating for the vulnerable. At the same time, additional research is needed to determine the most effective ways to change attitudes towards valuing equity and diversity.

Potential Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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