A LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

University of St. Thomas Excel! Research Scholars are dedicated to their academic success with a strong goal and desire to immediately pursue graduate school upon successful completion of their baccalaureate degrees. These students are not just working to get into graduate school, they seek to be awarded funding for their success and preparation as they approach the next steps in their education. The Excel! Research Scholars Program models the Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Achievement Program, also known as the McNair Scholars Program, a nationally recognized U.S. Department of Education Program. Excel! Research Scholars are challenged, at great lengths, to be academically prepared and successful. Their goal is to succeed on their academic merit, and not based on quota.

President Obama once stated, “In a global economy where the most valuable skill you can sell is your knowledge, a good education is no longer just a pathway to opportunity – it is a prerequisite!” Buzz words, labels, and descriptors are no longer opening doors for people in jobs and graduate school. The country has endless numbers of first-generation college students, representing all walks of life. Many of these students have not had the chance to be exposed to knowledge about maneuvering the pathways of opportunity that lead to success. Some students are still banking on buzz words only to find out that all that buzz is what you know and your skills may be minimal. Today, life is no longer just about what you can talk about, or who you know, but what you produce in the end and the required contributions you can make.

The Excel! Research Scholars Program is a new door opened to first-generation college students through the hard work of many successful University of St. Thomas McNair Scholars, outstanding and dedicated program staff, and committed educators and administrators at the University of St. Thomas. Students demonstrated success from their hard work and determination. We are blessed to have this opportunity.

Cynthia J. Fraction, M.A.
Director, Excel! Research Scholars Program
ABOUT THE PROGRAM

The Excel! Research Scholars Program is a post-baccalaureate achievement program designed to prepare first-generation undergraduate students, students underrepresented by race in graduate school, and students with U.S. military status for graduate study and admission. The program works with students whose goals are to pursue graduate study immediately after completing their baccalaureate degree. Eligible undergraduate students are enriched with education and preparation for advanced study, which includes research experience, graduate school seminars, graduate admission exam training, writing assistance, and presentation training.

The goal of the Excel! Research Scholars Program is to provide eligible undergraduate students with the skills and education necessary for graduate admission and success. The program seeks to increase the attainment of graduate degrees of the populations it serves. Students admitted to the Excel! Research Scholars Program are required to be degree-seeking students enrolled at the University of St. Thomas, Concordia University-St. Paul, Hamline University, Macalester College, or St. Catherine University at the time of application.

This year, the Excel! Research Scholars Program admitted five highly motivated undergraduate students determined to succeed in graduate school for the summer 2013 program. Each student was paired with a faculty mentor who helped guide their summer educational experience. Students had the opportunity to work closely with a faculty mentor to complete a graduate-level research study. All students participated in graduate school seminars, professional development and presentation training, writing workshops, and graduate admission exam training. Students completed their research paper at the end of an eight-week summer program and presented their research at the Excel! Research Scholars Program Summer Research Institute.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine non-native English speakers writing experiences across disciplines at the university level, specifically among international students. International students are a growing percentage of students who use the Center for Writing; testimonials from international students serve as invaluable resources to describe reading and writing challenges. This study gives international students a voice to express their educational challenges and achievements through interviews. The strategy of inquiry is a narrative approach with the hope that students will share what I, the researcher, have deemed their “Literacy Narratives.” Analytic induction was used to analyze the interviews to uncover meaningful patterns and themes expressed by students. I conclude by sharing the students’ literacy and proposed measures the University of St. Thomas and the Center for Writing could implement in order to make the University of St. Thomas more culturally and linguistically inclusive.

INTRODUCTION

As a peer consultant at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul Minnesota, I am particularly fascinated with students whose native language is not English. When I first started work in the Center for Writing, I thought working with English as a Second Language (ESL) students would be simple—after all, I could focus on sentence-level “problems.” After a few consultations with ESL students, I quickly realized these students’ writing issues are much more complex than grammatical errors. I am particularly interested in the difference between American rhetoric and the students’ native languages. Students must learn how to compose grammatically correct sentences in academic English, and do so in a way accurately reflecting how essays are composed in respect to American rhetoric. Peer consultants and professors alike may tend to focus on grammatical “correctness” when reading ESL papers, but I wonder how helpful sentence-level instruction is to ESL students. Through this study, I hope to give ESL students a voice to express what is working—and what is not—when being taught American rhetoric and academic English.

The purpose of this study is to explore the cultural and linguistic differences ESL students face when writing and communicating in English across disciplines at the University of St. Thomas. Through semi-structured interviews, ESL students are given a voice to express their educational needs. The findings directly benefit the Center for Writing at the University of St. Thomas. The conclusions will be implemented when training new consultants, and will be used to apply new procedures within the Center, among other useful applications. Second Language Writers are a growing percentage of students who use the Center for Writing, so having testimonials from students themselves would serve as an invaluable resource. This research will benefit the University as a whole by providing information on how to better serve the growing international student population within classrooms. By providing international students with an opportunity to express their literacy narratives, I aim for the Center for Writing and the University of St. Thomas to become more culturally and linguistically inclusive.
Literature Review

Writing Center Methodology

Writing centers feel the strain on their resources as international and ESL students are becoming a significant percentage of universities across the United States. Many prominent scholars have researched writing center pedagogy when working with ESL students. Blau and Hall call for rethinking how peer consultants work with ESL students. Traditional writing center methodology dictates a “Socratic” questioning method with an emphasis on “higher-order” concerns when working with students, but the authors argue that this may not be an effective way to work with students whose first language is not English. Blau and Hall warn consultants about the danger of falling into “asking ‘closed’ questions” when using the Socratic questioning. When asking ESL students about grammar and word choice, consultants usually have a “right answer” in mind. As a result, ESL students are left guessing if they are not sure of the right answer, leaving the writer embarrassed and the consultant frustrated. Instead of focusing on “higher-order” concerns, the authors suggest acting as a “cultural informant,” meaning consultants should focus on areas of American rhetoric and, more generally, American life students may not completely understand. In turn, the writers act as “cultural informants” to the writing consultants, informing them about areas of their home country and writing styles.

Other sources agree with Blau and Hall’s idea of being “cultural informants” as the foundation for writing consultations. While Pipher’s text, The Middle of Everywhere: Helping Refugees Enter the American Community, does not deal with ESL students in academia exclusively, the author does reiterate the importance of American friends to refugees in order to become accustomed to American culture and way of life. Similarly, Thonus argues that consultants should teach “how to write, not simply how to get through a particular assignment.” By teaching ESL and international students general writing tactics instead of simply correcting grammar and sentence-level issues, writing centers become important cultural and academic meeting places for students to fully develop academically.

Narkamaru’s study, like many others studying writing center methodology, focuses on differences between ESL students and native speakers. In particular, she compares international student and bilingual student strengths and needs in an area of research previously lacking depth: lexical issues. Lexis, in this study, is defined as mastery of vocabulary allowing the student to easily express themselves. Citing Leki, Thonus, and Serevino, among other major researchers in writing center methodology, Narkamaru breaks the literature review into three parts—bilingual writers, International students, and responding to writers—to reflect the previous research and highlight the need for comparative research of multilingual writers and international students in regards to lexical issues. The study examined the strengths and weaknesses of lexical flexibility of U.S. educated bilingual writers and international students. Narkamaru calls for tutors to pay more attention to lexical needs during consultations in addition to higher-order concerns. She hypothesizes that tutors shy away from discussing lexical issues because they do not want to give students words or ideas. Her findings suggest some ESL students’ biggest needs are lexical instead of grammatical.

Pragmatics

Wolfson’s study was one of the primary foundations for continued research in cross-cultural comparison in languages. Google Scholar reports that her article has been cited 224 times in various studies of cross-cultural linguistics. These studies often expanded upon Wolfson’s broad understanding of cultural differences in speech patterns by exploring relationships between two specific languages or cultures. Wolfson’s study is vital to my research as it explains social pragmatic differences when working with International students. Wolfson’s study will inform my research question by acknowledging differences when talking across cultures and languages. Further, Wolfson calls for specific instruction in ESL classes of sociolinguistic rules to enable the students to communicate more effectively in written and spoken English.

Wolfson begins her article with translations of compliments from various languages (including Indonesian, Japanese, Iranian, and Arabic) to English. In doing so, the reader is able to see what the differences are in speech patterns across these different languages. The Indonesian compliment, for example, may not seem like a compliment to English speakers; conversely, it seems the speakers are
merely commenting on behaviors. Wolfson asserts that the Indonesian compliment comments on approval of behavior and accomplishments and this part of speech is reserved for upper-class members of Indonesian society.15 This may seem strange to English speakers who use compliments rather freely across social and economic boundaries.

The data collected in Wolfson’s study was based on 686 compliments gathered in a variety of situations. Wolfson claims that 80 percent of compliments contain adjectives, and within her data, seventy-two different adjectives were found. Interestingly, only five adjectives were used frequently: “nice, good, beautiful, pretty, and great.”16 These adjectives were found in over two-thirds of the data collected. All of the high-frequency adjectives are vague, allowing them to apply to multiple situations, explaining their regularity. In addition, some compliments use the verb to carry the sentiment. The two verbs that occur with frequency are “love” and “like.” From these observations, Wolfson asserts three patterns that closely resemble the semantic structures of English compliments.17

Since English compliments usually fall into these three categories, Wolfson calls for explicit instruction of these patterns in ESL classrooms. While many classrooms teach systematic formulas for greetings and thanks, compliments and other systematic phrases are often ignored because the patterns are typically unconscious to native speakers of English. Additionally, Wolfson illustrates in her study that these systematic rules for complimenting and other forms of speech vary greatly between cultures, increasing the need for specific instruction in ESL classrooms. Not only should ESL students be taught the structural format of speech, but also the situations these structures are used and accepted.

Similarly, Bell’s study on linguistic politeness in peer tutoring examines the use of linguistic structures and pragmatic competence within writing center consultations.18 Politeness theory is a “conversational contract” in which both parties of speakers have an understanding of each person’s conversational role.19 The common phrase “losing face” is derived from politeness theory; each participant respects the other’s role in the conversation in order to prevent them from “losing face” or being embarrassed. Both speakers want to be heard and accepted, so they will respect each other’s contributions to the conversation, even if they think it is boring or incorrect. Any act during speech that exhibits disapproval or criticism threatens the speakers “face.” For example, a young girl will listen to her grandma retell a story the girl has heard countless times in order to “save face” and not embarrass herself or her grandmother. Instead, the young girl may exhibit positive politeness strategies by telling her grandmother the story was very interesting even though it was boring. Generally, both parties want to maintain face, but some situations threaten this goal, including writing center interactions.

The aim of Bell’s research was to explore politeness strategies employed by consultants and students during writing center tutorials. The tutors met with the same students for thirty minutes weekly for the semester. Having the same tutor-student pair was important to the study because the investigator could analyze shifts in politeness strategies. She concluded that during the initial appointments, consultants used positive politeness strategies more because they wanted to relate to the student as their peer. An example of a positive politeness strategy is laughter. The tutor-student pair may partake in coordinated laughter even if the subject matter is not particularly funny to ease tensions during the consultation. As the consultations progressed throughout the semester, however, the consultants shifted to negative politeness strategies. The negative politeness strategies reflected the consultant’s shift into a more authoritative role when correcting the paper.20 Using linguistic hedges like “would,” “just,” or “possibly,” the consultant asserts what they believe the student needs to fix in the paper without being too commanding.21 However, if consultants rely on positive or negative politeness strategies too much, they may compromise the clarity of their suggestions. Therefore, Bell calls for politeness theory to be taught in consultant training courses in order to equip the consultant with the knowledge to analyze the effects of what they are saying and how the student perceives it.22

Interestingly, Nelson and Carson’s study, “ESL Students’ Perceptions of Effectiveness in Peer Response Groups,” asserts that Chinese- and Spanish-speaking students prefer negative politeness strategies and comments when working with peers on their draft.23 Unlike writing methodology studies, Nelson and Carson’s study focuses on general peer feedback. Therefore, the students interviewed in their study had no formal training on how to respond to their
peers’ papers. Regardless, this study gives insight to how students view comments about their writing.

The students analyzed in the study often gave positive comments about the draft initially but shifted to negative comments afterwards. One participant commented that she no longer took positive comments about her draft seriously because she knew the negative comments generally followed the positives ones. Another participant commented that positive comments were a waste of time and valued comments detailing change in her draft.24 Both the Chinese and Spanish speaking students found that grammar and sentence-level comments were not helpful, reflecting the practice in writing center methodology that the consultant should focus on “higher-order” concerns before addressing sentence-level issues.25

Nelson and Carson identified differences between the Chinese and Spanish students’ perceptions of what is helpful during peer tutoring sessions. The Chinese students focused more on group cohesion, and therefore were more reserved when making negative comments.26 The Chinese students tended to talk around their main point instead of more direct speaking patterns. In addition, the Chinese students spoke comparatively less than their Spanish counterparts to avoid embarrassing their peers. Conversely, one Spanish student expressed frustration when her peers did not give concrete suggestions.27 Therefore, it is important to recognize cultural differences in speaking patterns when working with students from different cultures and linguistic norms.

Assessment

Balester’s study, “How Writing Rubrics Fail: Toward a Multicultural Model,” challenges the use of writing rubrics in college classrooms because standardized English marginalizes students whose first language is not Standard Written English.28 While rubrics are important tools for teachers to “standardize” writing in English in order to fairly evaluate students, the rubrics may be overly general and simple in their evaluations. By solely evaluating students based on their professors’ perceptions of the severity of error, as dictated by the hierarchical writing rubric, students of different backgrounds may be downgraded unnecessarily. Balester calls for linguistically inclusive writing rubrics in order to respect multicultural and multilingual students whose English expression may not be Standard Written English.29

Like Balester, Abdullah Hady Al-Kahtany warns against the standardization of English because linguistic prejudice may be the unintended result.30 Focusing on Saudi Arabian students studying at Michigan State University, Al-Kahtany’s mixed method study details students’ perceptions of different dialects of English including Standard American English, Black English, and Indian English. The Saudi students were grouped into categories based on marital status, age, major, language proficiency, and motivation.31 The study consisted of three prerecorded 55 second-long oral readings of a newspaper article in Standard English, Black English, and Indian English. Participants listened to each recording of the article and filled out a survey based on their perceptions of the speech. The participants were asked to rank the speakers based on a variety of traits, including “intelligent,” “honest,” and “friendly.”32 Overall, Standard English was rated the highest among all categories of respondents.33 The study concluded the ESL students’ order of preference is Standard American English, Black English, and then Indian English, respectively; therefore, Al-Kahtany raises the question of whether Saudi students come to the United States with a linguistic prejudice. Further, linguistic stereotyping may develop through cultural exposure. Graduate students in the study tended to rank Black English lower compared to their undergraduate counterparts.34 This is especially concerning because on average, the graduate students lived in the United States longer than the undergraduate students, and therefore may have developed a linguistic stereotype based on prevailing prejudice. This study compliments my research by adding background about linguistic prejudice and international students’ exposure to various forms of English.

Student Perspectives

Most important to my research are studies centered on student perspectives. Interestingly, most writing center methodology studies deal with researcher or consultant perspectives of ESL student behavior with little insight from the examined student. Ilona Leki asserts the need for student voices in her book Undergraduates in a Second Language: Challenges and Complexities of Academic Literacy Development.35 Leki’s qualitative study focused on four
undergraduate students at a university. The students participated in bi-weekly, semi-structured interviews with Leki, or one of her research assistants, from their sophomore year until they graduated. The students were interviewed about their experiences in their classes and perceptions of literacy development. Additionally, participants were asked to keep a weekly journal detailing their academic work throughout the semester. The study allowed student voices to be the forefront of the research. By allowing students to express their own perspectives and experiences, ESL teachers and writing center consultants have organic data to shape their instruction. My study is designed to expand upon Leki’s research. Like Leki, I am using student voices to better explain the complexities of writing and communicating in English. My focus is pragmatic competence and general communicative literacy, instead of having academic, text-based interviews.

Similarly, the University of Minnesota’s “Voices of Multilingual Writers” video-based research allows students to give advice to other multicultural writers. Like Leki’s research, the primary focus of the University of Minnesota’s study is the development of academic English proficiency. While this is vital for international students’ successes in college, my research aims to focus on literacy beyond text-based work, including communicating effectively with peers and professors, social pragmatic competence, and adapting to American culture and rhetoric.

**Intercultural Sensitivity**

Through Milton J. Bennnet’s “A Development Model of Intercultural Sensitivity,” I am given a cultural lens to see how to work with multicultural students. Bennet’s model details how the development of intercultural sensitivity is an individual process, defined through a continuum of personal levels of recognition and acceptance. The development of intercultural sensitivity starts with the stages of ethnocentrism, including “denial,” “defense,” and “minimization,” and continues to the states of ethno-relativism, including “acceptance,” “adaptation,” and “integration.”

Starting at the beginning end of ethnocentrism is the stage of denial. People exhibiting the denial stage will outright neglect differences between cultures as a result of minimal contact with people of different cultures or being unaware of certain privileges that exist. Next is the defense stage, also found under the ethnocentric continuum. Individuals under the defense stage now notice difference, but polarize the differences by categorizing them as “good” or “bad.” People under this category may criticize others or uphold the superiority of their own culture. Conversely, individuals within this category may exhibit “reversal behavior” which results in degrading their own culture in favor of another. For example, someone in the defense stage may say “American Indians respect the land much more than brutish Europeans.” The last stage under ethnocentrism is minimization, in which individuals minimize the differences between cultures. This results in the saying that people are “all the same” without paying respect to different cultural values and norms.

Exiting the ethnocentric side of the continuum, one arrives at the ethno-relative stages. First is the stage of acceptance. As individuals become more aware of their own culture, one may see the distinctions between within different cultures without the judgments of “good” or “bad.” At this stage, individuals can suspend their judgments when viewing differences resulting in recognitions of different behaviors and patterns. Next on the ethno-relative stage is adaptation to difference. At this stage, individuals feel true empathy for people of different cultures and can appropriately shift his or her mind frames to effectively work with people of a different culture. The final stage in the Model of Intercultural Sensitivity is the integration stage. At this stage, individuals integrate certain parts of other cultures alongside of their own. An important distinction here is that individuals do not lose their own culture; conversely, they integrate words or habits of others alongside their own culture. This stage is most often found within non-doninate groups living alongside dominate groups.

Vicki Reitenauer, Christine M. Cress, and Janet Bennett’s essay “Creating Cultural Connections” details how students can relate to students of other cultures while engaging in service-learning projects. The authors touch on an important distinction between stereotyping and generalizing which is a helpful framework I will engage when talking about students of different cultures. Stereotyping is a rigid way of thinking, in which one bases opinions of other people of different cultures as representative for their entire cultural group. Conversely, a generalization is a “lightly held hypothesis based on
research about patterns of behavior in the other culture."42
While these hypotheses are helpful when working with people from different cultures, it is important that one does not act on these hypotheses until confirmed appropriate for the individual. In this research study, I am forming tentative hypotheses about different cultural linguistic behaviors, yet the hypotheses may not be completely generalizable to the entire student population because of the limited scope of my research.

**Methodology**

**The Research Site**

During the 2012 academic year, the University of St. Thomas saw a 22.7 percent growth in the undergraduate international student population,43 which accounts for 3.8 percent of the student population as a whole.44 From 2008 to 2012, there was an increase of one-hundred international students, 301 to 401 respectively.45 Compared to the 2.5 percent increase of undergraduate enrollment in general, the increase in international attendance is significant. Unsurprisingly, the Center for Writing sees significant numbers of consultations with international and ESL students. From June 1 2012 to May 31 2013, 23.5 percent of writing consultations consisted of students that self-identified as ESL.46

My study was conducted in the Center for Writing at the University of St. Thomas. Having worked in the Center Writing for one academic year, I am familiar with the culture and general demographics of students who visit the Center. The Center for Writing is a resource for undergraduate and graduate students at the University of St. Thomas. The majority of students served are undergraduates. Although the University of St. Thomas graduate program has its own Center for Writing, the undergraduate Center for Writing sees many students from the following departments: Education and Leadership, Engineering, and Counseling.

**Population**

The study consisted of three international students from the University of St. Thomas. Students were identified through the Center for Writing’s database; access was provided by Dr. Susan Callaway. Students who visited the Center for Writing five or more times during the spring 2013 semester were contacted through email and asked to participate in the study. The contact population was further narrowed by students taking summer classes. Since the Center is closed during the summer, I offered students a consultation in exchange for an interview. I sent six emails and received two emails back resulting in a thirty-three percent response rate. In addition, one student contacted Dr. Callaway directly asking for assistance with her paper. I emailed this student saying I could be of assistance and she agreed to participate in my study. The participants partook in videotaped interviews that lasted forty-five minutes to an hour.

Surprisingly, all of the research participants are Chinese. This is contrary to what I anticipated; while the Center does see a significant number of Chinese students, predominately Arabic international students are seen during the academic year. During the 2012-2013 academic year, the Center for Writing had 539 ESL consultations. Of this total, 335 consultations (62.2 percent) were with Arabic students while sixty-nine (7.2 percent) were with Chinese students.47

Therefore, I assumed the sample population would approximately represent the demographics seen in the Center, yet this was not the case. Consequently, a limitation of this study is the scope of the experiences across nationalities; what is expressed by my research participants may not be accurate for Arabic, Japanese, or other international students’ experiences.

This research is not meant to be generalized to the entire international student population; rather, it adds to general descriptions of student behaviors and perceptions. This is common in writing center studies which includes research of Nakamaru,48 Leki,49 among other writing center researchers. Understanding the individual and particular situations is important for educators and peer consultants to better serve the growing number of international students in higher-education.

**Method**

This qualitative study seeks to give international students at the University of St. Thomas a voice to share their literacy narratives. Therefore, the study is descriptive and dialogue-based. Participants were asked to fill out a questionnaire before they were interviewed.50 Next, participants were interviewed and videotaped.51 A voice recorder was used as a backup to the video camera. The
interview questions were open-ended and reflected three main categories: preparation before attending the University of St. Thomas, experiences in classes and the Center for Writing, and social communication experiences at the University of St. Thomas. Since I hoped to accurately reflect the participants’ literacy narrative, the interviews were conversational, allowing the topics talked about to be very fluid. Therefore, each interview focused on different aspects of literacy development based on what the participant thought was most pertinent.

I transcribed and coded the interviews. When transcribing the data, I preserved participants’ accents and speech patterns, including verbal hedges. As a result, some sentences were grammatically incorrect and/or confusing. However, it is important to respect the participants’ speech patterns to fully uncover patterns and themes. Specific examples and analysis of speech patterns can be found in the Findings and Discussion sections. To analyze the data, I used analytic induction, which “involves scanning the data for categories of phenomena and for relationships among such categories” in order to find “meaningful themes, issues, or variables to discover patterns.”

Participant Profiles

Three Chinese students agreed to participate in my research. All three participants are students from the University of St. Thomas and had at least one year left at St. Thomas. I used pseudonyms to protect the students’ identities, but the pseudonyms reflect gender.

<table>
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<td>Lin-Lin</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yu</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>China</td>
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Table 1. Summary of demographic information on student participants.

Findings: Literacy Narratives

Yang: “I want to talk to him, but I am still not confident to do it.”

Yang, a freshman at the University of St. Thomas, has a quiet yet friendly disposition. She had just completed her first year at the University of St. Thomas at the time of the interview and was taking summer classes. She came to me a few weeks prior with a paper for her theology class she was currently taking. As an accounting major, Yang’s experience with writing intensive courses has been limited to theology, geography, and ESL English course. When asked to rate her perceptions of others’ understandings of her written and spoken English, Yang consistently responded “in the middle” with “most of the time.” Compared with the other students I interviewed, Yang’s responses seemed the most guarded and reserved.

Yang spent a large amount of time talking about the differences with learning English in China and the United States. She emphasized the different demands of oral English within the United States:

I just think, oral English, is so, just not, really really what I learned here. It is really different. In China, we always we don’t have more time to speaking. We just do something for test. For example, grammar, writing. So I’m not sure if this is true, actual the English class.

Yang stressed how “different” speaking is in the United States multiple times during her interview, making oral English the most emphasized subject during her interview. While she found the test-focused grammar instruction in China helpful, she didn’t think that way of learning English “is the American way or the English way.” She seems to suggest that oral English was spoken very systematically in China, with great emphasis on grammatical correctness instead of pragmatic understanding: “So it is more focused on the grammar things and we were afraid to speak, because I always think ‘oh no, I speak, trouble little wrong things.’” Yang’s emphasis on her minimal preparation in oral English may contribute to the anxieties she faces when speaking and interacting in class.

Yang contributes increased proficiency in oral English to her year and a half in the “other school,” (which I assumed to be the ESL classes). Although she feels more
comfortable now when speaking in English, Yang asserts that Chinese people tend to be “a little afraid to ask” questions in class. This fear may originate from speaking in front of a classroom of people because she says she “always…would like to ask after class.” When she compared speaking to her professor to speaking with me during an interview, she commented:

When I talk with you, I’m a little fluid because I’m not worried to get it wrong, but if in the class, if I ask, and the question the professor cannot understand, that will get some trouble for me. [Laughs]

Her fear does not originate from intimidation from the professor; instead she is afraid to speak up during class because of her other classmates’ perceptions of her pronunciation and accent. Her anxiety when speaking is best described by her statement, “Yes, everyone is good at English except for me.” Clearly, her oral English is causing her much anxiety when learning at an American university.

As a result of Yang’s extensive training in grammatical structures in China, her confidence level with sentence structure seems very strong. However, an area she expressed troubles in is word choice. Referring back to the theology paper we worked on together before the interview, Yang talked about her strategies for writing papers in English. Against the well-informed advice from her friends, Yang relies on translating between Chinese and English to write her papers because “if I think about it in Chinese in my head that means just for the [same] sentence for every paragraph’s main idea, I will write it quickly.” While this strategy helps her complete her paper more quickly, Yang often runs into difficulty with word choice. Using translators makes it difficult for Yang to distinguish between synonyms to find the word that best fits the sentence. In addition, translating between Chinese and English makes it difficult to write her paper in proper American rhetoric and American sentence structure: “Sometimes I come here, the sentence is no problem but maybe American people don’t say it like this.” In addition to word choice flexibility, Yang spent a significant time discussing differences in American rhetoric, especially in regards to quoting and plagiarism.

Yang was quick to identify differences in structuring essays in her writing intensive courses in China respecting quoting habits. She asserts that in China there is less weight on quoting within a paper; if you don’t know the source of the original quote, it is acceptable just to leave it unquoted. Looking through the cultural lens of American rhetoric, Yang comments on the difference between Chinese and American rhetoric:

Now I find some special situation….it’s so funny. Because we have a big test at the end of the year… and people write the paper and quotation the sentence and say maybe it’s from some famous people. But if you check it, those people never say that word. I just want to put here to make the paper beautiful.

Overall, Yang’s interview is characterized by her observations and anxieties about differences between the Chinese and English language.

Lin-lin: “For me…because I speak a different language, I can write a paper, I’m proud of myself!”

Lin-lin is an energetic, fast-speaking Chinese international student at the University of St. Thomas. Like Yang, Lin-lin has lived in the United States for two years and is approaching her sophomore year at the University of St. Thomas. Lin-lin received my assistance for the same theology paper that Yang was working on. Lin-lin’s electrical engineering major has prevented her from taking many writing and reading intensive courses thus far at the University of St. Thomas, but she did cite English, geography, and theology as her most text-based classes. She rated her communication ability as above average, “almost all the time/rarely am I misunderstood.”

Compared to Yang’s academically focused interview, Lin-lin spent much time discussing communicative relationships during her time with me. She expressed difficulties communicating with American students yet also communicated understanding about American students’ relationships with international students:

Because I understand American students don’t know what you are thinking about so they might be nervous to talk to you. And for international students, especially for me and my friends around me, because we are not that much confident about our English so we all feel so nervous to talk to them so that’s why there is a gap between American students and us.

Like Yang’s interview, Lin-lin attributes anxiety when speaking with American students to a lack of English oral preparation in China. Recalling a story in which Lin-lin’s
landlord comments that she likes her accent, Lin-lin is unsure about her spoken English and is often worried about being misunderstood. Additionally, Lin-lin cites a cultural boundary as obstructing understanding between American and international students: “Sometimes it’s not about the vocabulary it’s about the society.” While Lin-lin is nervous about speaking to American students because of her oral accent, her biggest apprehension seems to originate from different cultural values. She comments that Chinese students “don’t understand the life” in America and the Chinese students do not know the trends in American music or news, making it very difficult to make small talk with classmates.

While Lin-lin asserts that American students are often hard to talk to, she makes distinctions between nationalities of international students of whom she is the most comfortable to speak with:

I feel much more comfortable speaking with international students from Asia or South America. I know from the Europe their pronunciation is very good and their appearance, to me, is just like Americans. So I don’t feel there is any difference. And for the South Americans, even though some like their appearance is like Americans, their personality is more outgoing and they are kind of more enthusiastic so you feel more comfortable to speak with them...

Her discrepancies between nationalities seem to suggest that she perceives that certain groups of people are more tolerant of her accent and speaking patterns. Furthermore, she is uncomfortable with certain “American style” activities. Speaking for herself and her Chinese friends, she stresses that they are not comfortable in party-type situations, which she attributes to short-term friendships. She recognizes that this is a cultural difference between the Chinese and Americans and appreciates that she might have to adjust to the American way of socializing.

Like Yang, Lin-lin quickly identified differences between Chinese and American rhetoric. She states she is changing her writing style to “American,” a change that she is actually happy to make:

For right now, I think writing English is a little bit easier for me. Yeah because when I was in China and writing a paper, I’m not very creative for the paper… So English just give you the whole point and give you evidence. I think it is very straightforward in the style. And then [it] just fits my personality or something...So right now I feel like kind of not that much harder for me to write in English, just a different language.

Lin-lin attributes her aptitude for science and math as the reason she feels more confident writing in American rhetoric.

Lin-lin’s concerns about word choice and lexis are very similar to Yang’s. Lin-lin expresses concern with her reading comprehension because she does not “have a lot of vocabulary compared to my friends around me here.” When she takes time to consult a dictionary or search for context clues, she becomes distracted and forgets what the paper is talking about. Like Yang, Lin-lin’s reading and writing concerns are not grammatical, but instead involve word choice flexibility and vocabulary mastery.

Lin-lin has many ideas of how to improve the academic and social climate at the University of St. Thomas for international students. One concern she has is how professors interact with international students. While she recognizes the need for international students to have extra attention from professors, she hopes that she will not be treated any differently within the classroom. Since Chinese classrooms typically are dominated by the teachers, leaving little room for student questions and discussion, Lin-lin says the Chinese are not comfortable speaking up during class. She recalled a time when her theology professor called out her and her friends by asking if the “Chinese ladies” understood, making her even more apprehensive to speak up during class. A similar event also happened in her communications class, when she was asked if she knows how to speak English which made her very embarrassed. She suggests that professors announce the first day of class that they are available to international students for questions but do not point out the non-native speakers during class.

Lin-lin also hopes that the University of St. Thomas could provide more activities and language preparation to international students. Citing her new job at International Student Services on campus, she emphasizes the need for more activities for international students because of the increasing numbers enrolling at the University of St. Thomas.

Yu: “Yeah, so I just don’t know what is wrong with my understanding in the meaning; I just don’t get the point.”
Yu, an upcoming senior at the University of St. Thomas, has lived in the United States for two years. Unlike Yang and Lin-lin, Yu took some college courses in his native country, China, before attending school in the United States. Therefore, he did not have the typical experience of other international students—he did not take an ESL or English course and received credit for many of the core courses from his Chinese university. Accordingly, his perceptions and experiences differ slightly from Yang’s and Lin-lin’s.

Yu is greatly immersed within the world of business through his major of accounting and his own personal interest. Our conversation was dominated about writing within business settings, especially accounting, and difficulties with business jargon and terminology when reading business texts, like the New York Times. Yu recalled writing a paper for accounting during the last spring semester that he took to the Center for Writing for assistance. Emphasizing the difficult material, Yu had a hard time rewriting accounting terms in his own words:

I just kind of [had a] hard [time] entire story I don’t quite understand what it is and I don’t want to deviate the original meaning from the original. Because that’s very strict and whatever they said that is it. And if I reword it I probably change the meaning.

Yu’s frustration with being told to reword his paper from the Center for Writing consultants may originate from confusion about the importance of citing sources in American culture. Yu highlights the differences citing sources in China:

In Chinese and oral writing in Chinese in high school or college like there is a concept…in China when you learn how to write. It says ‘every paper is [a] copy [of] another paper.’ I mean, it doesn’t mean exactly copy another paper, it means when you started to learn you know nothing; everything you learn is from the paper that already exists. And your point is from there…And after you learn so many years you already absorbed so many ideas and good sentences that you can’t remember where that sentence come from…so it is not necessary to quote when you say the exactly [same] idea or same sentence.

Therefore, Yu’s confusion seems two-fold: on one hand, he is still confused about the material he is trying to write about, but additionally he is confused about the American prominence on citations because of his Chinese upbringing. Yu revisited his confusion many times during his interview and was especially baffled about the American sentiment of writing original ideas:

So the biggest difference to the English writing is that everything is not your original idea you need to quote. At first I don’t know quite understand the point because how can you tell this is your original idea. This could be an idea that many people share. Maybe they’re not that popular but they definitely said the same thing and published the same thing in a paper. So how can you say that this is your original idea?

Yu seems to suggest that his struggle with citations is not merely the form and execution, but the American philosophy behind intellectual property.

Yu has been reading about the stock market in the Wall Street journal as an offshoot in his interest in business. While he can understand “95 to 90 percent of the words and the meaning, it is kind of hard to follow what they are trying to say.” Yu asserts that he can understand the sentences and most of the words, yet he still lacks the complete understanding of what the article is saying. When asked about a strategy he employs when reading complex texts like the Wall Street Journal, he points to understanding individual words as critical to understanding the entire article:

For me, there are so many parts that could be wrong…Like one word could have many meanings and I just know a few and in this use it could be a meaning I don’t know…So I just translate with an app…to find the most meaning the most make sense meaning in the topic.

Therefore, it seems that one of Yu’s main struggles is word choice, especially being able to distinguish synonyms among words with multiple uses. Yu reiterates his difficulty with word choice multiple times throughout his interview.

When speaking about communicating with American students, Yu expressed that Chinese students can use the wrong word with the wrong meaning without realizing, causing communication strains with American students:

If you speak, ask a question, an American could have their way to answer the question and the Chinese have a different approach to this question. So you probably
didn’t expect that answer so this is awkward… [laughs] Yeah because sometime the international could not organize the sentence really well so they end up saying something they didn’t mean. So this could make things worse…and they couldn’t realize that because they aren’t that sensitive to the sentence to what they are speaking.

Yu’s comment transcends correct word choice into the complex territory of pragmatic competence. Yu recognizes that not only do international students have to use the correct words when speaking with American students, they must also use language in an appropriate manner that Americans will recognize. Yu’s first management class was especially difficult for him as a transfer student because he had to adjust to group learning commonly found in American classrooms, which is very different from his professor-focused learning in China. Yu’s interview was characterized by change and adjustment—not only for him as an international student, but also for American students and professors adjusting to the changing face of American higher-education.

**DISCUSSION OF MAJOR THEMES**

I anticipated the majority of the interviews to be dominated with discussion of text-based, rhetorical learning gaps. However, the most commonly discussed themes tended to be pragmatic competence, communication and social differences across cultures, and intellectual property norms.

**Pragmatic Competence**

Pragmatic competence, briefly defined, is the ability to use language in a situation-appropriate manner. For example, a student would address a professor differently than they would address their best friend, depending on the context of the conversation. While these behavioral patterns may seem obvious to Americans deeply rooted in American culture, communication norms vary between cultures. All of the participants speak about pragmatic competence in a variety of situations, predominately dealing with interactions with American students and professors.

Yang, Lin-lin, and Yu spoke particularly about their anxieties when speaking up in class. These anxieties tended to originate from two sources: cultural differences in the classroom and language barriers. All of the participants commented on the differences in American and Chinese classrooms. The most apparent example is the perceived professor-student role. The participants pointed out that in Chinese universities, class sizes are much larger and the professors dominated the lecture, leaving little room for student questions and discussion. The transition to American universities, characterized by class discussions and frequent student input, cause the Chinese students great stress. In addition to the cultural shift in the classrooms, the participants also had to process material and respond quickly in a second language. Yu expressed frustration with the fact that American students could respond very quickly to the professors’ questions because they did not have to translate from English into their native languages, which leaves little room for international students to participate. Therefore, even if the international students wanted to participate, their chances to do so are limited. All participants expressed the need for professors to understand the complexities of attending college at a university that is not taught in their native language. Both Lin-Lin and Yang responded that they are conflicted about their international student status. They recognize the need for extra assistance from professors because of their language barrier, yet they do not want to be singled out because of their non-native status.

Additionally, the participants articulated perceived cultural differences when working and speaking with American students. Lin-lin said learning at a university in a different culture transcends academic coursework; learning the culture of another country is just as much work as memorizing logarithms. International students may be perceived as the “other” in American universities. This may be attributed to cultural and pragmatic differences. Yu commented about how Chinese students have different approaches to answering questions in English, which may confuse the American students they are talking with. Lin-lin feels a strain on what exactly she should talk about with American students. All the participants can form sentences correctly and intelligently, yet lack the knowledge of what to talk about in American culture. American students may take their bond with their peers for granted by talking about popular TV shows or musical artists; however, international students must face a large cultural learning curve. These experiences reflect
Nessa Wolfson’s claim that ESL students must be taught sociolinguistic structures and rules in order to communicate effectively in English. The participants may benefit from classroom-based instruction of how to communicate and what exactly to communicate about in the United States.

**Oral English**

Another aspect of communication anxiety may result from English instruction classes in China. All participants discussed how they felt ill-prepared in oral English. Yu commented that in China, classes focused on testing and grammatical correctness and spoken English was reserved for reading out of textbooks. The participants found this helpful for text-based assignments. Lin-lin commented that her ESL teacher told her some Chinese students are better versed in grammar and sentence structure than their American counterparts. This is great for paper writing and reading in English, but it further emphasizes the gap in support of oral English preparations for international students at the University of St. Thomas. Aligned with the mission statement, the Center for Writing supports international students with American rhetoric, critical thinking, understanding the assignment, grammar, among other assignment-based goals, yet does not provide assistance with oral English.

**Lexical Flexibility**

The participants’ literacy narratives align with Nakamaru’s findings about ESL students’ lexical flexibility. Yu and Lin-lin commented on their difficulties in finding the meaning of words when reading academic papers. The difficulty arose from a lack of synonym knowledge. The participants often knew one or two meanings of a certain word, but might not have understood the exact shade of meaning within the context. The lack of lexical flexibility would slow down their reading and potentially impact their comprehension. Yu expressed frustration with the fact that his lack of word choice can easily distinguish him from the American students in both classroom settings and social settings. He hopes American students and professors will be patient with him when he is trying to find the right word.

**Intellectual Property**

A major theme in the interviews was cultural differences with regards to intellectual property. American rhetoric greatly stresses the necessity to cite other people’s works in a paper. This reflects the Western cultural philosophy that ideas and words are property that requires ownership. This philosophy is not universal, however, and non-western students may struggle with the idea of plagiarism and intellectual property rights. Yu commented that he was often told by Center for Writing consultants that he had to change his writing into his own words. While he appreciated the concern for his paper and grade, he did not understand why changing the wording was so important in American writing. He worried by changing the wording, he would be changing the overall meaning of the sentence. Yu stated that the Chinese philosophy of writing and learning is that knowledge builds upon itself; therefore, a student cannot possibly remember where they learned concepts. Additionally, in China, using original language is acceptable and often encouraged to make the paper sound more authoritative. Yang’s account of the Chinese citing habits supports Yu’s assertion. Yang states that this difference is a result of a cultural dissimilarity between Chinese and American institutions. Recalling her high school experience in China, Yang asserts that papers that employed other people’s words scored higher than students who used their own original ideas.

**Plan of Action**

Based on the participants’ literacy narratives, it is clear the participants have much to say about their literacy development, both positively and otherwise. A major limitation of the study is the sample size; the three students that agreed to participate are all Chinese, making the data difficult to generalize. Yet, individual accounts are important for educators and students to understand the perception of somebody different from themselves. Therefore, I assert it is important to listen and understand what international students are saying in order to create a more culturally inclusive and successful environment for this population of students in higher education.

I argue changes can be made within the University of St. Thomas to accommodate the participants concerns. First, I would like to propose a meeting place for ESL
students to practice oral English. My research advisor, Dr. Callaway, and I name it “The English Café” at this preliminary stage. We propose the Café be held on Sunday nights in the O’Shaughnessy-Frey Library in the study area behind Coffee Bené. The Café can be a cultural meeting place for international and American students. This would be a “low-stakes” environment in which international students can speak to American students in English in order to practice their oral skills. The conversations would be casual, allowing international students to “test out” certain conversation topics with American students to further develop pragmatic competence. I hope this proposal would meet the participants’ needs. All participants mentioned the need for a meeting place for international and American students as a common ground for cultural knowledge. The American students who participate can inform the international students about popular subjects in American culture, including television shows and current news stories. However, the benefit will not merely extend one way. In turn, international students can educate American students about their home country and culture, allowing all the participants to become more culturally aware and inclusive. On a larger scale, small projects like The English Café can help students reach out to people different then themselves by providing common ground. The English Café can also address the participants’ concerns with lexical flexibility. The low-stakes environment would allow students to experiment with word choice and sentence structure with no judgment. Additionally, the Center for Writing and professors alike can benefit from understanding word choice difficulties facing international students. The participants commented that often their grammar and ideas are sound, yet they lack the word choice to accurately express their ideas. The Center for Writing can take a more active role in language development. Nakamaru called for language and word choice development to be a “higher-order” concern, along with critical thinking and idea development, within writing center consultations. From the participants’ testimonies, it is clear that the need for English language instruction, alongside general writing guidance, is important for ESL students. More explicit instruction dealing with cultural and rhetorical differences in writing may benefit international students. For instance, writing center consultants can spend more time talking about the cultural differences in citing sources and plagiarisms during consultations. By giving concrete reasoning, instead of telling students to “put it in their own words,” international students would develop a greater understanding of American rhetoric.

CONCLUSION

Three interviews were conducted in order to give international students a venue to express their literacy challenges, complexities, and successes. The interviews were transcribed and coded for prevailing categories. Main topics of discussion included pragmatic competence, oral English preparation, lexical flexibility, and intellectual property rights. As a result of the students’ stories, I plan to implement an “English Café” in which international and American students can converse to develop oral English skills and pragmatic competence.

I hope to continue my research to gain a more inclusive understanding of different cultures. Giving voices to other cultures within the University of St. Thomas can help educators understand the complexity of literacy development at the university level. I hope to use the same research method of literacy narratives to illuminate the development of the whole student.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


APPENDIX A

GENERAL INFORMATION

Excel! Research Scholars Program
Shannon Heitkamp

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Writing and Reading Intensive Courses at the University of St. Thomas:

English Preparatory Courses BEFORE Attending UST:

How many years did you study English before coming to the United States?

How long have you lived in the United States?

During my free time I generally speak in:

- English
- My Native Language
- Other

(please list)

When speaking in English, I believe I communicate my point effectively…

- All of the time (I’m always understood)
- Almost all of the time (Rarely I am misunderstood)
- Most of the time (Sometimes I am misunderstood)
- Sometimes (I am misunderstood more than I am understood)
- Almost always (I am misunderstood frequently)

When writing in English, I believe I communicate my point effectively…

- All of the time (I’m always understood)
- Almost all of the time (Rarely am I misunderstood)
- Most of the time (Sometimes I am misunderstood)
- Sometimes (I am misunderstood more than I am understood)
- Almost always (I am misunderstood frequently)

Plans After Graduation: (please check all that apply)

- Stay in the United States
- Return to your native country
- Move to another country
- Pursue Graduate School (If so, please indicate the expected program and if you will attend in the United States

APPENDIX B

Introduction:

- I will introduce myself and the project.
- Next, I will briefly explain the video camera and how I will be taking notes. I will allow the participant to “opt out” of the video recording and substitute it with a voice recorder.
- I will walk the participant through the consent form. Afterwards, I will ask the participant if they have any questions or concerns about the research and/or consent form.

Participant Introduction:

- I will ask the participant to introduce him/herself.

English Literacy Preparations:

- Please describe how you studied English before attending the University of St. Thomas. Was it classroom based? Conversationally? How many years have you studied English?

Writing in Academic English:

- How comfortable do you feel writing in academic English? What are your strengths? What are your weaknesses?
- What kinds of anxieties do you have about writing as a non-native English student? What are strategies that you have for addressing these anxieties?
- When a professor asks you to write an “analysis” paper, what do you think that means? What does your writing process entail when faced with this task?

Reading in Academic English:

- How comfortable are you when reading scholarly texts? Strengths? Weaknesses?

Cultural Expectations:

- Are there differences between writing in academic English and writing academically in your native language? Will you list these differences? Which ones do you find the most challenging?

Center for Writing Experience:

- Have you used the Center for Writing? Has this resource been helpful?
- What techniques used by consultants do you find the most helpful? Least helpful?
Experience with the University of St. Thomas:

- How would you describe your experience with the University of St. Thomas?

Accent:

- What strategies do you use to incorporate your accent effectively into academic writing?
- How successful have you found these strategies?

Differences in Essay Assignments Across Cultures:

- Can you describe a typical essay assignment in your native country?

Professor Expectations:

- What do you wish professors knew when working with non-native speakers?

Cultural Inclusivity:

- Describe your experiences communicating with professors and/or students with cultural or linguistic differences.

Support:

- Do you feel like you have received enough support when transitioning to America and the University of St. Thomas?
- Is there anything else you think is important to know about your experience with the University of St. Thomas or the Center for Writing?

Notes

2 Blau, Susan, and John Hall. “Guilt-Free Tutoring” 32.
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20 Ibid 52.
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See Appendix A

See Appendix B for a list of the interview questions


See appendix A.


ABSTRACT

Prostitution is widespread in the United States. Perceptions about prostituted females are largely negative and these negative, stereotypical beliefs likely influence how prostitutes are treated by legal and social service systems. In order to better understand what beliefs people hold about prostituted women and whether these beliefs can be changed, we surveyed the community about their perceptions before and after they watched a short first-person narrative from prostituted women. This study hypothesized that initial beliefs would be negative and that by using a first-person narrative, we would be able to change them into more compassionate or empathetic beliefs. An online, anonymous survey composed of qualitative and quantitative questions was used to measure beliefs before and after the first-person narrative was shown. Seventy-eight participants fully completed the survey. Preliminary quantitative results suggest that after viewing a short, three minute first-person narrative, people have a more empathetic view towards prostitutes. This research has implications for local organizations trying to find what current beliefs are held about prostituted women so that they may potentially decrease the stigma that may be held.

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Prostitution can be traced back to 2400 B.C. on one of the earliest lists of professions, along with cooks, doctors, scribes, and barbers (Lerner, 1986). Prostitution is believed to have started from temple prostitution, which involved religious rituals where sexual practices were performed for gods or goddesses (Lerner, 1986). This eventually developed into commercial sex, and by the middle of the second millennium B.C. it was considered to be "a likely option for daughters of the poor" (Lerner, 1986). Murphy (2007) and Williamson and Baker (2009) defined prostitution as any exchange of sexual service for economic compensation. Compensation may include drugs, sex, money, and sometimes housing (as cited in Murphy, 2010). Prostitution has existed for millennia and is still prevalent in our society.

Recently, the Federal Bureau of Investigation identified the Twin Cities as the nation’s 13th largest center for child prostitution and the Department of Justice determined that the average starting age is between 12 and 14 (as cited in Minnesota Girls Are Not For Sale, 2012a). Just recently, Yamiche Alcindor (2012) stated that in North Minneapolis, 50 percent of prostituted women over the age of 18 reported that they started as minors at the average age of 13. On any weekend night in Minnesota, the Shapiro Group estimated that 45 girls under the age of 18 are prostituted through online websites or escort services (as cited in Minnesota Girls Are Not For Sale, 2012a).

NEGATIVE BELIEFS AND PERCEPTIONS

The acceptance of prostitution and overall beliefs about prostitution tend to vary depending on the age, relationship status, religion, education level, gender, culture, and country (Stack et al., 2010; Cotton et al., 2012; Rasanen et al., 2007; Kissil et al., 2010; Roberts et al., 2010; Alikhadzhieva, 2009) and despite the prevalence of prostitution, community views about prostituted
women are overwhelmingly negative. Stack, Adamczyk, and Cao (2010) used data from the World Values Survey (Inglehart, 2004), which included over 45,000 respondents from 32 different countries, to determine how beliefs about prostitution varied by demographic variables. Stack et al. (2010) found that when participants were asked to report whether prostitution can “always be justified,” “never be justified,” or something in between, 71 percent reported that prostitution was always wrong by reporting that it “can never be justified.” Negative beliefs such as this one are a common theme among other research studies, further demonstrating negativity toward prostitution.

Stack et al. (2010) also focused on how public views vary depending on whether the culture is survivalist or self-expressionist. According to Stack et al. (2010), a survivalist culture is one that “places an emphasis on material security” caused by a history of battling for survival. A self-expressionist or individualistic culture is one that focuses on the tolerance of individual differences. An individual who is high in self-expressionism tends to be more liberal and empathetic, whereas survivalist individuals tend to have more conservative attitudes towards prostitution. Stack et al. (2010) found that survivalism serves as a powerful predictor of public opinion about prostitution. This suggests that where prostitution is prevalent, which may tend to be in low income places or in a survivalist culture, prostitution would be more frowned upon.

**Prostitution Myths**

In the United States, there are prostitution myths that are not in line with the facts. Cotton, Farley, and Baron (2002) surveyed undergraduate students in four different states using a previously existing, six-item scale called the Prostitution Behavior Questionnaire from Sawyer, Lewis, and Bucker (1998) (as cited in Cotton et al., 2002). Its six-items reflect six myths about prostitution. These items included the following statements: “there is nothing wrong with prostitution,” “prostitutes are victims of pimps,” “most prostitutes make a lot of money,” “women are prostitutes because they choose to be; it’s their choice,” “prostitutes enjoy their work,” and “prostitutes genuinely like men.” Each statement was responded to using a four-point likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” Agreement with each statement reflects an acceptance of the prostitution myth except for the statement “prostitutes are victims of pimps.” Disagreement with this statement is the prostitution myth.

Cotton et al. (2002) found that 5 out the 6 questions showed that men tended to be more accepting of the myths than women. Out of all the men who took the survey (n=276), 16 percent agreed or strongly agreed that there was “nothing wrong with prostitution”; 16 percent agreed or strongly agreed that “prostitutes enjoy their work”; 59 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed that “prostitutes are victims of pimps”; 45 percent of the men agreed or strongly agreed that “women are prostitutes because they want to be; it’s their choice”; and 39 percent believed that “prostitutes genuinely like men” (Cotton et al., 2002). Acceptance of myths such as these may rationalize the exploitation of prostitutes as well implicitly condone the violence prostitutes face (Cotton et al., 2002).

**Perceptions Under the Law**

Negative beliefs are also reflected in the way prostitutes are treated in the criminal justice system. Sullivan (2007) examined 51 court judgments from New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada, in which sex workers had been sexually assaulted. Sullivan (2007) discovered that since the 18th century, prostitutes could be considered victims of rape by British law; however, in Britain, Canada, and Australia, evidence of prostitution could be seen as relevant and could be used against a prostitute in the court of law. Under the law, evidence of prostitution soiled the victim’s credibility and made the prostitute appear to be incapable of being raped because it was assumed that prostitutes always agreed to intercourse. This evidence of prostitution then made it unlikely that a perpetrator would be found guilty. Similar judgments appeared to continue into the 20th century where many cases allowed promiscuity and prostitution to serve as evidence against the prostitute who had been assaulted. In the past 20 years, Sullivan (2007) noted that due to rape law reform, the courts have limited prostitution as evidence and prostitutes have started to be seen as victims; however, this change is slow but continuous.

**United States Law Reform**

Recent changes in the law can be found in Minnesota and across the nation. In Minnesota, it was not until the 2011 Safe Harbor Law that young children, 16 and under,
were seen as victims of prostitution rather than criminals (Minnesota Girls Are Not For Sale, 2012b). The Safe Harbor Law will eventually include adults 18 or older in 2014. Surprisingly, the legislation in the United States was only a few years ahead of state legislation. In 2000, the federal Trafficking Victims Protection Act proposed a new approach toward sex trafficking victims. This approach included protection, prevention, and prosecution for those who were victims of sex trafficking (Minnesota Girls Are Not For Sale, 2012b). Despite these positive changes, it cannot be overlooked that it took years for these laws to be enacted. Furthermore, these laws still fail to protect adult prostituted women in Minnesota who likely started at a young age.

**Prostitution – Recruitment**

Myths are not supported by research about troubles into actual lives. For example, the myth that “women are prostitutes because they want to be; it’s their choice” is not strongly supported by research on how women were recruited. By interviewing 22 prostitutes, parents of prostitutes, VICE police officers, outreach workers, health nurses, and other service providers and thirty-two women currently in the sex trade (Kennedy et al., 2007), researchers found that when recruited into the sex trade pimps used five techniques: love, debt, drugs, the “gorilla” technique, and position of authority. Murphy (2010) and Kennedy et al. (2007) have shown that there are common themes in the recruitment of prostitutes, what keeps them in the sex trade, and why they leave or cannot leave. Routes of recruitment vary on the individual level yet there are common themes among women. Researchers also found that the recruitment process could be narrowed down into two different forms: “pimp recruitment techniques” and “non-pimp recruitment techniques” (Kennedy et al., 2007).

Love as a technique consists of an emotional attachment formed over time. Pimps seduce young women, shower them with gifts, and pretend to love them. It was reported that often times the pimp would find a young insecure teenager and play with her vulnerabilities. By showering her with gifts and pretending to love her, the young woman would then feel guilty when her “boyfriend” told her they were out of money. Feeling guilty she would be convinced into prostituting herself in order to help. Other cases of the love technique involve tricking the young woman into going away on a trip in an unfamiliar city. When they arrive her “boyfriend” would then claim there was a financial emergency and the young woman would need to go out and work on the streets. Calling home to parents for help was discouraged since the parents would not know she was away with a man in a strange city. When the young women realize that prostitution is not a temporary job anymore, violent threats against their families were used in order to keep the women from fleeing. Women were often left feeling ashamed and afraid to ask for help. The fantasy of love frequently kept women from leaving as well. Other informants reported that this technique works because pimps are often “charming, intelligent, and good judges of human nature.” The love technique is usually used on women who do not come from an abusive home and is generally used on women from middle class or upper middle class homes (Kennedy et al., 2007).

Debt is also a technique pimp’s use. The debt technique includes the use of making a woman feel as though she owes the pimp money and therefore has to pay him back (Kennedy et al., 2007). For example, pimps will give women jewelry, clothing, drugs, or money with the impression that they are gifts, but later tell the women that they owe them. Women are then often turned to prostitution or led to believe that is their only option. Often times, women are unable to pay back this debt and for fear of being harmed, some women stay in the trade (Kennedy et al., 2007).

Drugs also play a large role in the recruitment techniques that pimps use. Kennedy (2007) found that 16 percent of women reported that drugs are what originally got them into the sex trade. With this technique, women may sleep with their drug dealer in return for drugs or may get into prostitution as a means to pay for their drugs. Women who were recruited this way reported being drug addicts previous to recruitment (Kennedy et al., 2007).

The “gorilla” technique is used by pimps as a form of recruitment. This technique was given its name by VICE police officers because of its primitive style (Kennedy, 2007). This style includes brute force and threats toward the women or their family members if the women did not comply with the pimps demands of selling herself (Kennedy, 2007).
In some cases, authority figures such as parents, foster parents, older siblings, or parents’ significant others can play the role of the pimp. Kennedy (2007) reported that 12 percent of the women were recruited in this way and in some cases women were forced to work in order to pay for their parents’ drug addiction.

There are other “non-pimped” pathways into prostitution, including substance abuse, financial difficulty, a past history of sexual abuse in the home, a sex trade hierarchy where women start as some form of a prostitute and move to another form (e.g. stripper to escort), or women are socialized or normalized to prostitution. Socialization/normalization includes the theory that women who are surrounded by prostitution become numb to their circumstances and are more likely to enter into the sex trade. “Free choice” was also reported by 18 percent of women in the study without further explanation (Kennedy, 2007). One woman reported that at the age of 10 she chose to go into prostitution and that she was fully responsible. The researchers suggest that it is unlikely that a 10 year old would know street prostitution exists and suggest that an external influence may have had an impact on her as well as some of the other women.

**Motivation to Stay in the Sex Trade**

Recently, Murphy (2010) interviewed 12 women who were taking part in an intervention program for women who were street-level prostitutes. She highlighted three themes keeping women in prostitution: drug addiction, social networks of support, and economic benefit.

In some cases, the physical and emotional need for drugs is overwhelming and often overpowers the need to get out of prostitution (Murphy, 2010). Prostitution also provides the financial means to support a drug habit which can keep the women in the sex trade for a longer period of time (Murphy, 2010). Murphy (2010) reported that one respondent stated:

> My habit is pretty bad, and where do you get that kind of money? I have to go out and walk the streets…corner to corner and all that kind of stuff. (p. 778)

Most of the prostitutes voiced that once the drug addiction ceases to exist, so will the prostitution (Murphy, 2010).

Second, women stayed in prostitution for fear of losing the social networks that have been there to support them. Women in the study reported sharing some sort of social support with their “co-workers” but Murphy (2010) found that these social networks actually played a role in their entry into prostitution as well as a possible role in why they stay or leave. Women expressed that they have a genuine concern for each other and often look out for one another. The social networks support them while they are in the sex trade; however, in some cases they also enable their drug addiction. For example, in Murphy (2010), respondent “Cara” reported:

> It takes you a while to trust the other girls because often they are looking for that free drug ride because no one likes to get high by themselves. So, if you find someone, then you take turns, one sits on the steps and the other goes out into the street. When she comes back, you go get the drugs. Then next time, it is your turn to walk the streets. (p.779)

In this theme, women support one another but they also support each other’s drug addiction in a cycle that keeps both prostitutes in the sex trade. It is important to note that it is difficult to determine just one reason why a woman may stay in the sex trade (Murphy, 2010).

Third, women may stay in prostitution for some sort of economic benefit. Murphy (2010) found that the reason behind the need for money may vary depending on whether the women are trying to support their children or just trying to pay rent. Whatever the reason, Murphy (2010) states that prostitution is providing the women with an income that allows them to have access to things they may not normally have access to, contributing to why some women remain in prostitution. Leaving the sex trade may be a long process filled with a feeling of shame, and this transition is then made more difficult when women lack the proper resources to get out (Murphy, 2010). Resources for leaving may include access to drug treatment centers for those who are addicted (Murphy, 2010). Prostituted women are met with enormous challenges getting into prostitution and trying to leave prostitution. For those women who are able to get out, they still have to confront social stigmas that say they are not victims and that it was their choice.
**PURPOSE**

This study aimed to present common themes of recruitment and factors that keep women in the sex trade by using first-person narratives of ex-prostitutes in a video clip. These first person accounts will be presented to participants in a survey about their general beliefs and perceptions held about prostitution. The goal of this research is to see if after hearing a first-person narrative, beliefs may be changed so that they are more compassionate or empathetic. By hearing a first-person account this research hopes to elicit empathy and serve as an educational background into the life of prostitution.

**REASONING BEHIND A FIRST-PERSON NARRATIVE**

After examining the negative beliefs internationally and nationally, this research hypothesizes that beliefs and perceptions held about prostitution in the greater Twin Cities area will be negative as well. Assuming that the beliefs will be negative, the question then becomes how can we change them? In order to change negative beliefs this research aims to see whether a first-person narrative may have the ability to do that. A first-person narrative is a story told by one person who experienced the action first-hand, for example a story or a memoir. This research is an online anonymous survey using a short video clip of women telling their stories about their lives in prostitution as well as what they are currently doing now that they are out of the sex trade. By allowing participants to hear an accurate first-hand experience they might be more aware of their experiences. After hearing these stories, it is likely that a participant’s perspective may change for two reasons: (1) empathy and (2) previous evidence provided by diversion programs.

**EMPATHY**

Empathy is one’s ability to understand and share the emotional perspectives of others and serves as a motivator of altruistic behavior (Preston & de Waal, 2002). First-person narratives are sometimes told through music. “It is a commonly accepted notion in the Western culture that music has the ability to […] induce emotional responses in the listener” (Vuoskoski & Erola, 2012) and is also known to help an observer have more accurate interpretations of what the performer is intending to express (Wollner, 2012). Mirror neurons, which are activated when humans observe others, are the basis of this empathetic response. These neurons have been implicated to be the biological basis for why music has been so effective at inspiring emotional responses (Berrol, 2006). In this study, music will not be used; however, first-person narratives in the form of a story or first-person account will be used with the intent of changing participants’ beliefs and perceptions about prostitution.

**DIVERSION PROGRAMS**

Kennedy, Klein, Gorzalka, & Yuille (2004) found evidence that diversion programs have the ability to change perceptions about prostitution. Diversion programs are programs set up for participant who have previously solicited sexual services. In these programs, awareness of the risks and the laws surrounding prostitution are used in the hopes that they may deter the participants from soliciting sex again. In this research, it was found that perceptions about prostitutes, prostitution, and purchasing sex changed to be more positive and in the directions that the program intended. Only three items on their survey did not change significantly. The items were likely to have not changed due to a lack of education about them in the program and because a stronger answer could not be given in order to change the responses. Their findings cannot be generalized, however they suggested that through education and awareness, change may be possible. Thus, by using a first-person narrative, it may be possible to elicit change.

**METHOD**

Participants included an age range of 18 to 65 with a total of 78 participants having fully completed the survey. Of these respondents, 31 percent were male, 67 percent were female, and 3 percent were transgender. Educational background ranged from 8th grade (1 percent) to graduate or professional degree (21 percent). Of these 78 participants, 76 percent identified as White/Caucasian, 8 percent as Black/African-American, 4 percent as Hispanic or Latino/Latina, 1 percent as Asian/Pacific Islander, 5 percent as Biracial/Multiracial, and 6 percent reported “other.” With the 78 respondents, 35 percent reported being from the greater Twin Cities area with 65 percent reporting a different origin. Some of these included other states in the United States, with a few people reporting other countries
This concurrent mixed methods study has two aims. The first specific aim is to use an online anonymous survey to evaluate people’s beliefs about women’s experience working in prostitution. The second specific aim is to determine whether hearing a first-person account will alter perceptions about a woman’s experience in prostitution. We hypothesize that after hearing first-person accounts, perceptions will change and be more compassionate or empathetic.

To address the first specific aim, an anonymous survey will be distributed online including questions from the “Attitudes Toward Prostitution Scale” and original questions that were created and modified in discussion with the co-investigator as well as with advocates for local women who are/were prostitutes (Sawyer, S.T., & Metz, M.E., 2007). Survey distribution will occur online by following a link to the University of St. Thomas’ Qualtrics account. This link will be sent out via e-mail, word of mouth, and through social media. This survey will take no longer than 20 minutes and will include pre-qualitative and quantitative questions, a short video, a comprehensive quiz on the video, post-qualitative and quantitative questions, and demographic questions.

To address the second aim, participants will answer the same qualitative and quantitative questions after they have viewed the short first-person narrative video clip. The short video is an edited clip from the Mary Magdalene Project pulled from YouTube. Certain scenes were cut in order to make the video more concise. To analyze whether beliefs have changed by using this first-person narrative video, we will use a paired T-Test at a 95 percent confidence level and qualitative analysis to compare pre and post narrative beliefs.

In conducting this survey, we will be able to assess beliefs about prostitution and determine whether those beliefs can change after watching a first-person narrative. If the results support the hypothesis, this will provide new insight into the field as well as provide an important service to local organizations that are trying to better target their message. It may be possible for organizations to be more effective in targeting their audience by finding out what negative beliefs and stigmas might be held about prostitutes and prostitution. By finding where the stigmas lie, organizations may be able to provide children and adults with an opportunity to get off the streets and potentially decrease stigmas about prostitutes and prostitution.

**Preliminary Results**

We have performed a preliminary analysis of the quantitative data; however, qualitative data has not yet been coded yet. A paired T-Test of the quantitative data has been run in order to compare pre and post narrative perceptions about prostitution myths. Participants were asked to respond to eight statements using a likert scale from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree (4). Data from the 78 participants who fully completed the survey was used.

In general, the attitudes toward prostitutes and prostitution changed and became more compassionate after participants viewed the first-person narrative. In six out of the eight statements, the change was statistically significant at a 95 percent confidence level. In the second and fourth statements, we can see the biggest change. The second statement, “women are prostitutes because they want to be; it’s their choice,” changed from and average response of 2.26 to 1.86. The fourth statement, “prostitutes are victims,” changed from an average response of 2.76 to 3.28. Data for all eight statements can be found in Figure 1.

![Figure 1. Eight Statement Mean Responses](image-url)

Changes were also found in response to the question, “if you knew that someone was a prostitute/ex-prostitute, how likely would you be to engage in a conversation with her in a public place such as church, the grocery store, a gas
station, the mall, etc.?" On a scale of 1 to 3 (1 = not likely, 2 = somewhat likely, 3 = likely), pre-narrative responses showed that 59 percent said they were likely to engage in a conversation with a prostitute/ex-prostitute, whereas post-narrative responses showed that 68 percent said they would engage in a conversation with someone they knew was a prostitute or ex-prostitute. A change in the participant’s response was found to be marginally significant at .07 (t = -1.833, p < .05).

The last quantitative question asked participants, “how much do you think each of the following factors are responsible for women getting into the sex trade?” These eight factors included: parents/family upbringing, women’s individual choices, history of childhood abuse, lack of education, lack of community involvement, lack of available jobs, lack of financial support, and lack or morals. With these eight factors, participants were asked to place each factor into three different boxes: “not responsible,” “somewhat responsible,” or “largely responsible.” Pre-responses showed that 57 percent participants perceived “lack of financial support” to be the top factor that was “largely responsible.” After the video, a “history of child abuse” was believed to be “largely responsible” with 78 percent of participants ranking this factor at the top of the list. Data may be found in Figure 2.

**Figure 2. Factor Responsibility**

**DISCUSSION**

The preliminary results suggest that a significant change in perception about prostitution occurred by using a first-person narrative of prostitute’s experiences. The purpose of this study was to see what beliefs and perceptions are currently held about prostitution and whether or not beliefs and perceptions held about prostitution could be changed by using a first-person narrative. Assuming that the beliefs were negative, the hope of this study was to change them into being more compassionate or empathetic.

There are a few limitations to the current study. This study aimed to find out what perceptions were specifically held in the greater Twin Cities area; however, more data is needed because only 35 percent of participants reported being from the greater Twin Cities area. This study was also a pilot study and therefore did not use any control variables. This also means that this survey was not randomly distributed and was instead given to a convenience sample. Another limitation is that we have not coded for the qualitative data yet.

Future studies may need to include different control variables in order to ensure that the change is significant. Other researchers may want to randomly distribute their survey so that they may control for participants who are only from a specific area, such as the Twin Cities, as well as control for an equal amount of men and women.

These data offers important information for the few organizations in Minnesota that deal with prostitution. Some organizations include the Northside Women’s Space, Breaking Free, and Adults Saving Kids. With this pilot study, it may be possible for these organizations to be more effective in targeting their audience by discovering what negative beliefs and stigmas are held about prostitutes and prostitution. By finding where the stigmas lie, organizations in the future might be able to potentially decrease stigmas and properly provide women with an opportunity to get off the streets. Perhaps by using a short, ninety-second first-person narrative video in a commercial promoting public awareness about prostituted women, organizations might be able to change some of the perceptions held about prostituted women.

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CONSONANCE AND DISSONANCE: 
EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES OF HEALTH EDUCATORS TEACHING SEXUALITY CURRICULUM

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ABSTRACT

Background: Sexuality education has been a topic of contention in the U.S. There is no standardized curriculum, although some have suggested this (Future of Sex Ed Initiative, 2012; Minnesota Department of Education, 2007; Buston, Wight, & Scott, 2001) due to the high prevalence of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and teenage pregnancy in the U.S. In examining sexuality education, it is pertinent to understand how sexuality education develops, the prevalence of STIs and teenage pregnancy, and student and parental perspectives in regard to sexuality education. The purpose of this study is to explore experiences of those teaching sexuality curriculum, namely health educators, and add to the limited amount of research on the perspectives of health educators teaching sexuality curriculum. Examining these categories provides background on: (1) the problems within sexuality education; (2) how the lack of structure influences health risks; (3) whether the current material reflects what is relevant to student needs and parental suggestions; and (4) what health educators believe is essential to the curriculum.

Purpose: This study explores whether there is an incongruence between sexuality curriculum being taught and the material health educators’ within the Twin Cities metro area of Minnesota believe are relevant to their students’ needs, the challenges health educators face while teaching sexuality curriculum, and their perceived role in addressing the sexual health needs of students.

Methods: An email was sent to fifty health educators teaching in the Twin Cities metro area of Minnesota, with a link to a 7-item survey via SurveyMonkey. The health educators could elect to participate in individual interviews by leaving contact information at the end of the online survey. Descriptive statistics were obtained from SurveyMonkey. A qualitative analysis was used to identify themes in the individual interviews. Health educator’s responses to the online survey were translated into percentages and graphs. The individual interview responses were grouped into categories based on common themes.

Results: Thirteen health educators participated in the online survey and four in the individual interviews. Health educators felt an insufficient amount of time was devoted to sexuality topics. This result was aggravated by the lack of standardized education, leaving districts and health educators to develop the sexuality curriculum. Some health educators did not believe they received adequate preparation before teaching sexuality topics. Health educators wanted other topics in the sexuality curriculum, such as cyber-bullying and communication in relationships. The health educators perceived themselves as a resource to students, providing factual and unbiased information.

Conclusion: There was incongruence between current sexuality curriculum and preferences of health educators in terms of time and curriculum needs. Future research endeavors can explore other difficulties health educators face while teaching sexuality curriculum, such as: parental disapproval or the lack of undergraduate preparation for teaching sexuality education.
INTRODUCTION

This research explores health educators’ perspectives teaching sexuality curriculum within the Twin Cities Metro area of Minnesota, where the majority (66%) of Minnesota’s population resides (United States Census Bureau, 2013). Sexuality is a topic that influences our physiological and psychological well being (Dyson & Smith, 2012). This study examines the consonance, or dissonance, within the sexuality curriculum being taught in Minnesota. In addition, it addresses the material health educators believe are relevant to their students’ needs, challenges educators face while teaching sexuality curriculum, and their perceived role in addressing the sexual health needs of students. It is pertinent to understand health educators’ perspectives of sexuality curriculum because students have voiced how educators influence their understanding of the material (Eisenberg, Madsen, Oliphant, Sieving, & Resnick, 2010; King, 2012). Therefore, sexuality education varies from state to state, but also within school districts. The knowledge a student gains at school should provide a strong educational foundation. However, this is difficult when an essential part of school curriculum, sexuality education, is not standardized (Future of Sex Ed Initiative, 2012; Minnesota Department of Education, 2007; Buston, Wight, & Scott, 2001). There appears to be an inconsistency in students’ education, especially when students learn about sexuality topics in informal settings, such as conversations with parents and peers. Research indicates the sexuality curriculum a student receives correlates with health risks such as STIs and teenage pregnancy (Hogben, Chesson, & Aral, 2010; Stanger-Hall & Hall, 2011). In exploring the perspectives of health educators teaching sexuality education in the Twin Cities Metro area of Minnesota, it is important to examine the structure of education nationally, the structure of sexuality education within Minnesota, the prevalence of STIs and teenage pregnancy in the United States, and student and parental perspectives in regard to sexuality education to provide a foundation for how these topics relate to health educators.

BACKGROUND

Sexuality education is a controversial topic within the U.S. (Eisenberg, Madsen, Oliphant, Sieving, & Resnick, 2010; King, 2012). State officials and parents are among some of the people who debate as to what is essential to the sexuality curriculum (King, 2012; Dyson & Smith). Therefore, sexuality education varies from state to state, but also within school districts. The knowledge a student gains at school should provide a strong educational foundation. However, this is difficult when an essential part of school curriculum, sexuality education, is not standardized (Future of Sex Ed Initiative, 2012; Minnesota Department of Education, 2007; Buston, Wight, & Scott, 2001). There appears to be an inconsistency in students’ education, especially when students learn about sexuality topics in informal settings, such as conversations with parents and peers. Research indicates the sexuality curriculum a student receives correlates with health risks such as STIs and teenage pregnancy (Hogben, Chesson, & Aral, 2010; Stanger-Hall & Hall, 2011). In exploring the perspectives of health educators teaching sexuality education in the Twin Cities Metro area of Minnesota, it is important to examine the structure of education nationally, the structure of sexuality education within Minnesota, the prevalence of STIs and teenage pregnancy in the United States, and student and parental perspectives in regard to sexuality education to provide a foundation for how these topics relate to health educators.

STRUCTURE OF SEXUALITY EDUCATION

The Educational System within the United States is divided into two bodies: The Federal and the State. The Federal functions as a regulatory body, creating acts such as the No Child Left Behind Act, to ensure all students are provided equal access to education and are meeting state standards (U.S. Department of Education, 2008; U.S. Department of Education, 2010 A; U.S. Department of Education, 2010 B). The States act as their own governing body and form curriculum, set standards, and create tests to evaluate if students are reaching standards. The legislature develops and drafts the statutes, which are approved by the Office of the Revisor of Statutes (The Office of the Revisor of Statutes, 2013).
Sexuality education in the United States is often incorporated within the broader health education curriculum. Presently, there are no national sexuality education standards. However, the Future of Sex Education Initiative (2012), in partnership with organizations such as American School Health Association, the National Education Association-Health Information Network and the American Association for Health Education has suggested national standards. The core content include the following: (1) anatomy and physiology (e.g., explaining bodily mechanisms); (2) puberty and adolescent development (e.g., mental and physical changes during puberty); (3) identity (e.g., examining self-perceptions); (4) pregnancy and reproduction (e.g., conception and contraception); (4) STIs and HIV (e.g., identifying STIs, preventative measures, testing, and treatment options); (5) healthy relationships (e.g., nourishing interactions through effective communication); and (6) personal safety (e.g., facilitating a safe atmosphere within academic settings) (Future of Sex Education Initiative, 2012).

There are two key statutes in Minnesota relating to sexuality education, Minnesota Statute 121A.23 and Minnesota Statute 120B.20 (The Office of the Revisor of Statutes, 2012 A; The Office of the Revisor of Statutes, 2012 B). These statutes contain nine points. For the purpose of this study, five of the nine will be addressed. Minnesota Statute 121A.23 is titled “Programs to Prevent and Reduce the Risks of Sexually Transmitted Infections and Diseases.” This statute addresses the following points: (1) STIs preventative and risk-reduction measures must be within the curriculum; (2) the information must be current and factual; (3) it must be comprehensive, including material aiding students to refrain from sexuality activity until marriage; and (4) partnerships between districts, state and local agencies having programs relating to STIs prevention and reduction must occur. There is an emphasis on STIs within this statute to aid in the reduction of certain health risks. This is due, in large part, to Minnesota’s high rates of STIs such as gonorrhea and Chlamydia (MDH, 2012 A). It is important to note that although there is a call for the sexuality curriculum to be comprehensive, the term “comprehensive” is not defined by Minnesota Statute 121A.23, meaning districts are left to define “comprehensive” for their own purposes (The Office of the Revisor of Statutes, 2012 A).

Minnesota Statute 120B.20 is titled “Parental Curriculum Review,” referring to parental rights in regard to education. Parents (or students who are eighteen-years old) can withdraw their child (or themselves) from the sexual component of health education. The school may provide an alternative lesson. However, if the parent (or eighteen-year old student) does not approve of the alternative lesson, the parent (or eighteen-year old student) may provide another lesson. Minnesota Statute 121A.23 and Minnesota Statute 120B.20 bring about two concerns in regard to the structure of sexuality education: (1) the guidelines for sexuality education are broad and (2) schools may not be required to teach sexuality education to all students if a parent does not want their child (or an eighteen-year old student) to learn sexuality curriculum within schools (The Office of the Revisor of Statutes, 2012 A; The Office of the Revisor of Statutes, 2012 B).

The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) has also created recommendations that districts may use in developing and implementing their curriculum to meet state standards, known as the “Minnesota Benchmarks for Health Education” (MDE, 2007). These are suggestions as to what topics students should have an understanding of after the completion of each grade level. As early as kindergarten, the MDE suggests that students understand appropriate touch; demonstrating good vs. bad touch and how to communicate personal space to others. In grade five, students should understand how HIV is transmitted, the effects on the immune system, and treatments available. In grade nine, students should demonstrate how their behavior could affect their health and the advantages of being abstinent. These benchmarks are less broad than the statutes and are similar to the core content suggested by the Future of Sex Education Initiative; however, both are only recommendations, not laws or policies (MDE, 2007; Future of Sex Education Initiative, 2012).

The amount of time devoted to sexuality curriculum within health education varies by school districts. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (2011), an average of 17.2 hours from kindergarten through twelfth grade is allotted for sexuality education, which consists of topics such as pregnancy and STIs prevention. Of the 17.2 hours on average devoted to sexuality education, 3.1 hours are within elementary school, 6 hours are within middle school, and 8.1 hours are...
within high school (CDC, 2011). This is minuscule when compared to the estimated 1,091 hours of science students receive from elementary through middle school as illustrated in Figure 1 (National Science Teachers Association, 2007). The inadequate time and attention devoted to sexuality education may result in a poor foundation of sexual health knowledge, which can lead to risky adolescent behavior and health risks.

**Figure 1. Time (in hours) on Average Devoted to Sexuality Education vs. Science**

**Prevalence of STIs and Teen Pregnancy**

Adolescents between the ages of fifteen to twenty-five comprise of 25% of sexually active persons within the United States; however, this group accounts for approximately 50% of the reported STIs (Future of Sex Ed Initiative, 2012; Weinstock, Berman, & Cates, 2000). This is a public health concern that affects the economy as well. An estimated six and one half to eight billion dollars each year are spent on STIs related diagnoses and treatments (MDH, 2013; Chesson, Blandford, Gift, Tao & Irwin, 2000). Recent statistics from the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) has shown an increase in STI rates; STIs account for approximately 70% of reported disease to the MDH. Since 2011, gonorrhea increased by 35%, Chlamydia increased by 7%, and HIV infections increased by 8%. These are only the accounts reported to MDH (MDH, 2012 A; MDH, 2012 B). The most insidious quality of STIs is that many are asymptomatic, and without being treated, can lead to reproductive complications such as infertility (LeVay, Baldwin, & Baldwin, 2009; WHO, 2013 A).

The high prevalence of STIs within the U.S. (Future of Sex Ed Initiative, 2012) has led researchers to examine the correlation between STIs rates and sexuality education. Hogben, Chesson, and Aral (2010) conducted research on abstinence-only sexuality education policies and occurrence of STIs within the U.S. This study examined the rates of gonorrhea and Chlamydia within persons between the ages of fifteen to twenty-four. The scholars found that the states with policies emphasizing abstinence-only sexuality education had higher rates of gonorrhea and Chlamydia compared to states that had no policies emphasizing abstinence-only sexuality education (Hogben, Chesson, & Aral, 2010).

Teenage pregnancy is another public health concern. The U.S. has one of the highest rates of teen pregnancy in the developed world (Kost, Henshaw & Carlin, 2010). More than nine billion tax dollars are spent on teenage pregnancy related costs, from health needs to the inadvertent decrease of “tax revenue” (Hoffman, 2006). Research has examined the correlation between teenage pregnancy rates and sexuality education policies. Stanger-Hall and Hall (2011), for instance, reviewed the abstinence-only sexuality curriculum and teenage pregnancy rates within the U.S. and discovered that states with schools teaching abstinence-only sexuality curriculum had higher rates of teenage pregnancy compared to states with more comprehensive sexuality education. This led the researchers to believe abstinence-only sexuality curriculum is not only ineffective, but also produces the opposite of the desired results (Stanger-Hall & Hall, 2011). In other studies, students who received comprehensive sexuality education had lower rates of teenage pregnancy than students who did not have any form of sexuality education (Kohler, Manhart, & Laffery, 2008). The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) made preventing teenage pregnancy a public health issue (CDC, 2013). According to Langille (2007), there are other negative outcomes from teenage pregnancy. For example, teenage mothers are less likely to complete high school education and/or continue with post-secondary education. Research indicates that lower educational attainment correlates with lesser lifetime earnings (Langille, 2007). In addition, infants born to teenage mothers often have a host of health complications, including low birth weight and an increased likelihood of mortality during infancy (Langille, 2007). With STI rates increasing and teenage pregnancy rates in U.S. trumping other developed nations, it is necessary to not only examine...
the structure of sexuality education, but also examine the perspectives of those it affects.

**Parent Perspectives**

Qualitative studies relating to parental perspectives have been helpful in learning what parents teach at home and what they want their children to learn within schools. Dyson & Smith (2012) used focus groups and surveys to explore parents’ perspectives pertaining to sexuality education. The scholars found that parents wanted school-based, comprehensive sexuality education for their children. There was a discrepancy as to what topics comprehensive sexuality education should contain, such as what subjects are age-appropriate, the consistency between parents’ values and the information their child is learning in school, and the potential to omit topics that parents thought should be discussed with their child and not within school (Dyson & Smith, 2012). Other studies have found that more than 80% of parents want their high school children to have school-based sexuality education and nearly two-thirds of parents want their students to have sexuality education incorporated from kindergarten through twelfth grade (Welshimer & Harris, 1994). Likewise, Alexander (1984) found the majority (66%) of parents were in favor of school-based sexuality education, and most parents (94%) believed the curriculum should be kept as is or developed further rather than be decreased or eliminated. Additionally, 95% of parents believed parents should be the main source of sexuality information for their children, with school being the second source (Alexander, 1984). Exploring parental perspectives has provided information on the sexuality topics parents want their children to be learning. It is also important to examine the experiences of those enrolled in the health courses, students.

**Student Perspectives**

In recent years, many researchers have conducted studies on students’ perspectives of sexuality curriculum. Byers, Sears, Voyer, Thurlow, Cohen and Weaver (2003) examined 1,663 high school students’ perspectives on sexuality education. The majority (92%) of students wanted school-based sexuality education. Students stated that the comfort level of the instructor, in terms of teaching sensitive topics, was an important quality effective instructors should possess (Byers et al., 2003). Eisenberg et al. (1997) also found that students valued health educators who were transparent when teaching sexuality topics. Students mentioned the educator should be someone who is knowledgeable in the sexuality education field and not simply a coach from the sports department. In the Byers et al. (2003) study, 77% of students believed parents and school systems should teach sexuality education. Additionally, students wanted specific topics to form the sexuality curriculum, such as statistical information on the number of known sexually transmitted infections and applicable material such as how to properly wear a condom (Byers et al., 2003). Allen (2008) also explored students’ perspectives of sexuality-based curriculum in schools. The topics students wanted their curriculum to consist of related to emotional and social well being within relationships, the pleasure received from sexual behavior, and an unbiased discussion on abortion (Allen, 2008). Eisenberg et al. (1997) also found that high school students wanted school-based, comprehensive sexuality education, believing sexuality topics were an important part of health education curriculum. Students felt sexuality topics should be delivered in a discussion-format rather than lecture and in an unbiased manner so students do not interpret behavior as wrong or right, allowing them to make their own decisions (Eisenberg et al., 1997). In addition, students believed having guest speakers who told their experiences was an effective method of teaching and valued hands-on activities such as learning how to use contraceptives. Students also felt that by ninth grade, students should have a solid foundation in sexuality education topics (Eisenberg, et al., 1997).

**Health Educators Perspectives**

Although many studies are available pertaining to students’ and parental perspectives regarding sexuality education, research on the perspectives of health educators is limited. Eisenberg, Madsen, Oliphant and Sieving (2013) explored health educators’ perspectives within Minnesota and the difficulties that emerged while teaching sexuality curriculum. Surveys gathered information such as the number of years each educator had taught and the difficulties educators’ might encounter in teaching sexuality curriculum. Most health educators taught anatomy (79%), STIs (92%) and healthy communication
in relationships (84%), while topics such as sexual orientation (33%), and abortion (29%) were less prevalent, potentially due to the value-based sensitivity of these topics (Eisenberg et al., 2013).

Health educators discussed the following difficulties when teaching sexuality curriculum: funding, district guidelines, time availability, and parental support. Forty-eight percent of health educators cited time availability as a difficulty and 45% had worries related to parental, student and administrative reactions to the sexuality material (Eisenberg et al., 2013). Health educators in Scotland also cited difficulties in teaching that influenced their experiences, such as lack of training prior to teaching sexuality material (Buston, Wight & Scott, 2001). Other qualitative studies examining health educator’s perspectives also found that health educators felt ill-equipped or lacked academic training in sexuality education (Eisenberg et al., 2010).

The purpose of this study is to add to the limited amount of research on the experiences of health educators by exploring the question, “Is there an incongruence between the sexuality curriculum being taught and the material health educators teaching in the Twin Cities metro area of Minnesota believe are relevant to their students’ needs”? This question is examined by using mixed-method research.

**METHODS**

**PARTICIPANTS**

The population examined were high school health educators within the Twin Cities metro area of Minnesota. The health educators were employed in high schools within four counties: Anoka, Dakota, Washington, and Hennepin. In all, the survey sample population consisted of thirteen health educators. The interview sample population consisted of four health educators from three counties: Hennepin, Ramsey and Washington County. One of the interview participants was male and three were female. Three of the four educators taught at schools within the St. Paul suburban area and one educator taught at a school within the Minneapolis suburban area.

**MATERIALS AND PROCEDURE**

The search engine Google was used to find the names of the counties within the Twin Cities metro area of Minnesota and the high schools within those counties. The schools’ public websites were used to acquire the name and work email addresses of health educators who are employed in those schools. On Friday July 5th, 2013, an email was sent to fifty health educators in the Twin Cities metro area of Minnesota. The email stated the principal investigator’s name and invited the health educators to participate in a study exploring health educators’ perspectives on human sexuality education. A second email was sent on Thursday July 11th, 2013 to the same fifty health educators containing the same email script to further recruit. Both emails contained two links, one to an online consent form and another to an online survey powered through SurveyMonkey.

After filling out an online consent form, health educators were directed to a 7-item survey. The survey questions related to the participants length of teaching, amount of time the health course devoted to sexuality education, sexuality topics included in the curriculum, the location of their school such as urban or rural, the type of school (such as private or public), the type of sexuality curriculum the schools supports, and the gender of the health educator. A final question asked participants to include their name, phone and /or email if they were willing to participate in a 30-minute interview. Health educators interested in the interview were contacted via email to set up a date and time for the interview.

Informed consent was obtained from all interviewed participants using a standardized consent form that followed conventional human subjects protection protocols with regard to describing the research, demands of participation, and the confidentiality of the data collected. The interview consisted of eight questions related to health education courses, sexuality curriculum, and the role of health educator. Additional questions were posed as follow-ups to participants’ responses when further elaboration was necessary to clarify participants’ responses. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed to facilitate data analysis.

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DATA ANALYSIS

This research was a mixed-method study containing both quantitative (online survey) and qualitative (individual interview) data. Data from SurveyMonkey was obtained from the SurveyMonkey webpage on August 8th, 2013. A table was created in Microsoft Word to organize the descriptive statistics and generate percentages to the survey questions. Data analysis for the interviews involved transcribing audio recordings of the health educators’ response and reviewing the transcriptions for common themes that reflected the health educators’ responses.

RESULTS

SURVEY RESULTS

The response rate for the online survey was 26% (N=13), with 40% of the respondents (N=5) interested in participating in the interview portion of the research. One male and eleven females completed the online survey, and one participant chose not to include his/her gender. Some of the health educators who completed the online survey preferred not to answer some questions. Results from the survey showed that all health educators surveyed worked in a public school (N=12) with 42% teaching in an urban setting and 58% teaching in a suburban setting. Additionally, 17% of health educators had taught from six to ten years, 58% of health educators taught between eleven to twenty years, and 25% of health educators had taught for twenty-one years or more. Of the twelve health educators who responded to the question about the proportion of time spent on sexual health topics in a health course, 8% reported that less than ten percent of their health course is spent on sexuality topics, 58% reported that eleven to twenty percent of their health course is spent on sexuality topics, and 33% reported that twenty-one to forty percent of their health course is spent on sexuality topics (see Figure 2).

The Proportion of Time on Sexual Health Topics in a Health Course

In regards to specific health topics, 100% (N=13) of health educators stated that their course included anatomy and physiology, pregnancy and reproduction, STIs and HIV, and healthy relationships. Sixty-nine percent of health educator’s health courses included puberty and adolescent development and identity and 77% of health educator’s health courses had personal safety, including safe school environments. In addition, 8% of health educator’s schools supported abstinence-based education, 58% of health educator’s schools supported comprehensive education and 33% supported both abstinence-based and comprehensive education (N=12) (see Figure 3).

The Type of Sexuality Curriculum Supported by the School

INTERVIEW RESULTS

Health educator’s perspectives of sexuality education are categorized into three sections: sexuality curriculum, the role of a health educator, and challenges. Direct quotes were used to exemplify the themes within each section.

Sexuality curriculum

Three themes appeared in the sexuality curriculum section: (1) the formation of the sexuality curriculum being a partnership; (2) an incongruence between sexuality curriculum being taught and the material health educators within the Twin Cities metro area of Minnesota believe are...
relevant to their students’ needs; and (3) the belief that sexuality education is an ongoing process.

The health educators interviewed believed the formation of sexuality curriculum was a combined effort. There are state guidelines that districts and health educators must abide by when forming the curriculum. The health educators played a role in developing the sexuality curriculum with the help of district officials. Certain topics have strict guidelines, specifically the lesson on alternative lifestyles. One health educator stated this lesson features information on homosexuality and is fully scripted. The health educators perceived some incongruence between their preferences regarding sexuality education curriculum and the content currently taught. This incongruence related to additional information they wanted to incorporate within the curriculum, such as “how does HIV affect societies and countries economically, politically, and socially,” communication with sexual partner(s), sexuality identity, cyber-bullying, and mental health. Some health educators mentioned the difficulty of including these topics when some students do not have a foundation in anatomy and reproduction.

Some of the health educators taught “Embedded Health,” which was described as health incorporated within other courses from ninth through twelfth grade. This involves twelve lessons per year, for four years. A health educator stated, “Health isn’t something that you shut the classroom door, you get your semester cut and its over.” Further, the health educator felt health-related topics should be woven throughout students’ high school career. Those health educators who teach “Embedded Health” felt it is more comprehensive than their prior curriculum because it provided time for topics such as cyber-bullying and mental health.

Role of the health educator

One theme appeared from the role of the health educator section: health educators perceived themselves as a resource to their students, saying, “You empower them with the tools to make those decisions.” Health educators provide, for instance, factual information on birth control methods and STIs preventative measures to bring awareness to the students. The health educators emphasized their desire to present information in an unbiased manner, to encourage students’ critical thinking skills so they can independently make informed decisions. Health educators also believed they should connect students to resources outside of the classroom, such as having guest speakers from the Abstinence Resource Center and Family Tree Clinic frequent their health education course to provide further information on abstinence, STIs, and pregnancy prevention.

Challenges

Three themes appeared from the challenges section: (1) health educators have an insufficient amount of time to teach a great deal of sexuality topics; (2) health educators do not receive adequate (if any) training on teaching sexuality education; and (3) health educators struggle with helping students personalize the sexuality material to make the topics tangible.

All four health educators interviewed cited an insufficient amount of time for teaching sexuality topics within their health curriculum. The sexuality topics featured were abstinence, STIs, anatomy, healthy and unhealthy relationships, birth control, and decision-making, to name a few. The health educators felt these topics were briefly discussed because of limited time. A health educator mentioned, “They want us to go deeper… although it’s hard because we try to cover so much.” The myriad of sexuality topics discussed influences how the curriculum is formed with health educators attempting to provide comprehensive sexuality education in short periods of time. The students’ level of knowledge of sexuality topics was said to vary due to the difference in the sexuality education taught prior to high school. This presented another challenge to health educators, namely, teaching sexuality topics when some students had a strong foundation and others did not have knowledge on basic information such as anatomy and physiology.

Other challenges to teaching sexuality curriculum were mentioned. One health educator questioned their preparation for sexuality education, saying, “I don’t know if all health teachers, when they go through the program, are taught themselves.” This health educator took a sexuality course in college, but found ways outside of academic settings to gain knowledge in sexuality curriculum, such as using resources like the Family Tree Clinic and guest speakers as a form of extended education. Another challenge health educators cited was the
difficulties of having students personalize the material, saying, “My wish and objective is that they can apply it [the topics] to themselves…and to speak of the material in a real way, not like a textbook.” This goal was challenging to achieve as some students did not understand how or why the material related to them.

**DISCUSSION**

Similar themes resulted from the online survey and individual interviews. The online survey showed that 58% of health educators’ health courses devoted 80% to 89% of their course to non-sexuality topics. The health educators interviewed mentioned a multitude of sexuality topics they must cover, from anatomy to violence in relationships. One health educator stated, “We need more time so that we can go deeper” rather than “[skimming] the top.” The health educators surveyed have a dense health curriculum. However, sexuality education only consists of approximately 11% to 20% of the health topics covered in courses. Time constraints pose great difficulties for health educators. It is challenging to provide students with a strong background in sexual health when insufficient time is devoted to said topics (Eisenberg et al., 2013; Buston, Wight, Scott, 2001; CDC, 2011).

All health educators from the individual interviews and the majority (58%) from the online survey taught comprehensive sexuality education. This curriculum consisted of topics such as anatomy, STIs, reproduction, contraception, and healthy relationships. District officials and health educators develop the curriculum in accordance to Minnesota laws. The purpose of Minnesota Statute 121.23A is to prevent STIs and implement programs to reduce the risk of contracting STIs, and while it requires the curriculum to be comprehensive, it does not define comprehensive (The Office of the Revisor of Statutes, 2012 A). The broad statute, coupled with the lack of national standards, places the burden on districts and health educators to define comprehensive sexuality education. Consequently, students across the state may receive inconsistent sexuality education (Future of Sex Education Initiative, 2012; U.S. Department of Education, 2010 A; U.S. Department of Education, 2010 B).

The health educators interviewed perceived themselves as a resource to their students. Their role is to provide factual information in an unbiased manner (Eisenberg et al., 1997). As one health educator mentioned, “it’s not important what the teacher thinks…it’s just important that the kids think.” The health educator creates and nourishes a safe environment, encouraging students to make use of their analytical skills. The health educators facilitate activities and discussions, have guest speakers frequent their course, and connect students to resources outside of the classroom if the students have questions the health educators are unable to answer. Understanding health educators’ perceived role in addressing the sexual health needs of their students is pertinent because school-based sexuality education has been cited as one of the preferred methods for adolescents to learn about sexual health (Dyson & Smith, 2012; Welshmier & Harris, 1994; Alexander, 1984; Byers et al., 2003; Eisenberg et al., 1997).

**LIMITATION**

The limitation of this study relates to the sample population. An additional email was sent to fifty health educators to increase the sample size response rate, yet there was a lack of response due to inactive email accounts, difficulties in reaching health educators during summer vacation, and educators that were listed under the health department of their school although they did not teach health courses. Five health educators agreed to participate in the individual interviews, but one was unable to due to conflicting schedules. The majority of participants were female and taught in the St. Paul area. Thus, the small sample size and response rate and lack of diversity, in terms of gender and school location, are limitations to the study.

**FUTURE RESEARCH**

Additional questions could be included within the individual interview to explore the challenges health educators face while teaching sexuality curriculum. Due to the insufficient amount of time to teach an immense amount of sexuality material, in addition to the other topics within the health curriculum, interviews with district officials may be helpful in identifying what they believe is essential to sexuality curriculum. Future research can include health educators employed in schools within
Greater Minnesota (i.e., areas outside of the Twin Cities Metro area) and health educators who work in private or charter schools.

**Implications for Practice**

This research brings to light sexuality topics that are not included or addressed in depth within the current sexuality curriculum, an example being sexual identity. The gap identified in this study can be used to reform sexuality curriculum and provide students with essential sexuality topics that were mentioned by the health educators. For example, health educators could offer courses that focus specifically on human sexuality, instead of incorporating the topic in an already dense health curriculum. Undergraduate education could also be restructured to sufficiently prepare future health educators. For example, colleges and universities could offer human sexuality courses and courses that focus on teaching sexual health topics to students. In addition, prior and in-service training would be beneficial for health educators, reviewing sexual health topics and clarifying any questions they have in teaching the material.

**Conclusion**

The current study illustrates the incongruence between sexuality curriculum being taught and material health educators’ believe are relevant to students’ needs, challenges educators face while teaching sexuality curriculum, and their perceived role in addressing the sexual health needs of students. Health educators within this study perceived themselves as a resource for students, in providing factual and unbiased sexual health information, but thought an insufficient amount of time was devoted to sexuality curriculum. Some felt ill-equipped to teach sexuality curriculum due to lack of training. The formation of sexuality curriculum, a subject that has been under fire by parents and politicians, has been thrust upon districts to develop, with health educators at the forefront teaching the material. With inadequate prior training in sexuality education and broad state guidelines, the words of Haim Ginott reflect the difficult position health educators are placed in: “Teachers are expected to reach unattainable goals with inadequate tools” (Eisenberg, Sieving, Oliphant & Resnick, 2011).

**References**


Why we need comprehensive sex education in the U.S. PLoS ONE, 6, 10. Doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0024685


ABSTRACT

This study examines attorneys' political preferences between liberal and conservative, the correlation of political preferences with their legal specializations, and their political preferences' effects on their attitudes towards immigration and its legislation. This paper poses the hypothesis that immigration attorneys are more liberal than their non-immigration specializing counterparts. The random sample used consists of three immigration and three non-immigration attorneys drawn from a University of St. Thomas provided online database of alumni practicing law in the Twin Cities-Metro Area of Minnesota. The study conducted uses mixed methods consisting of individual face-to-face interviews and online surveys. A Likert-type scale was used to measure attorneys' attitudes towards immigration and government. Semi-structured questions allow for elaboration of opinion.

INTRODUCTION

Immigration reform is a highly controversial issue. There are usually two sides of the argument: liberal and conservative (Mascaro, 2013). This study concerns itself solely with those two political ideologies when it examines attorneys’ political preferences, the correlation of political preferences with their legal specializations, and their political preferences’ effects on their attitudes towards immigration and its legislation. Legal scholars were chosen to analyze what commonalities could be ignored when arguing to win and not to compromise in this belief-inspired political battle.

Teresa Collet, Professor of Law at the University of St. Thomas, made a political statement in May of 2010 mentioning the divide in the liberal and conservative stances; she asserted that the answer for immigration reform could be found in selecting concepts from each side. She upheld the value of a compromise, and while this idea should not be new, it is something that is seemingly lost in today’s political society. To expand on this notion, this study’s participants responded to questions about their attitudes towards immigration and their political preference, liberal or conservative.

The intent of this mixed methods study is to examine attorneys’ political preference between liberal and conservative, the correlation of political preferences with their legal specialization, and their political preferences’ effects on their attitudes towards immigration and its reform legislation. This paper poses the hypothesis that attorneys who specialize in immigration law are more liberally-biased than those with specializations in other fields.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This review of literature first highlights why immigration reform is important. Secondly, it identifies the importance of attorneys in today’s
society focusing on why their opinion on controversial issues, such as immigration reform legislation, should be valued. Then, it reviews the factors that affect attitudes towards immigration and details how political ideology is a significant factor in shaping these attitudes. Finally, examples of liberal and conservative stances on immigration are provided before moving into the detailed methodology of the study.

**SIGNIFICANCE OF IMMIGRATION**

In an article published in the American Bar Association Journal, Higgins (1998) highlights the importance and impact that comes with immigration. He specifies the federal agencies that most closely deal with immigration: the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service and the Immigration and Naturalization Services. According to Higgins (1998), there was discussion about shutting down the two agencies completely. The opinions over the necessity and usefulness of these agencies differed in the midst of lack of immigration regulation. The debate revolved around the agencies’ importance, and the opinion emanated the decisions made by these agencies helped determine the “face of America,” or general perception of the American population. An unexpected wave of support for the agency originated from immigration attorneys themselves. A conclusion was reached: instead of a complete shutdown, the organizations needed reorganization and stability (Higgins, 1998). Higgins highlights the importance of the agencies, namely in attorneys’ opinions and support, laid in heading the formation of such a crucial factor as the “face of America,” when regulating immigration.

**ATTORNEY ATTITUDES**

There is remarkably little research on attorney attitudes toward controversial issues. This is disappointing, considering their critical role as middle men and women in maintaining social order and justice (Mediating and Negotiating Science, 2011). As legal scholars and experts in the justice system, attorneys are sought out for advice, whether legal or not. The value of their opinion on a controversial issue like immigration legislation is often overlooked. Before presenting attorney’s opinions on the matter, this paper identifies what causes these opinions.

**FACTORS AFFECTING ATTITUDES TOWARDS IMMIGRATION AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF POLITICAL IDEOLOGY**

An article written in 2012, from Delaware State University, analyzes the significance of ethnic prejudice and perceived economic competition in support of mass deportation of undocumented immigrants. The article contends that racism and fear were dominant factors in the support of mass deportation. It affected a majority of conservatives, moderates, Republicans, and independents as well as a substantial number of Democrats and liberals. Opposing political ideologies used this fear to fuel negative attitudes and perceptions against immigrants. Unfortunately, racism and prejudice perpetuate negative, and often incorrect, stereotypes among all groups of people toward immigration (Cosby, 2012).

Research conducted on 2005 to 2006 state legislatures across the United States sought to identify what factors influenced attitudes and policies towards immigration. Chavez and Provine (2009) defined restrictive policies as any proposed, passed, or enforced bill or law that limits, denies, or minimizes benefits and services to immigrants; pro-immigrant legislature was defined as a proposed, passed, or enforced bill or law that expands, allows, or includes benefits and services to immigrants. The authors found evidence reporting economic vulnerability influencing negative attitudes toward immigrants, thus restrictive policies. Moreover, the scholars found that elevated crime rates also correlated with negative attitudes. Fear of threat to national identity added to negativity towards immigrants. Other sources revealed a relationship between political ideology and attitudes towards immigrants. Chavez and Provine’s (2009) study indicated that factors such as economic indicators, crime rates, and demographic changes are not nearly as prominent in immigration reform as are political preferences of the citizenry. In fact, as tabulated by Chavez and Provine (2009:88), “ideological framing is the most consistently important factor determining legislative responses.”

Sandovici, Jakobsen and Strabac (2012) also aimed to identify the causes of general attitudes towards immigrants and began by highlighting the common perceptions of immigrants as both economic and national identity threats. According to their sources, controlling immigration could influence the state’s sovereignty. Therefore, lack or failure of such regulation led to an increase of negative attitudes.
towards immigrants. The study also revealed that those with a higher level of political interest are more susceptible to their governments’ attitudes than those who are less politically inclined, general attitudes towards immigrants in immigrant-receiving states are affected by the governmental stance of such state, and how politically interested an individual is (Sandovici, Jakobsen, and Strabac, 2012).

The conservative stance
A brief overview of the annual Faith and Freedom Conference highlighted the “socially conservative” nature. The Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) article details the conflicting comments made by Republican Minnesota Representative, Michelle Bachmann, and former Florida Governor, Jeb Bush, regarding immigration reform. While both disagreed with much of the bill, and concurred that border security should be priority, they differed in perceptions of how to “fix the legislation” (Haven, 2013). The apparent conflict among the self-proclaimed conservatives poses the question of possible agreement with liberal stances (Haven, 2013).

Freshman Republican Senator from Texas, Rafael Edward “Ted” Cruz, appeared on Rush Limbaugh’s radio show, “The Rush Limbaugh Show,” June 19, 2013. Cruz and Limbaugh, are widely recognized as highly conservative advocates. On the show, Senator Cruz denounced the Gang of Eight immigration reform bill claiming that “it does not fix the problem” (Spiering, 2013). Cruz asserted the bill would become more costly and lead to “affirmative action” in the labor market because undocumented immigrants would be exempt from The Affordable Care Act and the employer mandate (Spiering, 2013).

The liberal stance
An opinion piece in the New York Times expresses a liberal voice on the current immigration legislation. The article criticizes the Republican stance for being hypocritical. However, the author, Downes (2013), notes that pleasing conservative republicans on higher security of the border will allow for other parts of the bill in question to pass, such as allowing legalization for millions of undocumented workers. Downes (2013) contends that the idea of a compromise could allow the Senate to finally “get a bill done” (Downes, 2013). Another opinion piece written for the New York Times highlights the importance of the immigration bill’s struggles in passing. Collins (2013), although perhaps too sarcastic and comedic at some points, relays the importance of obtaining democratic votes for Republicans, seeing as they suffered with the Hispanic vote last election. She clearly illustrates choosing between the two tough decisions in compromise: standing up for equality or compromising and “finally getting a major bill through Senate” (Collins, 2013).

Another 2013 NY Times newspaper article focuses on the benefits of the immigration bill making its way through congress. The article mentions that many conservatives were proven wrong when the report came that “the benefits…would outweigh the costs” when debating the bill’s effect on American debt (Parker, 2013), hinting at a greater possibility of a much needed compromise.

Father Raymond J. de Souza from Queen’s University in Kingston, Ontario, expresses his concern over the fact that only a few miles apart from each other are a road sign warning drivers of a “desperate family on the freeway,” and “the affluent elderly driving down the strip mall in their golf carts.” He maintains that although there is no shortage of reasonable arguments from both sides of the immigration debate, America “ought to find a more humane place for the poor and desperate” (De Souza, 2013). Here, he clearly expresses the need for compromise in the differing sides of immigration reform (De Souza, 2013).

A 2013 news article in the Los Angeles Times gives an update on the current immigration legislation where the Senate rejected the notion that would delay a path to citizenship until the borders were secure. Mascaro (2013) clearly highlights the struggles of immigration reform policy-making. The main issue, she contends, is border security. Although she is vague on other aspects of immigration reform, she portrays well how both sides are attempting to gain support from the other on their own ideas, but are not very receptive of each other’s ideas (Mascaro, 2013).
METHODOLOGY

In this study, Likert-type scale items were used to measure the relationship between attorneys’ political preferences and their views on immigrants and immigration policy. At the same time, detailed political preference regarding immigrants and immigration policy were explored using in-depth qualitative interview questions with attorneys contacted through the University of St. Thomas’ “lawyer search” referral system, as well as a relevant literature review through interrogation of text. The reason for combining both quantitative and qualitative data was to better understand this research problem by converging both numeric trends and detailed narratives.

POPULATION AND SAMPLE

From the target population of attorneys practicing law in the Twin Cities-Metro area (Minnesota), two random samples from the University of St. Thomas’ online lawyer referral system, an openly accessible source, were taken. The sample selected three, out of seventeen, attorneys with specialization in immigration law and three attorneys specializing in other fields. The fields were also chosen randomly, from 143 specializations available which ranged from credit and banking law, poverty law, and government law. Potential participants were recruited via email invitations, where they were given the option of in-person interviews or the completion of a survey.

SURVEY DESIGN

This study employed interview, survey, and content analysis. Both the interview and survey consisted of identical research instrumentation. The research instrument consisted of structured and semi-structured questions. These questions ranged from open-ended short answers, such as, “What do you think should be the goal of immigration reform?” to Likert-type scale answers, for example “On the scale of 1 to 5, 1 being very important and 5 being very unimportant, how important of an issue is immigration in America today?” These questions were designed to measure the participants’ political identification and investment, as well as their legal specializations, and other factors that may or may not affect their attitudes towards immigration. The quantitative data is analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods, the questions are meant to prompt a lenience towards either liberal or conservative political preference. The qualitative data was analyzed using methods such as content analysis and searching for common themes in opinion of government, religion, social issues, and immigration issues, thus rendering my study a mixed methods design.

ETHICS

The subject risk in this study was very low. Participants were not only voluntary, but also, as legal professionals, knowledgeable about risk and liability. However, the study involved probing for personal and potentially sensitive information. Consent forms, and completed interview schedules and answers were secured under lock and key in the principal investigator’s private office/dorm at Morrison Hall, University of St. Thomas. Any information shared between the principal investigator and her academic advisor was password protected.

FINDINGS

First, this section presents general demographic information. Then, it describes the responses by self-identified conservatives, followed by the answers from self-identified liberals.

ATTORNEY DEMOGRAPHICS

Three participants were male and three were female. Three participants identified as immigration attorneys and the other three identified as non-immigration; those specializations included business, creditor, and criminal defense. The age range of participants was twenty-five to forty-eight, the median was twenty-nine, the mode was twenty-six, and the mean was roughly thirty-three years of age. Three participants identified as not religious, and the other three were Pentecostal, Catholic, and Lutheran. Three participants had recently passed the bar examination in 2012, two in 2007, and one in 2008. Five participants identified as White/Caucasian. One as Latino/a, but did not specify origins. One participant, identifying as Caucasian, claimed German and French ancestry, maternal and paternal lineage respectively. A second merely specified the process of which her family obtained legal American
documentation, she identified as Latina. A third identified as Caucasian, claiming ancestry from Wales, England, and Scotland. This participant also highlighted his wife’s Argentinian origins. Another participant identified as Caucasian, and claimed Norwegian and German ancestry, maternal and paternal respectively. One participant, highlighting his adoption, specified a rough estimate of seventy-five percent Irish and twenty-five percent German. Another respondent identifying as Caucasian, explained his mother’s Puerto Rican origins, and his wife’s father’s Puerto Rican origins briefly.

**Political Identifications versus Preferences**

For consistency throughout this research study, the definitions of “liberal” and “conservative” are provided. Student News Daily (2010), an educational, non-profit website, defines conservative beliefs as those that uphold limited government, free markets, a strong national defense, and general policies that emphasize individual empowerment. Conversely, liberal advocates tend to support the responsibility of government to achieve equal opportunity and equity for all, to alleviate social ills, and protect civil liberties and human rights (Student News Daily, 2010).

**Self-identified conservatives.**

One participant self-identified as conservative in political beliefs, but his responses to the survey questions yielded a tendency towards slightly more liberal preferences, according to the definitions I have provided. He even stated, “I feel conservative, but usually vote liberal.” This Pentecostal individual generally did not support a connection between religion and government. When asked about a moral or ethical concern in his occupation, he merely declared: “Money creates equal access to justice.” When prompted about the state of the United States, he claimed that the most serious problem facing the U.S. is the need to “identify a mission, we are losing the glue that keeps our country together” he worried, but felt hopeful. Regarding immigration reform, the participant provided that “expanding and standardizing the naturalization process, securing borders, and bringing undocumented individuals into the system for legal status” should be the goal. With further thought on legal compromises, he continued:

> The current proposals seem to include a ‘pathway to citizenship’ that can be more than a decade long. Don’t use the word ‘citizen.’ It makes conservatives think people who break the law are being rewarded (not what I think!). Talk about giving people legal status that enhances the rule of law and tax revenue.

This participant specialized in business law.

Another participant who self-identified as conservative admitted a slight liberal tone. She, an atheist, generally opposed a connection between religion and government. When asked what she thought was the most serious problem facing America, with worry and dissatisfaction, she answered “The polarized government. They aren’t willing to compromise.” The participant stated that the goal of immigration reform should be to “curb illegal immigration, reduce waiting lines on petitions already filed.” She advocated for “more STEM immigration, and reduction of brain drain.” STEM is in reference to the students of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. When prompted about legal compromises in the political world, she professed “I think there are similar goals, the little ones, but I can’t see a way to reconcile the little with the big.” This participant specialized in immigration law.

The last participant who self-identified as conservative made it clear he did not agree with the “neo-conservative” values and usually voted democrat. According to the prompting questions and the definition provided, his responses pushed him more liberal. An ethical concern he identified in his work life was ensuring that the fee for his services was fair; namely, he specified the struggle between deciding to help someone for free, and paying his bills. The participant identified the most serious problem facing America today as “the gap between the rich and the poor, and the rich’s influence on government policy.” He was more worried than hopeful or satisfied with the U.S. The participant stated that the goal of immigration should be to “provide an efficient and responsible way to separate the good people in the country with the negative.” When further prompted about legal compromises in politics, he answered that the government was too big, along with the national defense- a clear example of drawing from both political stances of liberal and conservative respectively. This participant focused on debt and creditor law, and business formation disclosure.
Self-identified liberals

One participant who identified as liberal remained consistently so in his responses. He did not support a connection between religion and government. Coming from a liberal upbringing, the participant expressed the personal value of his political beliefs. When prompted about a moral or ethical concern in his personal work life, he explained:

Since I do immigration law, I regularly come across people who might be eligible to apply for lawful status if they tell a little lie. Specifically, someone who is married to a U.S. citizen but who has entered the U.S. illegally twice generally has no way of gaining permanent residence. I strongly disagree with this particular law that gives the permanent penalty for entering twice. But as a lawyer, I have decided that I won’t take someone’s case if I know that he is ineligible for entering illegally twice (even if the government almost certainly wouldn’t question the person’s assertions that he entered only once). This is an ‘ethical’ decision on my part, at least according to the professional rules of lawyers. But I’m not sure if the moral thing wouldn’t be for me to act ‘unethically’ and help deserving clients gain permanent residence, even if it means helping them lie to the government.

In regards to the goal of immigration reform, he stated that it should be:

For government action to reflect how migration actually works. In 2013, that means passing a broad legalization program which would cover the majority of those living here without authorization. This should include a path to permanent residency and then citizenship for those who earn eligibility. A new law should also reform how employment visas are issued, removing current restrictions so that visa issuance lines up better with how the economy actually works. Reform should also eliminate some of the brutal penalties that currently exist and prevent families from being united (e.g., someone who has entered the U.S. illegally twice and is married to a U.S. citizen forced to wait outside the U.S. for ten years before being able to get permanent residence). Reform does not need to pump more money into securing borders and deportation. Those areas are already extremely well-funded and have been producing detentions and deportation at record high numbers in the past few years.

After further thought on legal compromises in politics, he lamented, “I don’t think immigration is a partisan issue except on the margins. The same is probably true for a lot of other issues.” This participant specializes in immigration law.

Another self-identified liberal did not reflect liberal in her responses to the probing questions, her answers leaned slightly conservative according to the definition provided. Interestingly, she identified both of her parents as very liberal. In describing a moral or ethical concern, she elaborated, “White defendants who speak English and have some financial means are treated with more respect and leniency in the criminal justice system than non-White defendants who are poor and who do not speak English as a first language.” In worry for the United States, she identified that the three main problems facing America were financial unsustainability, immigration reform, and environmental reform. She provided that the goal of immigration should be “making it possible for immigrants who want to work, to work, pay taxes, and contribute to American society.” When pondering legal compromises, she explained, “There are no compromises in immigration law, while criminal law is nothing but compromises. This makes interaction between immigration and criminal law absolutely disastrous!” This participant specialized in criminal defense.

The last self-identified liberal remained slightly more consistently liberal in her answers to the probing questions. In concern of ethics or morals, she professed the struggle in maintaining equality for all her clients and ensuring they all have equal opportunities. While worrying for the state of the U.S., she identified the main problems facing America as lack of debt control and job instability. In regards to the goals of immigration reform, she emphasized the need for an organized system, the clean-up of backlogged courts and petitions, and the opportunities for immigrants in hospitality employment. After further thought about political compromises, she said “I think both sides can agree on the opportunities for immigrants in hospitality jobs.” Identifying hospitality jobs as the sole opportunities for immigrants was her conservative streak, according to the definition provided. This participant specialized in immigration law.

DISCUSSION

In a target population of this small sample size, conclusions are subject to change with further research. This pilot study yields only preliminary results, which are
described above. In the context of past studies and literature, some conclusions have been made that support the hypothesis posed at the beginning of the study. This section first addresses political inconsistencies and then legal specializations and possible correlations with political identification.

**Political Identification Inconsistencies**

First and foremost, the unclear divide between liberal and conservative, as introduced by Romero (2003), is apparent in this specific study. Most self-identifications (five out of six) did not match the respective participants’ answers throughout the survey or interview. Acknowledging the plethora of definitions available, a reiteration of the definitions of liberal and conservative used in this study are as follows: conservative beliefs uphold limited government, free markets, a strong national defense, and general policies that emphasize individual empowerment, while liberal beliefs support the responsibility of government to achieve equal opportunity and equity for all, to alleviate social ills and to protect civil liberties and human rights. Granted, these definitions were not provided at the time of the surveys or interviews for the prevention of changing already established personal perceptions of the two political ideologies.

The unclear divide between liberal and conservative stances

A 2003 article, written by a Pennsylvania State University law professor and scholar, outlines both the liberal and the conservative stances concerning racial profiling, affirmative action, and the diversity visa lottery using critical race theory. The article provides working definitions of both political identifications and cross-examines stances on highly controversial issues. Interestingly, Romero (2003) finds conflicting uses of racial profiling in these instances. He notes that in law enforcement, a liberal standpoint eschews racial profiling as a harsh stigmatization in the face of possible innocence, while a conservative perspective praises racial profiling for its rationality. In the situation of affirmative action, a liberal perspective praises it for its remediation for past injustices, while a conservative denounces it for “reverse” racism. At this point, Romero (2003) points out the inconsistencies in support for racial profiling on either side. The diversity lottery in immigration policy is criticized by the liberal value of individualism and favored by conservatives for its preservation of the status quo. Romero (2003) concluded his observation of the inconsistencies by providing the alternative to political ideology of critical race theory. Ultimately, Romero substantiates the liberal ideology using Critical Race Theory because it challenges “undeserved privileges.” (Romero, 2003)

**Legal Specializations and Political Correlation**

According to the results of this study, legal specializations has little, if any, solid correlation with political identification. Two out of the three immigration-specializing attorneys self-identified as liberal, and they both remained consistently liberal in responding to the leading questions. In regard to the open-ended questions, however, one of the liberal immigration lawyer’s elaboration leaned highly conservative when it denied immigrants an equal opportunity in the employment sector, limiting them to “hospitality positions.” This leaves one strongly liberal immigration attorney. The immigration attorney who self-identified as conservative, however, yielded slightly liberal answers to the leading questions. It is concluded that immigration attorneys lean slightly more liberal than conservative, thus supporting the second hypothesis posed.

**Conclusion**

This study concerns itself solely with two political ideologies, conservative and liberal, when it examines attorneys’ political preference, the correlation of political preferences with their legal specialization, and the effect their political preferences have on their attitudes towards immigration and its reform. The legal scholars that were chosen to analyze were randomly selected from a pool of University of St. Thomas Law School alumni. After participating in either a one-on-one interview or an individual survey, enough data was gathered from six respondents. The initial hypothesis was not supported by a significant amount of evidence, due to the fact that legal specializations were found to have little or no solid correlation with attorneys’ legal specializations.

This study, however, yielded an interesting spurious finding. Along with the literature support of Romero
(2003), this study revealed an inconsistent perception of political identifications, namely liberal and conservative. It was discovered that a significant amount of cross over and apparent confusion revolves around personal political identification.

**Implications for Further Research**

In the future, it would be helpful to address a larger sample of possible participants. In revision of the research instrument used for this study, it would be helpful to provide a set of definitions for the participants to fully understand the purpose of the study. This would probably be towards the end of the survey or interview in order to avoid changing original perceptions of both liberal and conservative definitions.

**Implications for Future Practice of Law**

This study provides a useful insight into the thoughts and opinions of attorneys on the issue of immigration. It could perhaps encourage a more unbiased, open, and understanding attitude of attorneys in addressing clients and their issues after the revelation of these conflicting results.

**REFERENCES**


ABSTRACT

As long as people of African descent have lived in America, Black-White intimate relationships have existed in the country. Throughout American history, these relationships have been stigmatized by law and socially discouraged. This study aimed to identify and understand the stereotypes of and attitudes toward Black-White intimate relationships among undergraduate students from colleges and universities in the Twin Cities metro area. The data was qualitative, collected through the use of a brief demographic survey and a twenty-two question interview instrument. The findings suggest patriarchy is present in gender patterns of Black-White intimate relationships; racially homophilous relationships are still the norm and individuals are still hesitant to fully accept Black-White intimate relationships.

INTRODUCTION

Black-White intimate relationships have been occurring in America for a long time. Such relationships began forming as soon as Africans were brought to America via the slave trade. A significant number of Black-White marriages began occurring in large urban areas, such as New York City, as early as 1850. Though Black-White intimate relationships have been formed for so long, it was not until 1967 that all anti-miscegenation laws (laws that forbade Black and White people from having sexual relationships) ended. Even now, forty-six years after the removal of all anti-miscegenation laws, some people are still uncomfortable with the idea of an interracial couple. Partners that differ in race are still an exception in America (Killian 2003). Moreover, research suggests that the majority of those looking for a long-term partner in America would prefer to be with someone of their own race (Yancey 2002; Campbell and Martin 2006; McClintock 2010). When a couple is multiracial, specifically Black and White, the two individuals involved can be criticized for a number of reasons. The disappointment stems from the de facto social expectations that come along with their race and gender.

The intent of the current research is to understand the types of race and gender stereotypes that persist in Black-White dating and the effect these stereotypes have on college students in the Twin Cities metro area. The two research questions are: (1) what are the stereotypes of Black-White intimate relationships? And (2) what are the attitudes toward Black-White intimate relationships? Data collected from the study will be interpreted using Social Dominance Theory and Social Identity Theory. Race and gender stereotypes will be defined as popular generalizations about the characteristics, namely the behavior and social status, of a race or a gender. Interracial dating between Black people and White people are the only interracial dating relationships this study will address.
LITERATURE REVIEW

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The history of Black-White intimate relationships in America is extensive. During the mid to late nineteenth century, many Irish and Scottish immigrants came to America and settled in New York (Dabel 2005). The Irish and Scottish had a similar socioeconomic status to the Black inhabitants of New York because they were immigrants. This meant both populations lived in the same neighborhoods, had similar jobs and were viewed by other White Americans as lowly. Irish racial identities were not distinct in America, but a Black person would consider any Irish or Scottish immigrant as White. Marriage between Black people and Irish/Scottish immigrants was not unusual because of the unique social conditions of New York at this time. In this case, socioeconomic class in a Black-White intimate relationships was revealed to be more significant than it was thought to be (Dabel 2005).

Virtually all Black-White/European marriages in New York during the second half of the twentieth century were between Black men and Irish or Scottish women (Dabel 2005). This pattern suggests that gender roles affect the nature of Black-White relationships. This information supports research that has found Black men and White women are more in favor of interracial dating than the other genders within their racial groups (Yancey 2009; Schoepflin 2009). These findings take into account gender roles in addition to the more obvious race and class issues. These hierarchies—orders of social groups based on differences in status and power—are founded on racial identity and gender. Examining how those factors affect intergroup relations leads to a greater awareness of racial and gender based hierarchy as well as the behavior that reinforces the hierarchy.

A historical study of Black-White marriage highlights the influence of legislation on American attitudes toward Black-White intimate relationships. McClain (2011) notes that the first Gallup poll on the topic of interracial marriage was conducted in 1958, nearly a decade before the Loving v. Virginia case. The case involved a White man and a Black woman, Richard Loving and Mildred Jeter, who were arrested in Virginia for violating the state’s anti-miscegenation laws. The couple took their case all the way to the Supreme Court and won. The Supreme Court deemed all anti-miscegenation laws unconstitutional after the verdict on the Loving case. The Gallup poll showed that ninety-six percent of White Americans were against interracial marriage. However, during the mid-1960s, these attitudes began to change.

McClain (2011) interviewed twenty-two children of Black-White couples that united during the 1960s. She found that the families of her respondents’ White parents did not react as severely to their child being in a Black-White couple in the late 1960s as many White families did before Civil Rights advancements. McClain (2011) also found that none of the families of her respondents’ Black parents disapproved of their child’s marriage to a White person. The information is highly indicative of a well-established racial hierarchy which places White people above Black people. This explains the differing levels of tolerance for interracial marriages discussed in McClain’s (2011) study. Also noteworthy, is that nineteen of the twenty-two respondents had a Black father and White mother, a gender pattern in Black-White marriage that mirrors the pattern found in Dabel’s (2005) study. Having studies about perceptions of intimate Black-White relationships from two different time periods allows for comparison with the collected data. Relating the trends found in the data to the findings in previous studies makes it easier to note societal progress, or lack thereof, in perceptions of Black-White relationships.

RECENT STUDIES

The trends found by Dabel (2005) and McClain (2011) persist in recent studies on attitudes toward Black-White intimate relationships. For example, Yancey (2009) examined adult interracial dating preferences on a dating website ran by Yahoo! The scholar collected information on 997 dating profiles: 633 White people, 185 Black people, 102 Hispanic people and 77 Asian people. Yancey (2009) found that the White people in the study, more than any other race, were willing to date within their racial group. Ninety-eight percent of the online daters that identified as White had this preference. Yancey (2009) also found that Black dating partners were the least favored among other racial groups, White people being the least willing to date a Black person. Yancey (2009) found that 49.2 percent of White people in the sample were in favor
of dating someone Black versus 56.5 percent of Hispanics and 69.5 percent of Asians.

Robnett and Feliciano conducted a study similar to Yancey’s (2009) in 2011. The study examined racial preferences among online daters on Yahoo! The sample consisted of 1,424 Whites, 1,459 Blacks, 1,422 Latinos and 1,302 Asians. Robnett and Feliciano (2011) found that among White men who had a racial preference, 96.69 percent excluded Black people, the highest exclusion percentage of Black people by any race. Among Black participants in the study, 77.04 percent of women had racial dating preferences compared to 55.46 percent of Black men. Regarding the preference of White dating partners, Black women were significantly more averse to dating White men than Black men were to dating White women (58.69 percent of Black women versus 39.55 percent of Black men).

In a study done by Elizabeth McClintock (2010), from Stanford University, the occurrence of various intimate interracial relationships among undergraduate students at Stanford University was examined. The study was conducted to uncover how racially homophilous different types of intimate relationships were on campus. Racial homophily is attraction to others based on racial similarities. The sample consisted of 724 Stanford undergraduate students that identified as White, Black, Asian, Hispanic or Other. The frequencies of three types of intimate relationships were recorded: (1) hookups (i.e., intimate interaction outside of a committed relationship), (2) short-term dating relationships, and (3) long-term dating relationships. The data was collected through a survey.

McClintock (2010) found many racial and gender-based patterns throughout the study. White males and females were the two demographics least involved in intimate interracial relationships. However, Black males and females had the highest homophily bias among racial groups in the study. The homophily bias was used to measure a group’s tendency toward partners of the same race beyond what would be expected by chance, given the size of the group (McClintock 2010). Racial homophily increased among all racial groups in the study when the commitment level of the relationship increased, meaning racially homophilous relationships were seen the most in long-term dating relationships and the least often in hookups.

Todd Schoepflin (2009), from Niagara University, carried out a similar study to McClintock’s (2010). Schoepflin (2009) focused on attitudes toward and stereotypes of Black-White intimate relationships on a predominantly White college campus. The sample population consisted of seventy Black and White students at Upstate University.

The findings were organized according to the four different race-gender classifications in the study (Black females, Black males, White females and White males). Overall, the Black females in the study were found to be uncomfortable with Black-White intimate relationships. One of the larger concerns that the Black females in the study had was of the sincerity of Black-White intimate relationships on campus. Some Black female respondents said that White females that are in such relationships on campus are attracted to Black males because of preconceptions they have of Black males, not a genuine fondness for the person they are dating. In contrast, Black males were very accepting of Black-White intimate relationships. Only one of the Black male respondents expressed a concern regarding the sincerity of Black-White intimate relationships. Otherwise, the Black males in the study were much less skeptical of such relationships and were much more accepting of them than the Black females.

The White female respondents in the study were accepting of Black-White intimate relationships, but had an issue with the perceptions that their peers and family members had of such relationships. Two White female respondents, in particular, received negative reactions from peers and family for being in a Black-White intimate relationship. Much like the highlighted testimony of the two White female respondents suggested, the White males in the study were less inclined to date Black females than White females were to date Black men. However, according to Schoepflin (2009), the attitudes of the White males in the study toward Black-White dating were less oppositional than he anticipated. Schoepflin (2009) mentioned that social desirability—the presentation of one’s self in a socially acceptable way through action that differs from an individual’s true beliefs or intent—may have impacted how White males answered the questions.
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Many theories aimed to explain group-based discrimination and imbalances in power between groups in society. Almost all of these theories are rooted in psychology, mostly preoccupied with the aspects of an individual’s self-perception and how that perception affects a person’s behavior toward other people. An example of one such theory is Social Identity Theory (Hewstone and Rubin 2004). Social Identity Theory attempts to explain discriminatory group relationships by addressing three factors that influence social identity: the social-psychological component, the system component and the societal component (Hewstone and Rubin 2004).

The social-psychological component of Social Identity Theory is the cognitive process that an individual goes through when evaluating their identity (Hewstone and Rubin 2004). According to Social Identity Theory, the process of creating distinctions between oneself and other people is what gives rise to intergroup discrimination. Hewstone and Rubin (2004) refer to intergroup discrimination as social competition. Social competition is said to be an identity management strategy, meaning the distinction between a person and another group of people is what validates a person’s identity.

The system component is the cognitive process of defining group boundaries and aspects of those boundaries including: (1) the stability of group boundaries, (2) the ability to travel through group boundaries, and (3) the legitimacy of group boundaries (Hewstone and Rubin 2004). This component of identity allows an individual to associate with a group and regulate their social mobility. This regulation of social mobility and establishment of boundaries helps a person identify with a group. According to Social Identity Theory, social competition does not occur unless the group boundaries formed by the system component of identity are impermeable (Hewstone and Rubin 2004).

The societal component of Social Identity Theory relates to the context in which social-psychological and system components occur (Hewstone and Rubin 2004). The “context” refers to the historical, political, cultural and economic background of an area and its effect on how people characterize themselves and distinguish themselves from other people. If a society does not have a social background, the social-psychological component and the system component of individual and group identity cannot exist (Hewstone and Rubin 2004).

In summary, Social Identity Theory serves to explain identity formation. The process an individual goes through in self-identification, group association and distinction are all accounted for by the theory. However, Social Identity Theory does not offer any significant explanations for the differences in favoritism that some groups show for other groups. The theory also lacks an emphasis on explaining how group-based discrimination becomes institutionalized. Since Social Identity Theory has flaws, one can better explain differences in favored intergroup relationships and institutional group-based discrimination with Social Dominance Theory.

Social Dominance Theory (SDT) explains the existence and persistence of social hierarchies. SDT takes into account individual and institutional factors that contribute to the creation and maintenance of certain forms of social order. SDT differs from Social Identity Theory because it puts more emphasis on explaining differences within a social group’s tendencies toward certain intergroup relationships. SDT also more seriously considers the phenomenon of group-based discrimination being institutionalized in a society. The forms of social order that SDT can be applicable to include patriarchy and the superiority of White people to Black people (Sidanius, Pratto, van Laar and Levin 2004). Though law does not support these hierarchies anymore, interaction patterns between different demographics prove the existence of these implicit (de facto) hierarchies.

A component of SDT that gauges an individual’s disposition toward maintaining the status quo is Social Dominance Orientation (SDO). There are variations of the questionnaire that tests SDO, but it is fairly easy to figure out who would have or not have a high SDO without the test. For example, someone with a high SDO would believe that people of a lower socioeconomic status are inferior to those with higher statuses. Someone with a high SDO is also more likely to have fewer complaints about the fairness of society and enjoy more privileges. Studies that find dissonance in attitudes towards different social groups are finding key characteristics that betray someone’s SDO. If there’s a trend in the data that suggests certain groups of people have differing SDOs, the presence of an underlying hierarchy becomes more explicit (Sidanius et al. 2004).
Given a society’s history, the average SDO of a specific demographic can be inferred. For example, the institution of slavery, segregation laws and anti-miscegenation laws in America make it obvious that White people throughout the nation’s history have been socially dominant. Based on America’s history, it can be inferred that White people have the highest SDOs among racial groups in America (Yancey 2009). Also, the gender of a person can influence SDO depending on what gender relations are like in a society. In patriarchal societies, for example, men are superior to women. With other demographic factors disregarded, men in these societies would certainly have higher SDOs than women.

With SDT and the gauging of SDO in mind, many types of data can be interpreted to uncover implicit hierarchies. For example, the McClintock (2010) study found that White men and women were the two least likely demographics to engage in interracial relationships of any kind (what were called “hookups,” short-term relationships and long-term relationships). However, the homophily bias (adjusted statistic used by the researcher) was highest among Black students in all forms of intimate relationships (McClintock 2010). It also showed disparity between the percentage of Black men engaging in intimate interracial relationships and Black women doing so (McClintock 2010). The data can be interpreted using SDT in this way: since White students belong to a more privileged racial category than all other students, their tendency toward racially homophilous relationships can be explained as a subconscious attempt to maintain their status. Associating with people of underprivileged racial groups would put their status at risk, so they’re apt to avoid intimate relationships, especially long-term ones, with minorities.

McClintock’s (2010) study did not explain why the homophily bias was highest among Black students. This could have been due to Black students preferring those within their racial group, or a level of alienation from the student body that Black students experienced more than any other racial group in the study. Yancey (2009) argues that the alienation of Black people is responsible for the higher rates of homophily and homogamy (marriage between people with significant similarity in their cultural backgrounds). Yancey’s (2009) hypothesis, based on SDT, is that the Black internet daters in his study would be the minority racial group most in favor of dating White people. However, his hypothesis was not supported by his findings. The White people in Yancey’s (2009) study were very homophilous relative to the overall results, but the Black internet daters in the study were the racial group least in favor of dating outside of their race, something also found in the McClintock (2010) study. The rejection of Yancey’s (2009) hypothesis means that SDT does have some flaws when it is used to explain attitudes toward intimate interracial relationships.

Social Identity Theory can be applied to a study on Black female college students conducted by Wilma Henry (2008). In the study, Henry (2008) examined the attitudes that Black female college students had toward interracial dating. Several studies were referred to in the article that found that Black women were less likely to date outside of their racial group than Black men (Henry 2008). Social Identity Theory can be used to interpret this data in the following way: the system component of identity formation of the Black women in the various studies was more established than in the Black men.

Social Dominance Theory infers that people in positions of power are more likely to protect their privilege or make greater attempts to gain status. When gender roles in American society are considered, it becomes evident that the society is patriarchal. White men have been found to be more averse to interracial relationships than White women and Black men have been found to be more in favor of interracial relationships than Black women. It appears that patriarchy still exists based on these differing attitudes between genders. White men, the most privileged demographic in America, engage in more racially homophilous relationships. Black men, racially underprivileged but privileged in gender status, are more likely to pursue a partner with a higher racial or social class status.

**Methodology**

This qualitative study examines stereotypes of and attitudes toward Black-White intimate relationships. The methods included the use of a brief demographic survey and 30-45 minute interviews. The target population was Black and White males and females from the University
of Minnesota (U of M), the University of St. Thomas (UST), Hamline University, Minnesota State University-Mankato (MSU-Mankato) and St. Olaf College (St. Olaf). Six participants were recruited from the targeted demographics in the study. The data was interpreted using Social Dominance Theory and Social Identity Theory.

Data collection consisted of two parts: (1) a brief demographic survey and (2) an interview. Both research instruments were designed by me, the principal investigator and the research faculty advisor, Dr. Buffy Smith. The survey asked for information on the racial background, class background and gender identity of the participant. The survey had four questions and took roughly five minutes to complete. The next part of the data collection was a 30-minute interview. The questions aimed to gather information about participants’ experiences with Black-White intimate relationships, whether vicarious or personal. Information about these experiences constituted the majority of the data. The recruitment of participants was done primarily through snowball sampling, the usage of the principal investigator’s social network, to get participants. As a secondary method, flyers were also used in an attempt to recruit participants.

There were twenty-two interview questions in total. Two of those questions were meant for respondents who have been in Black-White intimate relationships, so the two respondents that did not have personal experience with such relationships did not answer those questions. There were four main categories of interview questions: (1) general societal perceptions of Black-White intimate relationships, (2) the influences of family, peers and the media on perceptions of such relationships, (3) the influences of race and gender identity on perceptions of such relationships and (4) the perceived gains and losses for the various people involved in Black-White relationships. Although information was collected relevant to the four categories, the respondents introduced other factors in the formation of stereotypes and attitudes toward Black-White intimate relationships.

After the six interviews were conducted, they were transcribed verbatim and coded. Before coding, the respondents were assigned a numerical code in place of their names in order for their identities to be protected. Numerical codes were assigned to all data (transcriptions, written notes and questionnaire). The principal investigator began the coding process by coding the content of each interview. Then, every response to each question was coded. After coding each question, recurring words and concepts were searched for and themes were identified.

**Findings and Discussion**

This research examined the stereotypes of and attitudes toward Black-White intimate relationships among college students in the Twin Cities metro area. After conducting six interviews, the following themes were identified: (1) Black males and White females were perceived to be in more Black-White relationships than White males and Black females, (2) hesitance to accept interracial couples still exists and (3) American media underrepresents Black-White couples.

Of the six respondents, four explicitly said that Black-White intimate relationships happened infrequently and Mike, a Black male from the U of M, said, “...they’re more common than they used to be.” This respondent, as well as Janice, a Black female from MSU-Mankato, believed that Black-White relationships are more frequent than people think they are. The two respondents also came from a similar social environment as they both lived in the Twin Cities and went to high schools with racially diverse populations. The presence of social environment as an influence on the perceptions of Black-White intimate relationships became noteworthy during the interview process.

When discussing the frequency of Black-White intimate relationships, as well as the effects race and gender had on personal perception, all six respondents said they believe Black-White relationships between Black males and White females are much more common than intimate relationships between White males and Black females. Multiple studies have also observed this gender trend among Black-White couples (Dabel 2005; McClain 2011). Some respondents added that Black male-White female couples are more acceptable than Black female/White male couples. All six of the respondents believed White males, in general, were hesitant to engage in interracial relationships and two respondents suggested that this phenomenon was a larger social issue.
Emily, a White female from Hamline University, said “I’ve heard it’s more rare for African American females to be with Caucasian males...not sure if that’s a society sort of thing, or how people in society are ranked or something like that.” Janice echoed this sentiment by acknowledging there is “something that’s holding them back.” Both Emily and Janice believed that Black females and White males are rarely seen together in intimate relationships and Emily in particular suggested that the trend is indicative of a greater social structure. One factor in the infrequency of intimate relationships between White males and Black females is the disparity in social status between the two groups.

Being a minority woman, you’re super low out of the gate *snaps* out of the gate, off the bat you’re low as...you know. So if she’s able to (brief pause) go across those barriers and get a White guy, she made it in a way, in a sense. That status, you know? (Mike, Black male, U of M)

Based on the history of Black-White race relations in America (slavery, anti-miscegenation laws, Jim Crow Laws) and overwhelming information on demographic measures such as wealth, educational achievement and employment, it can be said that White people in general enjoy a greater status in society than Black people do. Based on the same demographic measures, American males are more privileged than American females. As expressed by Mike, Black women are severely marginalized due to the lack of privilege that accompanies their racial and gender identity.

According to Social Dominance Theory, people who belong to social groups with more privilege are more inclined to support existing social structures that maintain their privilege. Among these social structures in American society are race and patriarchy. Given that the racial category ‘White’ and the gender identity ‘male’ are the most privileged race and gender identities in the study, Social Dominance Theory can account for the hesitance of White males to be in intimate relationships with Black females. The theory posits that people in more privileged social groups will be less willing to socialize outside of their group(s). Based on SDT, the hesitance of White males can be interpreted as a socially superior group who are less willing to compromise their perceived status by being in intimate relationships with Black females.

There’s, there’s a, I don’t, I guess there must be something with the White man Black woman that...there’s a disconnect because I don’t see it as much as I would expect to see it. (Janice, Black female, MSU-Mankato)

Not as common as Black man/White woman? (Principal Investigator)

Yes. So I mean, I don’t know what it is but there’s something that’s holding them back I would say and I guess to them that would be a disadvantage, whatever it is that is holding them back from doing it. (Janice, Black female, MSU-Mankato)

Yeah, yeah. Then I’ve heard that, yeah it’s more rare for like, African-American females to be with Caucasian males. Umm, maybe, yeah that’s uh, not sure if it’s like a society sort of thing or like, how people are like, in society ranked or something like that. (Emily, White female, Hamline)

The “disconnect” mentioned by Janice and Emily’s reference to social ranking are partially explained by SDT’s inferences regarding people in positions of privilege. Though SDT can interpret the hesitance of White males to engage in Black-White relationships, it does not explain why Black females would be hesitant as well. According to SDT, the Social Dominance Orientation of individuals in what are considered inferior groups is less than those in more privileged groups. This study’s findings do not fully support or oppose SDT’s expectation that Black women would tend toward interracial relationships, but a study by George Yancey (2009) has data that clearly opposes SDT’s expectation of Black women.

In Yancey’s (2009) study on racial preferences among adults on an online dating website, it was found that Black men and White women in the sample population were more in favor of dating outside of their race than White men and Black women. Yancey (2009), using SDT, explained the lack of willingness that White men had to date outside of their race, but he could not use SDT to explain the tendency toward racially homophilous dating among Black women. Instead, he suggests that the historical alienation of Black people in America might be the cause of Black female hesitance toward White men. However, the alienation of Black people in America does not explain the significantly greater preference that Black
men in the study had for a White partner. Social Dominance Theory explains this by noting the elevated status males have in society over females. The theory also asserts that those in underprivileged groups are expected to be more willing to interact with those outside of their group. Therefore, Black males—a privileged gender group but underprivileged racial group—are expected to have greater interracial dating preferences than women of the same race.

The tendency of Black females toward racially homophilous relationships discussed in this study as well as others (Yancey 2009; Henry 2008; McClintock 2010; Schoepflin 2009) cannot be explained by SDT, but can be explained by SIT. The system component of SIT is the establishment and strengthening of group boundaries. The alienation of Black people by White people throughout American history has aided in the reinforcement of racial group boundaries, allowing for social competition—the intergroup discrimination that results from the social-psychological component of identity formation—which encourages the racially homophilous tendencies that Black females have been shown to have in these studies. “I know some Black girls that have like looked down at me or not approved of me only going for White girls.” (Mike, Black male, U of M). Mike has met overt opposition from Black females for pursuing White females. Along with discouragement from Black female peers, Mike’s mother also discouraged interracial relationships. Both oppositional attitudes toward interracial relationships are possibly results of social competition and the system component of SIT in effect.

Another theme found in all six interviews was the belief that racial homophily is the norm for intimate relationships. In the following quote, Emily discusses her observations of the couples at her father’s business trips.

Okay, um, I suppose it’s more common for, I feel like there’s, like, I’ve been to my dad’s business trips and it always seems like there’s always the, there’s no interracial couples. It doesn’t seem like there’s any Black-White couples there. Umm, I suppose that might have influenced me to have this sort of norm where it’s the norm to have the same, um, race in a relationship. (Emily, White female, Hamline)

Emily’s observations of her father’s peers influenced her perception of racially homophilous relationships as normal. She was the only respondent who identified her class background as upper-middle class, the highest class background among the six of a privileged racial group. Socioeconomic status has not made her less tolerant of Black-White intimate relationships, as SDT would suggest, but her social environment as a result of her socioeconomic background has affected how she views the prevalence of Black-White relationships.

Two of the respondents said Black-White intimate relationships are common, but it was said by all respondents that intimate interracial relationships in general were underrepresented in media.

Umm, it seems like every single TV show has a same race couple. They don’t really have interracial couples on TV that much. Um, celebrity-wise I feel like it’s the same thing, only, I mean, they might have, I mean there’s a little bit of variety there but I feel like for the most part you always see like, Caucasians with Caucasians. (Emily, White female, Hamline)

This underrepresentation has contributed to the view of Black-White relationships as uncommon, as in the case of Emily’s experiences with television. Lionel had similar experiences with media and also noted that White people in general were glorified in the media.

Umm, well, in terms of dating I think because I’m from Nigeria and I came here, it was difficult to...because when you watch the movies, and you type online “beautiful” you don’t really get anyone else who’s not White, usually you get all White people. So I think watching TV and magazines, I think I was steered a little bit more to one direction, to think that maybe White is beautiful and then, so that had gave me a few problems because then, well, I’m not White, so is that a problem? (Lionel, Black male, UST)

Lionel’s perception of beauty was influenced by media associations of whiteness to beauty. Television and magazine publications influenced him to value whiteness more when considering dating partners and it also made him critical of his own racial identity. Although Lionel is the only respondent in the study who discussed these media effects in particular, television and magazine publications certainly could have a national influence on racial perceptions. Lionel being “steered a little bit more to one direction” is in accordance with SDT’s provided
explanation of the attitudes that Black males have toward Black-White intimate relationships.

Three respondents mentioned the Cheerios commercial that aired in May of 2013 which depicted a Black father, White mother and mixed-race daughter. The negative reactions that the commercial received were mentioned by Rick, a White male from St. Olaf, Emily and Janice.

Yeah, I think they could do a better job. But, I mean even when they try to, people have a lot of bad things to say like have you heard about the Cheerios commercial? Have you seen that? (Janice, Black female, MSU-Mankato)

Yeah, I think they could do a better job. But, I mean even when they try to, people have a lot of bad things to say like have you heard about the Cheerios commercial? Have you seen that? (Janice, Black female, MSU-Mankato)

Yes, I have. I’ve actually used that in a presentation. (Principal Investigator)

Oh, cool well look at that! Yeah, like things like that...TV could do a better job. (Janice, Black female, MSU-Mankato)

There was this Cheerios commercial where there was a, uh, interracial couple and there was a big fuss about it and I didn’t understand why, at all. But then they made it a big deal and I just thought it was really weird and I didn’t think it was a big deal at all. (Emily, White female, Hamline)

The respondents cited the reactions to this commercial as an example of the negative attitudes that people still have toward Black-White intimate relationships, as well as an example of how underrepresented interracial relationships are in the media. This underrepresentation has contributed to the hesitance to accept Black-White intimate relationships as normal.

Along with the unanimous belief among the respondents that pairings between Black males and White females are more frequent than Black female and White male pairings, it was also said that intimate relationships between Black males and White females were more acceptable than Black female and White male pairings. This is a reflection of how society views the relationships between these four demographics. Two respondents, Mike and Lionel, said that White females in high school and college are seen as “rebellious” when they engage in Black-White intimate relationships.

They probably see her as a rebel, same thing with a White guy too. “Oh, you’re rebelling. Oh you’re tryna be different.” Most White people that date people that are Black anyways uhh like, male and female, they kinda have this like, rebellious persona about them anyways. ‘Cause I know from my personal experience, like the White girls that I’ve been with, they’re not, they’re White girls but like in a way they’re not like your typical White girl, you know? Kinda more like, free-spirited like, flingy, like uhhh, like more party, party-type girls you know. I don’t even know how to put this in like, smart words I don’t know how to say this. (Mike, Black male, U of M)

(Laughter), Alright, not as bound by a social expectation of them? (Principal Investigator)

Mmhmm, yes. (Mike, Black male, U of M)

This view of White females as such indicates that certain perceptions of Black-White intimate relationships and assumptions made about the people in them still persist. Being seen as rebellious means an existing norm is being defied when a White female is in an intimate relationship with a Black male. This perception of White males dating Black females was not expressed by any of the respondents. This is indicative of differing gender standards within racial groups.

The differing behavior and expectations of males and females in the same racial group can be explained using SDT. More privileged groups are expected to have a lesser tendency to interact with those outside of their group. White males are more hesitant to engage in Black-White intimate relationships than White females, therefore, their SDOs are higher. Differences in behavioral trends between White males and White females affirms the existence of patriarchy in American society. The existence of this gender-based hierarchy has an effect on the perception of Black-White intimate relationships. Other studies demonstrate patriarchy’s effect on stereotypes and attitudes toward Black-White relationships (Killian 2003; McClain 2011).

**CONCLUSION**

Various stereotypes and differing attitudes toward Black-White intimate relationships were found in this study. All respondents believed there were more Black
male/White female relationships than White male/Black female relationships. It was also found that hesitance to accept Black-White intimate relationships is still present. These findings supported previous findings regarding racial and gender patterns in Black-White intimate relationships, as well as stereotypes of and attitudes toward Black-White intimate relationships. Also, the findings showed that stereotypes and attitudes held during the Civil Rights era have persisted to some degree over the last half-century. A spurious finding in the study was the influence that social environment had on the perception of the frequency and the acceptance of Black-White relationships.

This study was limited by the sample size. Due to time constraints, the intended sample population of ten Black and White male and female college students in the Twin Cities metro area was unable to be gathered. As a result, the sample population underrepresents White females, Black females and White males. Only one of each of the underrepresented demographics was present in the study. Variables like the social environments that the respondents grew up in became significant but were not the focus of the study. In the future, additional studies are needed to improve our understanding of the formation and alteration of stereotypes and attitudes toward Black-White couples.

REFERENCES


APPENDIX A: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SURVEY

1. How do you racially identify yourself (check one)?
   ___White ___Black ___Other
   ___European ___African
   If “Other,” identify yourself as accurately as possible:

2. What is your gender (check one)?
   ___Male ___Female

3. What do you consider your family’s class background to be (check one)?
   ___Low-income ___Working class ___Lower-middle class
   ___Middle-middle class ___Upper-middle class ___Wealthy

4. What highest level of educational attainment did your parent(s) achieve (check one)?
   Mother:
   ___High school diploma/GED ___Associates Degree (A.A.)
   ___Bachelor’s Degree (B.A. or B.S.)
   ___Master’s Degree (M.A. or M.S.)
   ___Doctorate Degree (Ph.D, M.D., JD) ___Other
   If “Other,” specify: __________________________

   Father:
   ___High school diploma/GED ___Associates Degree (A.A.)
   ___Bachelor’s Degree (B.A. or B.S.)
   ___Master’s Degree (M.A. or M.S.)
   ___Doctorate Degree (Ph.D, M.D., JD) ___Other
   If “Other,” specify: __________________________
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW INSTRUMENT

1. How common do you think Black White dating relationships are?
2. In general, how are Black White couples perceived in society? Give examples.
3. What dispositions do/did your parents have toward interracial dating? Give examples of these dispositions.
4. Are they generally accepting of interracial dating? Give examples supporting your answer.
5. What do your peers think of interracial dating?
6. (If participant has been in a Black White dating relationship) What reactions, if any, did your family have regarding the racial identity of your partner?
7. Has a person you know told you about the reactions or thoughts his/her family had about being in a relationship with a (Black or White, depending on participant’s race) person? If so, what were they?
8. Do you know what types of reactions a person you know received from peers for being in a relationship with a Black/White person?
9. (If participant has been in a Black White dating relationship) What reactions, if any, did you receive from people in public because of who you were dating?
10. What reactions have you seen Black White couples being met with in public? Examples?
11. How has media (music, television, social media, etc.) affected your perceptions of race relations and gender roles? Give examples.
12. How have your peers affected your perception of race relations and gender roles?
13. How have your parents affected your perception of race relations and gender roles?
14. Has your racial identity affected your perception of Black and White dating relationships? How?
15. How has your gender identity affected your perception of Black and White interracial dating relationships? Give examples.
16. How has your social class background affected your perception of Black and White interracial dating relationships? Give examples.
17. What are the advantages of being a Black man dating a White woman? What are the disadvantages? Explain your answer.
18. What are the advantages of being a Black woman dating a White man? What are the disadvantages? Explain your answer.
19. What are the advantages of being a White man dating a Black woman? What are the disadvantages? Explain your answer.
20. What are the advantages of being a White woman dating a Black man? What are the disadvantages? Explain your answer.
21. Have you ever been in a Black White interracial dating relationship? If yes, answer the following:
   - Describe how you and your partner were treated by family members. Give examples.
   - Describe how you and your partner were treated by peers. Give examples.
   - Describe how you and your partner were treated by the general public. Give examples.
22. If you have not been in a Black White interracial dating relationship, answer the following:
   - Describe how you and your partner would be treated by family members. Give examples
   - Describe how you and your partner would be treated by peers. Give examples
   - Describe how you and your partner would be treated by the general public. Give examples.