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The Role of Heterosexual Identity in Higher Education Classrooms



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Introduction

Historically, U.S. college campuses have been unwelcoming to homosexual students, with responses ranging from expulsion to conversion therapy (Renn, 2010). This started to shift in response to the Stonewall Riots in 1969, and with the removal of homosexuality from the APA list of disorders in 1973 (Renn, 2010). However a 2003 study suggested that 1 in 5 LGBT students reported fearing for their safety on campus (Rankin) and in a follow up study in 2010, 42% reported the harassment they experienced occurred in the classroom (Rankin, et al.). This study seeks to apply psychological theories and findings to improve classroom climates for LGBT students.

Heterosexual Identity

Mohr's concepts of heterosexual identity (Mohr, 2002; Martinez & Smith, 2019)

Politicized: "Gay and lesbian people should be encouraged to 'come out of the closet.'"

Democratic: "Someone's sexual orientation doesn't really affect their day-to-day lives."

Compulsory: "If someone is attracted to members of the same sex they should not act on those feelings."

Integrative: "Most people could be considered 'bisexual,' while people who are exclusively gay, lesbian, or straight are rare."

Minority Stress Model

Minority Stress Model: Suggests that minorities experience more stress, which may lead to physical and mental health problems (Frost et al., 2015; Meyer, 2003; Meyer & Frost, 2013; Woodford et al., 2012). For example, students who reported hearing "That's so gay" more often on campus, were also more likely to report feeling left out, headaches, or a poor appetite.

Climate: Studies have also shown that classroom and campus environment can impact students' wellbeing (Garvey & Rankin, 2015; Garvey et al., 2015; Blumenfeld et al., 2016), furthermore classroom climate is one of the best predictors of campus climate.

Research Question and Hypotheses

Research Question: Can an intervention on integrative heterosexual identity impact classroom climates?

Hypotheses: The experimental group will score higher on the measure of integrative heterosexuality compared to the control group. The experimental group will be rated higher on the Classroom Diversity Climate scale, as mediated by their scores on integrative heterosexual identity.

Expected Procedures and Measures

Participants and Procedures

The proposed study would collect data from Portland State University professors and their respective students. Professors will be invited to a training intervention through their institutional email and offered a \$20 Amazon gift card for their participation. In this randomized control trial, heterosexual professors will be randomly assigned to either a training intervention or a waitlist (control group). The intervention would involve a once weekly 1-hour training session for the duration of an academic quarter. Students will be asked to fill out a survey in addition to course evaluations at the end of the quarter and will receive the option to enter a raffle for a \$50 Amazon gift card for their participation. The independent variable will be the interview or waitlist conditions (X), and the dependent variable will be the professors' Classroom Diversity Climate score (Y) as mediated by their scores on Integrative Heterosexual Identity (M). Much of the design will reflect a workplace training intervention done by Hammer et al. (2019).

Measures

Heterosexual Identity Scale: adapted Martinez & Smith's (2019) 20-item scale ($\alpha = 0.84$), using the 5 items relating to integrative heterosexual identity only. A higher score indicates a more integrative heterosexual identity.

Classroom Diversity Climate Scale: Grover et al.'s (2020) 5-item scale ($\alpha = 0.78$). A higher score indicates a more supportive and inclusive environment for a diverse body of students.

Expected Results

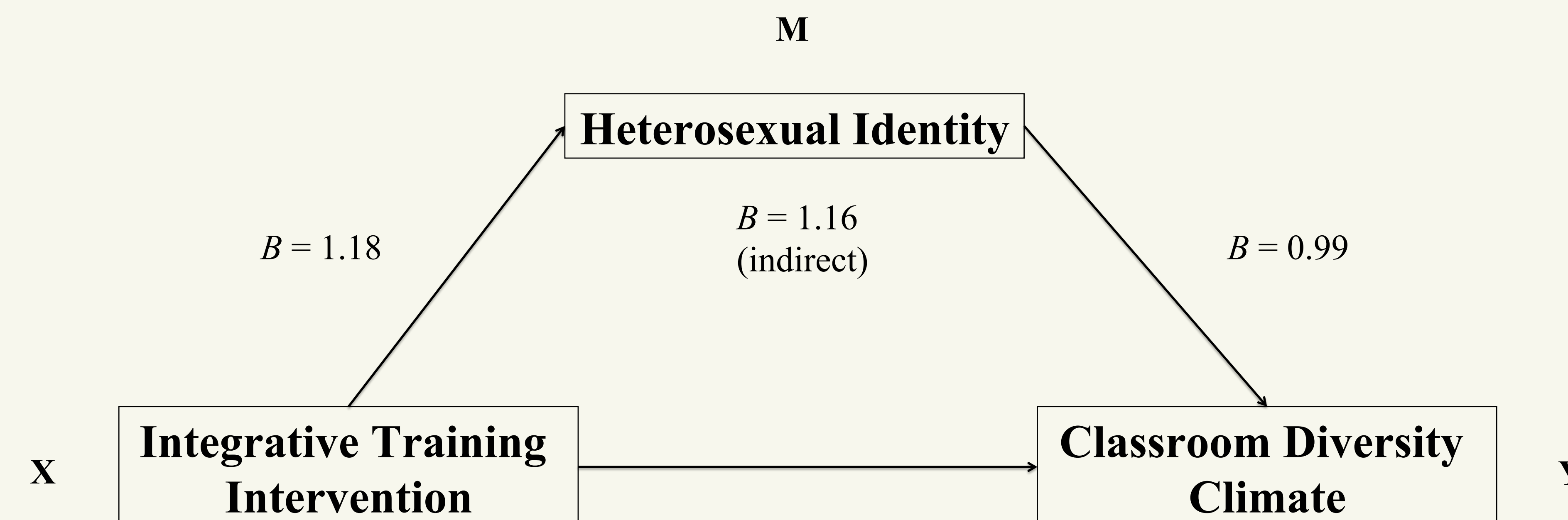
The data will be analyzed using Hayes PROCESS Macro extension in SPSS (Hayes, 2020). Model 4 will be used to test the effect of mediation of integrative heterosexual identity scores on the relationship between the training intervention and the classroom diversity climate. If support is found for the hypotheses, then the results will show that the training intervention is a significant predictor of integrative heterosexual identity ($B = 1.18, SE = .19, p < .001$) and will also show that integrative heterosexual identity is a significant predictor of Classroom Diversity Climate ($B = .99, SE = .09, p < .001$).

Theoretical and Practical Implications

These simulated findings would suggest that professors with higher integrative heterosexual identity scores may provide a buffer for minority stress by improving classroom climate. These findings also provide support for Mohr's theory of heterosexual identity and the continuation of the study of heterosexual identities as other than the norm. Additionally, if the hypotheses are supported, the intervention may be useful to retain lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) students by lessening the level of minority stress they encounter in the classroom. Retention of LGB students would also help the institution reduce drop-out rates, and maintain diversity. If the intervention was applied on a larger scale, it may help to improve intergroup relations in general.

Simulated Figures

Simulated Mediation Analysis



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