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Cognitive Complexity of Heterosexual Arguments on the Civil Rights and Liberties of Homosexuals

Kristopher Michael Goetz
Eastern Illinois University

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Cognitive Complexity of Heterosexual Arguments on the Civil Rights and Liberties of Homosexuals

BY

Kristopher Michael Goetz

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THESIS

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Cognitive Complexity of Heterosexual Arguments on the Civil Rights and Liberties of
Homosexuals

Thesis for a Master of Arts Degree
In Clinical Psychology
Eastern Illinois University
Charleston, Illinois

Kristopher M. Goetz

Chair: Ronan S. Bernas, Ph.D.
Linda Leal, Ph.D.
Marjorie Hanft-Martone, M.A.

ABSTRACT

This study examined how heterosexuals argue about the civil rights and liberties of homosexuals and how various factors interacted in determining how complex heterosexuals' arguments are about two issues; the freedom of homosexuals to express their sexual orientation in public and the status of same-sex marriage. The factors examined were: value conflict (conflict in values experienced when dealing with an issue), issue familiarity (knowledge of the pros and cons of an issue), and perceived status (the perception that one's views are shared by most people or by only a few).

The value conflict experienced by the participants was assessed when participants rank ordered various values that were relevant to the two issues examined. Value conflict indices were obtained using a modified version of Tetlock's (1986) Value Conflict Index. Perceived status and issue familiarity were measured using Likert scales. The latter two factors were obtained for each topic.

Participants in the study orally expressed their arguments for and against the two issues. They defended their own stance and also criticized it. Likewise, they defended and criticized the opposing stance. The complexity of the arguments was assessed using a standardized scoring system developed by Baker-Brown, Ballard Bluck, deVries, Suedfeld, & Tetlock (1992) and Tetlock and Tyler (1996).

Results indicate that an overwhelming majority of heterosexual participants thought that gays should have the freedom to discuss their sexuality in a public forum. However, the heterosexuals were ambivalent about the legalization of homosexual marriages. They argued in significantly more complex ways on this topic than on the previous one. Most of the participants felt their opinions were in the minority when

dealing with free speech rights than when they were confronted with legalizing homosexual marriages.

When arguing about the free speech rights of homosexuals, perceived status, value conflict, and issue familiarity were not predictive of argument complexity. However, on the issue of same-sex marriage, findings show that the influence of issue familiarity on complexity depended on value conflict. For those with little knowledge of the topic, it did not matter whether they were value conflicted or not. They argued at the same level of complexity. Value conflict, however, had an impact among those who were more familiar with the issue. Those who were familiar but had low value conflict were the most complex. Further results indicate that the impact of perceived status on complexity depended on issue familiarity. When participants were in the majority their levels of complexity did not vary according to how familiar they were with the topic. However, among those who believed their views were in the minority, they were more complex if they were less familiar with the topic.

Results may be attributed to the fact that participants had definitive supportive opinions about homosexual free speech rights, but were conflicted about homosexual marriages. Individuals arguing about the rights issue were more certain about their stance and may have engaged in absolutist thinking. Furthermore, granting free speech to gays may simply not be a controversial issue for participants. Alternatively, the more complex arguments on the liberty issue may be attributed to the fact that heterosexuals were ambivalent about same sex marriage. They may have been struggling with the pros and cons of the issue. These complexity levels also may be due to motivational factors. Participants may have felt that the issue was irrelevant to them.

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Cognitive Complexity of Heterosexual Arguments on the Civil Rights and Liberties of

Homosexuals

Introduction

This study examines the level of cognitive complexity that heterosexuals manifest

when making arguments about the civil rights and liberties of homosexuals. Seventy

undergraduate students participated in an interview in which they were asked to express

their opinions about granting rights and liberties to homosexuals. Issues in complexity

theory (Streufert & Streufert, 1978) frame the discussion of the study results.

Argumentation has been of historical interest to the field of psychology. By

studying the various ways that individuals argue, one can gain insights into their thinking

styles. This is especially the case when arguments are made about controversial issues

such as abortion or homosexuality. One of the most fascinating aspects of a person's

thinking style is the level of integrated or cognitive complexity achieved by the

individual. Complexity Theory (Streufert & Streufert, 1978) claims that individuals'

arguments are structured in specific ways. The structure of a person's arguments reveals

how complex the arguer's thoughts are on the issue at hand. This study will examine the

cognitive/conceptual complexity of the arguments that heterosexuals make regarding the

civil rights and liberties of homosexuals.

Defining Complexity

Conceptual complexity is about how complex people's thoughts or arguments are

on an issue or topic. Specifically, it is the extent to which people's thoughts or arguments

take into account different dimensions or sides of an issue, and the extent to which people

are able to integrate these conflicting dimensions or sides into a coherent understanding

of the topic. Formally, complexity is defined as "the utilization of several different dimensions of cognition in the placement of stimuli. Complexity can be either differentiative or differentiative and integrative" (Streufert & Streufert, 1978 p.88). Complexity theorists focus on the structure and dimension of arguments and ignore the content.

There are two dimensions involved in assessing cognitive complexity. The first of which is differentiation. It is the ability to recognize various aspects of an issue. Baker-Brown, Ballard, Bluck, deVries, Suedfeld, and Tetlock (1992) referred to it as the extent to which individuals are able to recognize different viewpoints of an issue. Hunsberger, Lea, Pancer, Pratt, and McKenzie (1992 p.96) refer to differentiation as "the number of dimensions of an issue that are taken into account in evaluating or interpreting events." An individual demonstrates this aspect of complexity when he or she can recognize at least two different sides of a controversial issue. When one fully demonstrates differentiation, he or she must see each side of an argument as relevant, legitimate, justifiable, and valid. An example of this, when arguing on the topic of abortion, is when the subject makes statements such as "Well I do think abortion is wrong because it is not giving a child a chance to live, but on the other hand I understand that a woman should be able to decide what happens to her body."

The second aspect of cognitive complexity is the presence of integration of viewpoints. This dimension refers to the recognition of a dynamic relationship between alternatives. Tetlock (1989 p.134) defined it as "the development of complex connections among differentiated characteristics." Baker-Brown, Bluck, Suedfeld & Tetlock (1992 p.401) describe integration as "noticing the existence of conceptual connections between

differentiated dimensions of judgement." Integration occurs when an individual can identify various category links between concepts, when attributes are made to various dimensions, and conflicting ideation is recognized. There is explicit interaction of ideas and alternative views are in focus simultaneously. Integration is the most complex way of thinking because differentiation must already be present for it to occur. The interaction of various dimensions is the essential element. Integration occurs when an arguer makes a statement like "Outlawing abortion would not give a woman a chance to decide what happens to her body, but it would protect the lives of unborn children. Making this law would affect some individuals positively and some negatively. I guess some sort of compromise is in order so that both sides can benefit from the legislation. Such a compromise might include legalizing abortion, but putting heavy restrictions on it such as outlawing late term abortions, and making multiple abortions illegal."

The Value of Studying Complexity

Assessing the complexity of individual's thoughts is theoretically valuable because it is predictive of certain psychological phenomena. Cognitive complexity as a measure of information processing has been indicative of a number of personal traits (Suedfeld, Bluck, & Ballard, 1994). Complexity has been associated with many facets of the Interpersonal Adjective Scale (IAS) (Coren & Suedfeld, 1995). Highly complex individuals tend to be more dominant, less submissive, highly extroverted, highly agreeable, highly expressive, social non-conformists, thrill seeking, experience seeking, and more susceptible to boredom.

Complexity is also indicative of how individuals form specific versions of the world around them (Verkuyten, 1998). For example, individuals who demonstrate

relatively low levels of complexity view their world in simple terms with definitive answers to life problems. However, complex thinkers form complex choices and diverse alternatives to life situations.

Through analysis of archival and historical documents, exhaustive measurements of cognitive complexity have been done on numerous populations. These measurements have, in turn, been used to predict certain psychological or behavioral factors. For example, Egyptian and Israeli leaders who demonstrated complex thinking, increased their success at peacekeeping (Maoz & Astorino, 1992). Complex international and American revolutionary leaders were more successful in their attempts to overthrow the existing power structure (Suedfeld & Rank, 1976). Atomic scientists decreased in complexity when there was a perception of tension and extreme seriousness, as is the case when dropping nuclear weapons on humans is considered (Suedfeld, 1980). American Psychological Association presidents who were perceived as particularly eminent by their colleagues generated greater complexity than those who were not. A positive correlation was also discovered between the number of years of life remaining and complexity (Suedfeld, 1985). President Bill Clinton presented a low level of complexity compared to past presidents when arguing about such issues as the economic stimulus package, tax bills, and health care despite his liberal reputation (Suedfeld, 1994). Leaders of UN peacekeeping forces exhibited low complexity in times of criticism and failure, an increase of complexity in times of professional success and personal indiscretion, and an increase in complexity once again when relieved from duty and the stress related to the task (Suedfeld & Grandstein, 1995). Twentieth century American presidents manifested a relatively low level of complexity before election, but increased

in differentiation and integration once they took office (Tetlock, 1981a). Liberal supreme court justices were more complex than conservative ones (Tetlock, Bernzwieg, & Gallant, 1985). U.S. senators who are isolationists are less complex than non-isolationists (Tetlock, Hannum, & Micheletti, 1984; Tetlock, 1981). Finally, the great level of complexity of Winston Churchill was demonstrated (Tetlock & Tyler, 1996). These examples prove the usefulness and diversity of complexity theory.

Measuring Complexity

To measure complexity Baker-Brown, Ballard Bluck, deVries, Suedfeld, & Tetlock (1992) and Tetlock and Tyler (1996) developed a standard scoring system. Scoring of complexity is done on a 1 to 7 scale with 1 being the lowest and 7 being the highest. The content of the statement must be completely ignored and the raters must be objective when scoring.

A score of 1 indicates no sign of conceptual differentiation or integration. The author of the argument relies on simple, one-dimensional rules for interpreting events and making choices. The individual feels that there is only one way of looking at the world, and the use of absolutes is common. The author seeks rapid closure to the issue by engaging in all or none thinking. It is important to note that the elaboration of a single view does not constitute a higher score. Value judgments are pervasive in a statement of this nature and some commonly used expressions include "absolutely", "all", "always", "never", "convinced", "solely", and "surely". An example of an argument that deserves a score of 1 is "Homosexuality is wrong. I think it's disgusting and that they don't deserve the same privileges as heterosexuals because they're inferior."

A score of 2 is given when the arguer recognizes the potential for looking at the same issue in different ways and along different dimensions. Differentiation of views is emergent and not developed. Statements are not specific and the use of general comments is common, there is simply a potential for more complex thinking. Some common expressions of a score of two include "but", "nevertheless", "while", "however", and "though". When an individual says "I think homosexuality is wrong, but there may be some instances where it should be accepted," they deserve a score of two.

A score of 3 is given to an argument when the author makes a clear specification of at least two distinct ways of looking at the same situation. There is no evidence of integration, but each perspective is seen as relevant, legitimate, and valid. The author distinctly realizes that there are at least two ways to see the subject. It is not necessary that each view is developed, but they must be explicit. If the author recognizes more than two views to the issue the score does not increase. This score is a valid sign of increased tolerance to the issue because there is a reaction against absolutism. Some common expressions include "alternatively", "either...or", "on the other hand", and "meanwhile." An example of this score is "I think when homosexuality is immoral when it comes to sexual relations, but on the other hand, being gay or lesbian is a perfectly acceptable way of life and deserving of equal rights. I guess it just depends on what you are referring."

A score of 4 is given when the author recognizes the emergence of integration. Although the integration of various ideas is not clearly present, two factors must be present for a score to receive this score: representation of alternatives, and implicit recognition of a dynamic relationship between alternatives. This score is given when there is only a suggestion of integration. Someone who states "Homosexuality is a tricky

issue. On one hand I feel it is wrong, but this makes me feel guilty because I know they are people like you and I, and they deserve equal treatment, I think I value the morality of equality which makes my feelings about the issue mixed," deserves a score of 4.

A more complex score of 5 is received when the arguer demonstrates explicit integration of ideas. Alternative views are in focus simultaneously and are also viewed interactively. Clear integration is seen. Some common expressions include "interplay", "interaction", "interdependence", "mutual", "compromise", and "trade-offs". An example of this occurs when an arguer states " I think homosexual issues are complicated. I'd like to think I have an open opinion about this. On one side I think homosexuality is just a normal lifestyle, deserving of equal treatment. However, when I say this I think I may be fooling myself because I was raised to think homosexuality was immoral. However, just because I was raised to think one way doesn't mean I haven't learned to broaden my horizons and have many ideas on this subject. I guess this shows how one idea impacts the other by forcing me to deal with my current opinions and with the values I was raised with, simultaneously "

A score of 6 occurs when a high level of interaction is stated. There is an expression of a dynamic changing form of interaction. There are explanations of both of the "moving parts" within a system. Alternate views are readily accepted, compared, and contrasted. The author makes global overviews in their statements and there are explicit details of a dynamic interaction. An example of a score of six is "I have conflicting feelings about homosexual rights. I think they should be treated just like everyone else, but I don't think that they deserve special treatment or that anyone should go out of their way to accommodate them. My feelings are torn, and it is a struggle for me to decide

what I should believe because both of my ideas seem right. I guess this issue taps into that fact that people are unsure how to deal with the ideals of equal rights for everyone and personal convictions against the norm at the same time."

The most complex score a statement can receive is 7. The arguer recognizes the presence of overarching viewpoints pertaining to the nature of the relationship. There is a discussion of how each alternative affects the overarching view. Finally, this global view unites high differentiation and high integration. An example of this score is " I think gays and lesbian are distasteful and not my choice of a lifestyle, but I think they should be accepted in our community because they have many things to contribute to our society. My values of equal treatment and personal choice are at odds in this subject. It just goes to show that even though people don't personally believe in something, they can still support it."

Factors Influencing Complexity

Value conflict. Thinking does not occur in an isolated environment, and indeed there are factors that may influence the level of complexity. Every conflict or issue has at least two sides. Underlying each side of an argument are specific values that support it. Therefore, any differences in opinion arise from a primary difference in values. When individuals take a stance on an issue they evaluate the various values involved and rank them (Stein & Miller, 1990). Individuals prioritize their values while making arguments. Stances or positions that uphold one value tend to sacrifice others (Tetlock, 1986). For example, when a person takes an opinion on homosexuality, and argues for the legislation for equal work rights, he or she values both equality for all, and preserving the traditional family structure, but one value is prioritized over the other. On the other hand, if a person

argues for the abolishment of equality for homosexuals in the workplace, he or she is prioritizing the same values in different ways.

There are circumstances that might arise in which an individual has a difficult time making an argument because both values involved in an argument are held in high regard. In such cases a high level of personal value conflict occurs. Value conflict occurs when "one has to deal simultaneously with two desired but conflicting values" (Suedfeld & Wallbaum, 1992 p.19). For example, an arguer would have a difficult time taking a definitive stance on an argument for granting legal marriage rights to homosexuals if he or she held the values of preserving the traditional family and equal treatment for everyone both in high regard. Value conflict broadens one's perspectives of the issue and prepares the individual to differentiate alternatives. Therefore, the greater level of value conflict an individual is experiencing, the more complex the thinking patterns tend to be (Suedfeld & Wallbaum, 1992; Tetlock, 1986; Tetlock, Armor, & Peterson, 1994). Complex thinking is in direct relation to the degree to which an issue activates conflicting values that people perceive as important and equal (Tetlock, 1986). In the present study, the factor of value conflict is treated as an independent predictor of complexity. This is because it is theoretically unrelated to any of the other variables that will be discussed. As a conflict in values arises, complexity is directly increased. Conversely, as value conflicts are resolved, values become prioritized and complex thinking decreases.

Perceived status. The second factor that influences complexity is whether the individual views their opinions are being shared with those of the majority or minority. An arguer may fit into one of two categories in this respect: either the individual feels that his or her opinions are the same as the majority's or he or she feels that their personal

opinion is in the minority. Wegman (1988) and Zammuner (1987) argue that individuals who feel that their opinions are in the minority are compelled to defend their answers and have the need to become familiar with the opposition's stance. Conversely, those in the majority do not feel the need to elaborate on their position because their opposition is small and unimportant. Therefore, those in the minority tend to think more complexly than those in the majority. However, this stance has been debated. Greunfeld, Thomas-Hunt, and Kim (1998) contend that just the opposite is true. Their findings show that those in the majority feel a social pressure to elaborate and defend their stance. Individuals who share the majority's opinion are also more likely to face social consequences if their argument fails, but those in the minority do not have the burden of this social responsibility. The results show that those in the majority tend to argue in ways that are more complex. Because this variable has provided mixed results, further study is required. In the present study, testing will occur in a relatively non-social environment that is free from public scrutiny. Therefore, those who hold the majority view will not be challenged. Persons in the minority have been shown to have knowledge of the majority's side, feel compelled to defend their stance, and are therefore more complex. Those in the majority are unaware of the minority view and engage in a less complex form of argumentation (Wegman, 1988 & Zammuner 1987).

Issue familiarity. Another factor that may influence complexity scores is the level of prior knowledge an individual has regarding the issue before he or she is asked to discuss it. This taps into how familiar one is of the various pros and cons of an argument, or how well informed someone is about the issue. Individuals vary in the amount of knowledge they have of the issue at hand (Grotevant & Cooper, 1985). Some arguers are

unfamiliar with topics while others consider themselves as experts on issues. Still others know a great deal of facts regarding one aspect of an argument while others are familiar with many views on the issue. Logically, if an individual was knowledgeable of both the pros and cons of a controversial topic, he or she would have an easier time recognizing the conflicting arguments on the subject than another who was just introduced to the topic for the first time. Individuals who have greater issue familiarity on a topic tend to think more complexly than those who are unfamiliar with the topic do (Stein, Bernas, & Calicchia, 1997). They have the knowledge to at least differentiate if not integrate the conflicting sides of the issue.

Although issue familiarity is a predictor of complexity, it is theoretically related to the two factors previously discussed: perceived status and value conflict. For example, if an individual feels that they are in the majority, they are not typically exposed to the minority view and will not feel compelled to be familiar with it. Therefore, those in the majority will tend to have less knowledge of the issue. However, those who feel that they are in the minority will be aware of not only their own opinion, but will be exposed to the majority opinion simply because it is so popular. Therefore, those in the minority will have greater knowledge of the issue at hand. Likewise, if a person has greater knowledge of the issue, they will know the pros and cons of both sides of the topic, and therefore are more likely to experience a high level of value conflict. If a person does not have much knowledge about the issue, he or she will not know the pros and cons of the arguments and will tend to experience a low level of value conflict. If issue familiarity proves to be empirically associated with the value conflict and perceived status variables, it will be statistically controlled for in the present study.

Facilitating complexity through elaboration requests. Another possible factor that may influence complexity is how the thoughts or arguments are elicited. Hunsberger, Lea, Pancer, Pratt, and McKenzie (1992) found that although individuals may think in complex ways, they do not verbalize it when simply asked one question. It is valuable to encourage arguers to elaborate on their opinions to help them externalize their existing complexities. When an individual is prodded or asked to elaborate, complexity scores have been found to increase (Hunsberger, Lea, Pancer, Pratt, & McKenzie, 1992). Prodding individuals to elaborate their responses simply sets up an optimal environment for people to maximize the possibility of increased complexity. In the present study, the participants will be asked to generate reasons for and against their position on the issue, as well as, reasons for and against the opposing position.

Facilitating complexity through oral argumentation. A final factor that may impact complexity scores is the method of argument expression. Two significantly different complexity scores may result if an arguer is asked to express themselves with a pen and paper method as with the Paragraph Completion Task (PCT) as compared to an individual being asked to express themselves orally as is common in the interview method. When an individual is asked to write down their opinions, as in the case with the Paragraph Completion Task (PCT), thinking becomes narrowed, list-like, and fatigue may become a factor. However, if thoughts are generated through an oral method the individual participant does not experience these constraints. Significantly more arguments are presented in an oral generation task than in a written one (Bernas, 1999). In the present study, the interview method is employed.

It is recommended that a test for complexity not be timed. It has been found that there is a decrease in complex thinking if time pressure is placed on the individual (Suedfeld & Wallbaum, 1992). Therefore, in this study, the basic preferred task is to generate arguments orally with no time limit. Testing complexity orally also is used to optimize the testing environment so that individuals have every opportunity to increase their complexity in argumentation. The purpose of the present study is to examine how value conflict and perceived status influences argument complexity when issue familiarity is controlled for and arguments are prodded and generated orally.

Complexity in the Context of Arguments about Homosexuals

A particular controversial topic that individuals often make comments about is the issue of homosexuality. Homosexuals have made tremendous political and social gains since the Stonewall rebellion in 1969, which resulted in widespread legitimization as a minority culture. Some recent advancements include the acceptance of homosexual marriages in Hawaii, the establishment of a powerful voting block in many states, the petition to have AIDS awareness become one of the most pervasive health issues in our country, the recent lobbying for hate crime legislation, and the emergence of numerous gay and lesbian civil and economic leaders around the country. However, there is still a great deal of intolerance and hostility towards homosexuals (Herek, 1996). Even as our culture heads into a new millennium, there is still an undercurrent of prejudice and discrimination that occasionally leads to senseless violence that was seen in Wyoming in 1998. Today the term Heterosexism has been used to describe this phenomenon and is defined as "the ideological system that denies, deintegrates and stigmatizes any non-heterosexual forms of behavior, identity, relationship, or community" (Herek, 1990,

p.101). Perhaps one of the most alarming facts regarding heterosexism is that 90% of gay males and 75% of lesbians in U.S. metropolitan areas have been verbally harassed because of their sexuality (National Gay Task Force, 1984). An additional issue is the fact that heterosexual males tend to show more anti-gay hostility than heterosexual women (Weis & Dain, 1979). This is evidence that the issue of homosexuality is both emotional and controversial.

Civil rights. When one makes arguments regarding the issue of homosexuality, it becomes clear that it is a much more involved issue than once thought. The issue of whether homosexuality is right or wrong has been debated for decades. One specific type of argument regarding homosexuals is whether or not they deserve equal rights under the law. Some individuals support the position that homosexuals should not be treated equally due to their "inferior" sexual orientation. However, in the past two decades there has been a great increase in support of equal rights for homosexuals (Herek, 1994; Wood, 1990). Heterosexuals have shown that they now tend to agree that gays and lesbians should have equal job rights, should have freedom of speech, agree that relations between two consenting homosexuals should be accepted, think that homosexuals should be allowed to be teachers, and are opposed to removing homosexual books from public libraries (Herek, 1994; Wood, 1990). This fact may be due to the increased exposure and publicity gays and lesbians receive in society, or that many heterosexuals now have been in increased contact with homosexuals. As a result, the status of the modern day homosexual has changed tremendously in recent decades, therefore granting equal rights seems commonplace and warranted by the majority of the population. This type of

position has led to amendments guaranteeing the legal protection of the homosexual culture.

     <u>Liberties.</u> The other issue facing homosexuals are the <u>liberties</u> they deserve and their overall place in society. This topic entails how individuals feel about homosexuals in a personal sense or whether or not they deserve extraneous privileges that are outside of the law. As opposed to arguments that individuals make regarding the rights of homosexuals, heterosexuals believe that homosexual behavior is sinful and immoral (Weinberger & Millham, 1979). Most Americans condemn homosexuality, regard it as unnatural, express disregard for it, and do not consider it an acceptable alternative lifestyle (Herek, 1994;Wood, 1990). Evidence of this is seen in the widespread disregard of homosexual marriages and the existence of sodomy laws in nearly one half of the United States. The great opposition to homosexual liberties may be because it is seen as immoral, and that homosexual behavior is not viewed as "normal" or acceptable. This type of issue regarding homosexuals has impeded their success and uncovers some of the hostility felt towards gays and lesbians.

Cognitive-Affective Split

     Based on the two types of issues regarding homosexuals, a contradiction or hypocrisy seems to be emerging. On the one hand, our culture has shown increased willingness to grant civil rights to gays and lesbians, but on the other, heterosexuals continue to condemn homosexuality morally and feel uncomfortable and unaccepting about gays and lesbians personally (Herek,1996).This type of irony taps into the phenomenon known as the cognitive- affective split (Van de Ven, Bornholt, & Baily, 1996). Individuals may not personally <u>feel</u> supportive of an issue, but they <u>think</u> it should

be legitimized. Discussing cognitive complexity in this context lends itself very well to studying the factors that influence complexity because it is a very controversial topic that may have a variety of different arguments. In addition, many people have conflicting opinions on these issues. This topic involves the arguer making both moral and legal judgments regarding the issue that are often times unclear in a public forum. This is what makes studying the arguments of heterosexuals about homosexuals interesting. In addition, this fact explains why there is a need to address both the rights and liberties of homosexuals when asking heterosexuals subjects to argue about gays and lesbians. Overall, the civil rights and liberties of homosexuals provides the perfect platform for testing the cognitive complexity of heterosexuals.

Testing Complexity in Arguments about Homosexuals

The present study will ask individuals to make arguments regarding the civil rights and liberties of homosexuals. It will examine the factors that may influence the complexity of the arguer. The value conflict experienced by the participants will be assessed. Participants rank ordered various values that are relevant to homosexual rights and liberties. The values used in this study that are related to homosexual rights and liberties are equal opportunity for everybody, & freedom to express one's sexual preferences, versus keeping gender roles clear and distinct, & preserving the traditional family. A value conflict index will then be determined from the value ranking. Secondly, perceived status will be gauged. A measure of issue familiarity with the various issues involved in granting civil rights and liberties to homosexuals is obtained. A person can range in familiarity from knowing absolutely nothing about the pros and cons of the issue, to reporting that they are an expert on the topic. Then, the impact of issue

familiarity will be statistically controlled for. Finally, the interaction effect between value conflict and perceived status view will be assessed.

Participants in the study will be asked to orally generate arguments for and against homosexual rights and civil liberty issues. This type of interview method will allow subjects to think spontaneously. In order to give the participants ample opportunity to demonstrate their level of complexity on the topic without the stress of time pressure, no time limit will be imposed. Moreover, the participants will be asked to express what they think about the pros and cons of both sides of each issue. Not only will they defend their own stance, but they will also be asked to criticize it. Likewise, they will be asked to defend and criticize the opposing stance. The argument generation task is designed to create a situation optimal for exhibiting complexity.

Significance of the Study

Studying conceptual complexity of heterosexual arguments regarding homosexual rights and liberties is of interest in the fields of argumentation, discourse, and gay studies. First, discovering how complex heterosexuals are when discussing these issues is of interest in gay studies because this reveals how individuals think about gays and lesbians The idea of finding out how open heterosexuals are about various homosexual issues is what is at the core of this thesis. The study continues to examine the roles of value conflict and the perceived status in influencing the cognitive complexity. While these factors have been investigated separately in previous studies, the present study will test the interaction of both factors. Also, past studies have not optimized the opportunity for complexity to occur. Other studies have used less than ideal conditions, whether it is the use of a Paragraph Completion Task, or simply by not prodding responses. By using both

an oral presentation method and by making elaboration requests, this study will maximize the complexity of responses.

<u>Hypothesis</u>

It is predicted that individuals who are undecided about granting civil rights and liberties to homosexuals will be experiencing a greater deal of value conflict about the topics and will have a difficult time forming opinions. Therefore, they will have more complex arguments because both sides of the topic will be acknowledged. However, those who experience a low level of value conflict will have definitive opinions because certain values are clearly more important to the individual than others. Furthermore, those with strong opinions will dismiss alternative arguments, desire a hasty resolution to the issue, and will, therefore, be less complex. Because the current study takes place in a private office with only the interviewer and the participant present, there are no social consequences for those who think they hold the majority view. Therefore, there will be no need for them to be complex. On the other hand, those who perceive themselves as in the minority will not only have greater knowledge of the majority's arguments due to their exposure to them, but they will feel compelled to defend their statements. Those who feel that they are in the majority may not have had exposure to the minority viewpoint, and will be unfamiliar with it. Consequently, those who feel that they are in the minority will ultimately provide more complex arguments than those who feel that they are in the majority. It is also hypothesized that those who are relatively familiar with the issue of homosexual rights and liberties will have a greater knowledge base from which to make their arguments than those with little knowledge about the issue. Therefore, participants with more issue familiarity on the topic will have more complex

statements than those with little or no issue familiarity. It is also hypothesized that a positive correlation between issue familiarity and value conflict, and issue familiarity and perceived status will occur. When these are observed, the influence of issue familiarity will be statistically controlled for when examining the impact of value conflict and perception of the minority/majority view. In predicting the interaction of value conflict and the perceived status, it is expected that those who experience a high level of value conflict and feel that they are in the minority will possess the most complex arguments, and those who exhibit a low level of value conflict and feel that they are in the majority will have the least complex responses.

<center>Method</center>

Participants

Seventy heterosexual Eastern Illinois University college undergraduate and graduate students (half-men and half-women) were recruited (through announcements on the psychology research bulletin board and class announcements) and were paid $10 each for their participation.

Procedure

Confidentiality was assured because all names recorded for payment purposes were kept separate from the testing materials. Participants were given the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. At the end of the tasks they were given a debriefing statement that revealed the purpose of the study. In addition, this statement provided the address and phone number to the counseling center on campus that could address any issues concerning sexual orientation that arose and gave the participants an option to be informed of the results of the study.

Each participant was given five tasks administered by an interviewer who was of opposite gender and who was either a clinical or school psychology graduate student. The five tasks took approximately a half-hour to complete. The first task the participants were asked to complete was a modified version of Tetlock's (1986) Value Conflict Scale. This assessed what value conflicts the participant was experiencing and the intensity to which they were experiencing them. This task involved rank ordering 15 values in terms of personal importance (four of which are relevant to the rights and liberties of homosexuals). Each value presented to the participant was clearly defined.

The second task involved gauging the participant's perceived status. This was done using a set of two questions. The first question assessed the perception of the majority view on the rights of homosexuals and was stated "What do you think MOST people's positions are on granting freedom of speech to homosexuals?" The second question assessed the perception of the majority view on the civil liberties of homosexuals and was stated "What do you think MOST people's positions are on legalizing same sex marriages?" The participants answered by circling a score on a Likert scale ranging from one to seven. The lowest score of one represented a perception that MOST people are against it, a score of four represented a perception that MOST people are undecided about it, and a high score of seven represented a perception that MOST people are for it.

The third task assessed how much issue familiarity the participants had about the issues. This was also done by asking a set of two questions and having the participants answer by circling a score of one to seven on a Likert scale. The first question addressed the issue of granting rights to homosexuals and is stated "To what extent are you familiar

with the pros and cons involved in granting freedom of speech to homosexuals?" The second question measured how familiar the participants were with granting civil liberties to homosexuals and was stated "To what extent are you familiar with the pros and cons involved in legalizing same-sex marriages?" A score of one represented unfamiliarity with the pros and cons, a score of four represented being just as knowledgeable about the pros and cons as anyone, and a score of seven represented being an expert on the pros and cons.

The fourth task involved eliciting the participant's opinion about granting rights and civil liberties to homosexuals. The participant was presented with the first issue of granting civil rights to homosexuals. This was presented as: "There are people whose ideas are not necessarily accepted by others. What about a man or a woman that admits he or she is homosexual? Suppose he or she wanted to make a speech at the university to talk about his or her sexual orientation. Should he or she be allowed to speak or not? What is your position on this issue?" The individual was asked to circle a number from one to seven with one representing he or she should not be allowed to speak, four representing an indecisiveness about the subject, and seven signifying that he or she should be allowed to speak.

When the second issue of granting civil liberties to homosexuals was presented, the participant was also asked to express their opinion by circling a number on a one to seven scale. The issue was presented as: "There has been some considerable debate regarding the rights of gay men or lesbians to marry. Do you think same sex marriages should be legalized? What is your position on this issue?" A score of one represents the opinion that homosexual marriages should not be legalized, a four represents an opinion

that the participant is undecided about legalizing same-sex marriages, and a score of seven signifying homosexual marriages should be legalized.

Once these four steps were completed, the participants were asked to elaborate on their opinions on the issues. After the topics of granting civil rights to homosexuals and granting liberties to homosexuals were presented and the participant verified their positions, they were asked to come up with reasons to support their stance. The interviewees were then asked to discuss some problems with their own opinion. The participants elaborated on possible criticisms, weaknesses, or limitations of their position. They were then asked to come up with arguments that support the other side of the argument. Once this was done, the participants were requested to discuss problems with the opposing side and verbalize criticisms, weaknesses, and limitations of the opposing viewpoint. These interviews were audio taped and transcribed so they could be scored for complexity.

Design

The predictor variables are the level of value conflict experienced by the participant, their perceived status, and the amount of issue familiarity each participant has regarding the issues at hand. The predicted variable is the level of cognitive complexity during argumentation.

Coding

The predicted variable of complexity was measured on a scale of one to seven. A score of one represented neither the presence of differentiation nor integration. The score of two is representative of the emergence of differentiation among various viewpoints. If a statement receives a score of three, clear differentiation is apparent. A score of four is

representative of not only clear differentiation, but shows the emergence of integration of views. If a statement received a score of five, clear differentiation and integration is seen. A score of six was an indication that general overviews are present both within and between opinions. Finally, a statement deserving a score of seven contains global overviews and demonstrates how each overview affects the relationship between views.

Establishing Reliability

Two coders scored the statements made by the participants. One coder was the author of this thesis, and another coder was recruited from the second year Clinical Psychology masters program. Each coder was thoroughly trained from materials authored by Baker-Brown, Ballard, Bluck, deVries, Suedfeld, & Tetlock (1992). To ensure that the coders were competent enough to score the statements of the volunteers, each individual was required to achieve a scoring agreement of 80% with Baker-Brown, Ballard, Bluck, deVries, Suedfeld, & Tetlock on practice essays found in the training materials. The primary coder scored all the participants. The second coder scored a random sample of 30% of the essays. The two coders then compared scores and achieved an 80% agreement among essays.

Results

Derived Measures for Value Conflict, Perceived Status, and Issue Familiarity

The first analysis examined and established the relationships among the predictor variables (value conflict, perceived status, and issue familiarity). A value conflict index was obtained for each participant taking into account the two pairs of relevant values (equal opportunities for everybody & freedom to express one's own sexual preferences versus preserving the traditional family & keeping gender roles clear and distinct). A

value conflict index was then derived using Tetlock, Armor and Peterson's (1994) formula of VCI= (/V1 +V2/)*1 / (/V1-V2/). V1 represented the score of one of the first two relevant values for each pair (equal opportunities for everybody or freedom to express one's own sexual preference) whileV2 represented the score of one of the second set of relevant values (preserving the traditional family or keeping gender roles clear and distinct).

These two sets of opposing values resulted in four value conflict index scores for each participant. VCI 1, the first value conflict index score, was obtained from the values of equal opportunities for everyone versus keeping gender roles clear and distinct. VCI 2 was from equal opportunities for everyone versus preserving the traditional family. VCI 3 was obtained from the values of freedom to express one's own sexual preferences versus keeping gender roles clear and distinct. The last value conflict index score, VCI 4, was taken from freedom to express one's own sexual preferences versus preserving the traditional family.

Once these four scores were obtained, they were averaged to obtain an overall VCI score for each individual: (VCI1 + VCI2 + VCI3 + VCI4)/ 4= overall VCI score. For example, suppose a participant gave the values of equal opportunities for everyone, freedom to express one's own sexual preferences, keeping gender roles clear and distinct, and preserving the traditional family value rankings of 3, 5, 12, & 13 respectively. Using the formula described above, VCI1 = 1.6, VCI2 = 1.6, VCI3 = 2.4, and VCI4 = 2.2. Therefore the overall VCI = (1.6 + 1.6 + 2.4 + 2.2)/ 4 = 1.9. The lower the overall VCI (on a scale from 1 to 29), the more value conflict the individual was experiencing.

Perceived status was taken from the responses to two questions. The first question gauged the individuals' position on the issue using a Likert-type scale that ranged from a one representing total opposition to the issue to a seven representing total endorsement of the topic. The second question assessed the individuals' perception of the majority's opinion. Using a Likert-type scale ranging from a low of one representing the perception that most people are against the issue to a seven representing the belief that most people are for the topic. Perceived status was assessed by taking the difference in ratings on the two scales (score from personal opinion scale – score from majority opinion scale = perceived status). The larger the difference, the more the participant thought that they were in the minority. Perceived status was obtained on each of the two topics.

Issue familiarity was also measured by using a Likert-type scale. A rating of one meant that the individual knew nothing about the pros and cons of the issue, a rating of four signified that the participant thought they knew just as much as anyone else about the issue, and a rating of seven indicated that the participant felt like an expert about the pros and cons of the topic. Issue familiarity was obtained on each of the two topics.

Demographics

Forty-five percent of the participants were men and 55% were women. Ages ranged from 18 to 42. The median age was 22. Volunteers ranged in class status from freshman to graduate students, however the majority (88%) was either juniors or seniors. Eighty percent of the participants knew someone who was a homosexual. Of those who knew someone who was gay or lesbian, 25% felt that they were not very close to them, 57% felt that they were relatively close, and 17% felt that they were very close to that

individual. The average level of value conflict experienced by the participants was 3.9 (with a standard deviation of 2.2) and a range from 1.34 to 10.23.

Analysis of Topic 1

Overall opinion on topic 1. When participants were presented with the first topic, they thought that gays and lesbians should be able to speak about their sexuality publicly ($\underline{M}$ = 6.36, $\underline{SD}$ = .98) (on a scale from 1 to 7). When these individuals described how familiar they were with the topic, they generally felt that they knew as much as other people about the pros and cons involved in granting free speech rights to homosexuals ($\underline{M}$ = 3.05, $\underline{SD}$ = 1.23) (on a scale from 1 to 7). Most thought that their personal opinions were neither in the majority nor in the minority, but somewhere in between ($\underline{M}$ = 3.19, $\underline{SD}$ = 1.51) (on a scale from 0 to 6). However, the more an individual agreed with allowing free speech to homosexuals, the more he or she viewed him or her self as in the minority ($\underline{r}$ = .55, $\underline{p}$ < .001).

Cognitive complexity of arguments on topic 1. When the participants' arguments about granting free speech rights to homosexuals were assessed for complexity, a rather low score resulted ($\underline{M}$ = 2.12, $\underline{SD}$ = 1.16) (on a scale from 1 to 7). This meant that the participants had the potential of looking at the issue in different ways, but did not readily express different viewpoints. Therefore, most arguers either did not see weaknesses in their own opinions or were not able to express alternative views.

Predicting the cognitive complexity of arguments on topic 1. Correlational tests were first conducted on the predictors to discover whether or not the variables were independent of each other. The outcome of these tests would determine what further analysis of the data would be required. The only significant correlation that occurred was

between perceived status and position taken on the issue ($r = .55$, $p < .001$). The more accepting the participants were of allowing free speech for gays, the more they felt their views were in the minority. To transform the predictors into nominal scales, the median scores were used to divide the sample into two groups per variable. The median Value Conflict Index was 3.45, the median perceived status score was 3.00, and the median issue familiarity score was 3.0.

A three way ANOVA was conducted on the complexity scores with value conflict (higher versus lower), familiarity (more familiar versus less familiar), and perceived status (opinion shared with the minority versus shared with the majority) as predictors. Position taken in the issue was not included in the analysis because it was correlated with perceived status. Results show that there were no significant interactions or main effects. None of the variables predicted the complexity of arguments.

Analysis of Topic 2

Overall opinion on topic 2. When volunteers were asked about their views on granting liberties to homosexuals, they were relatively undecided about legalizing gay and lesbian marriages ($M = 4.92$, $SD = 2.03$). They thought that they knew as much as other people when it came to the pros and cons involved in legalizing homosexual marriages ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 1.12$). In addition, they felt that their opinion on the issue was neither in the minority nor the majority ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 1.73$).

Cognitive complexity of arguments on topic 2. The average level of complexity of the participants' arguments was rather low ($M = 2.62$, $SD = .98$). This means that the participants could not clearly express alternative views to the same issue. They were

unable to state ideas that were either contradictory or unassociated with their own opinion.

Predicting the cognitive complexity of arguments on topic 2. Correlational tests were conducted on the predictor variables for topic two to assess if they were independent of each other. The results of these tests indicate that a person's position on the topic and the level of value conflict were significantly correlated ($r = .30$, $p < -.02$). The more a person endorsed gay marriages, the more value conflict he or she experienced. Position on the topic and perceived status also had a significant correlation ($r = .76$, $p < .001$). The more a person endorsed the legalization of gay marriages, the more he or she felt that he or she was in the minority. Finally, value conflict and perceived status were significantly correlated ($r = .26$ $p < .04$). Those with higher levels of value conflict felt they shared the minority view.

To transform the predictors into nominal variables, it was necessary to split the sample into two groups using medians for each variable. The median Value Conflict Index was 3.45, the median discrepancy in views was 3.00, and the median prior knowledge score was 3.0.

First, a two-way ANCOVA was conducted on the complexity scores with value conflict (higher or lower) and familiarity with the topic (more familiar or less familiar) as predictors. Perceived status and position taken were treated as covariates due to their significant correlation with the predictor variables. There was a significant two-way interaction between the two predictors $F (1,58) = 7.61$, $p < .008$. When participants were less familiar with the topic, the levels of complexity were similar for those who had both high value conflict ($M = 2.67$) and low value conflict ($M = 2.78$). However, when

participants were more familiar with the topic their levels of complexity were higher (M = 3.20) if they experienced low value conflict than if they had high value conflict (M = 2.01). In sum, the impact of value conflict on complexity depends on the issue familiarity. One must be both familiar with the topic but not conflicted to argue in the most complex ways.
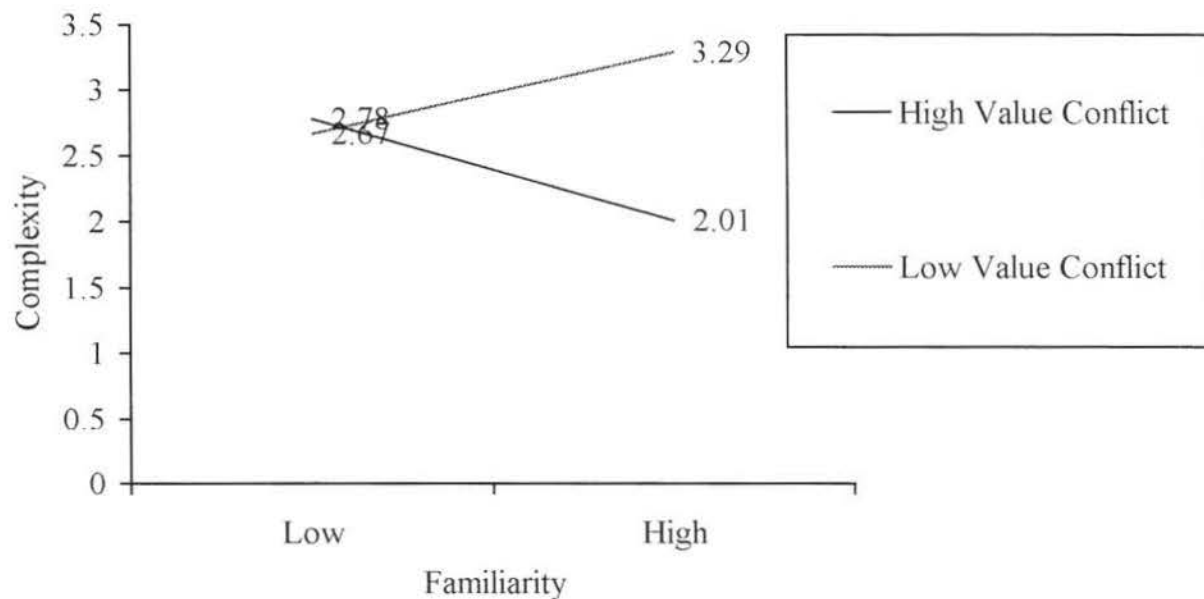
Another two-way ANCOVA was conducted on the complexity scores with perceived status (minority or majority) and familiarity with the topic (more familiar or less familiar) as predictors. Value conflict and position taken were treated as covariates because they were significantly correlated with the predictor variables. There was a significant two-way interaction between the two predictors, $F(1,58) = 8.43$, $p < .005$. When participants were in the majority their levels of complexity did not vary according to how familiar they were with the topic ($M = 2.89$ for the more familiar and $M = 2.58$ for the less familiar). However, when they were in the minority, they were more complex if they were less familiar with the topic ($M = 3.10$) than if they were more familiar (M =

2.02). In sum, the impact of issue familiarity on complexity depends on perceived status. Among those in the majority, issue familiarity was not predictive of how they would argue. However, among those in the minority, more complex arguments resulted when they were less familiar with the topic.
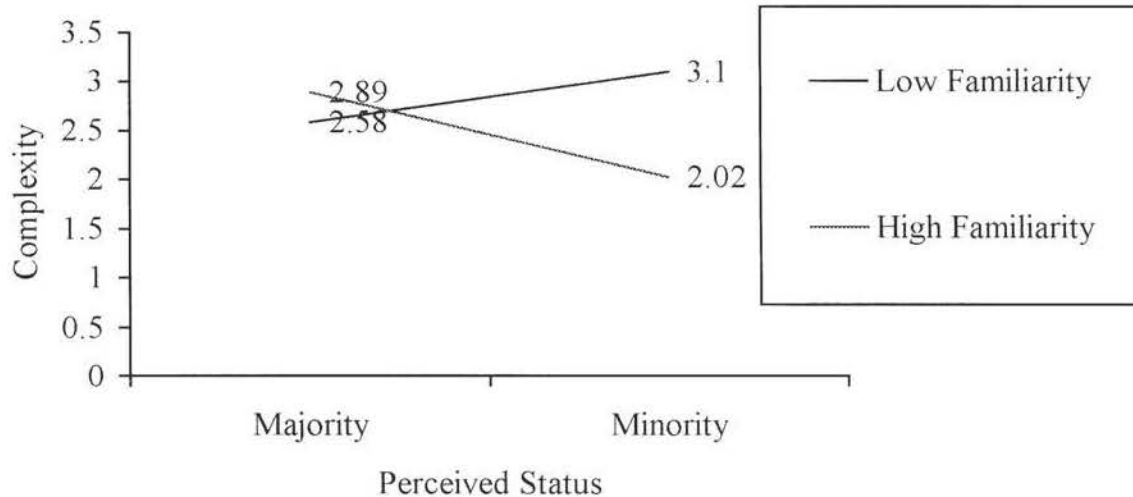
A final two-way ANCOVA was conducted on the complexity scores with position taken (decided or undecided) and familiarity with the topic (more familiar or less familiar) as predictors. Position taken was split into decidedly for versus undecided rather than for or against because the purpose of this study centered on the structure rather than the content of individuals' arguments. Value conflict and perceived status were treated as covariates because they were significantly correlated with the predictor variables. Results showed no significant results.

Differences Between Topics

Participants endorsed the right to free speech ($M = 6.35$) significantly more than the liberty to be married ($M = 4.94$) ($t (63) = 6.04$, $p < .001$). Participants felt their

opinions were significantly closer to the minority (M = 3.19) when dealing with free speech rights than when they were confronted with legalizing homosexual marriages (M = 2.58) (t (63) = 2.70, p < .009). Furthermore, position on the topic and perceived status were significantly correlated on both topics (r = .55 p < .001, r = .76, p < .001 respectively). The more they endorsed both issues, the more they felt they were in the minority. Finally, participants argued in significantly more complex ways on topic two (M = 2.63) than on topic one (M = 2.12) (t (63) = -3.02, p < .004).

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine how heterosexuals argue about the civil rights and liberties of homosexuals. More specifically, it examined how various factors interacted in influencing cognitive complexity when arguing about the free speech rights and marriage status of homosexuals. How does value conflict, issue familiarity, and perceived status interact in determining how complex heterosexuals' thoughts and arguments are about the issue?

The study of complexity in the context of homosexuality also raises broader questions. What and how do heterosexuals think about homosexual issues? Do they think and argue differently about granting rights to homosexuals versus endorsing their civil liberties? Why, on the average, do heterosexuals tend to be more accepting of homosexual rights, than homosexual liberties?

Endorsement of Civil Rights versus Liberties for Homosexuals

Endorsement of the right of free speech for homosexuals was significantly higher than the endorsement of same sex marriages among the heterosexual participants in the study. This is probably because the right to free speech is an issue that concerns

everyone, not just homosexuals. The participants have faced free speech conflicts in their own lives and know, on a first hand basis, the importance of being able to speak their mind. The freedom of speech is applicable to the domains of music, art, and the media. Furthermore, it is a relatively straightforward issue that is clearly discussed in the first amendment of the Bill of Rights. To outlaw one group from speaking its mind would jeopardize the country's foundation.

An overwhelming majority of participants thought that gays should have the freedom to discuss their sexuality in a public forum. When heterosexuals endorse these rights they are likely to be using logical and rational thinking rather than arguing emotionally. The topic of granting free speech rights to gays does not seem to evoke the core emotions and affective responses that other gay issues might. This may be because heterosexuals tend to view this subject as a matter of a constitutional right to be applied to everyone rather than a homosexual specific issue. It is perceived to be straightforward and a universal concern.

Heterosexual participants, however, were ambivalent about the legalization of homosexual marriages. Many participants condemned this liberty on moral, traditional, and evolutionary grounds, stating marriage should be reserved for a man and a woman. Specifically, they argued against gay marriages because the participants felt it violates moral and religious mores and contradicts the traditional marriage bond between a man and a woman. There may have been two motives behind this. First, the participants may have been ambivalent about this issue because they were torn between the basic freedom that should be granted to all and the moral compromises entailed in allowing gay marriages. Another explanation would be a lack of interest. Volunteers may have had

little interest when confronted with this topic because it may not have applied to them or they had never thought about the issue before. Heterosexuals may be unable to relate to this controversy. Straight people have never had their marriage liberties questioned, and may have given little thought to homosexual unions. Because this issue is specific to gays and lesbians, heterosexuals may have felt that the topic does not apply to them so they are less sympathetic to it. Finally, participants may have based their opinions on the emotional responses they had to the topic. Given that there are no legal codes or national policies regarding homosexual marriages, moral principles may have become a dominant factor. This topic questions personal beliefs rather than civil rights, and individuals may have argued based on their religious and emotional responses to the topic.

Most of the participants felt their opinions were more in the minority when dealing with free speech rights than when they were confronted with legalizing homosexual marriages. Although there was great support for gay speech rights, most individuals felt their opinions were in the minority. This may have resulted from the participants' perception that the American culture generally condemns gay rights. Perhaps they felt that most individuals do not believe homosexuals should be able to freely speak about their sexual orientation. It was interesting to note, however, that they were in fact, part of the majority (in the study sample, at least). Conversely some of these participants thought their opinions were in the majority on the topic of legalizing homosexual marriages. Most of those who thought they were in the majority either condemned gay marriages or did not care about it. The participants' perception of their status seems to be more accurate on this issue than on the previous one. In this issue, there was a wider range of perception of status.

Predicting Complexity in Heterosexual Arguments

The participants in the study were asked to make oral arguments to facilitate the generation of spontaneous and elaborate arguments. There was also no time restraint in order to give the participants every opportunity to demonstrate complexity. Finally, the participants were prodded when they were asked to talk about the pros and cons of their own opinion as well as the pros and cons of the opposing opinion. These steps were taken to create the best environment for complexity to arise.

Participants argued in significantly more complex ways on topic two than on topic one. This may be attributed to the fact that participants had definitive supportive opinions about the freedom of speech for homosexuals (a rights issue), but were ambivalent or conflicted about the issue of same sex marriages (a liberty issue). Individuals arguing about the rights issue were more certain about their stance and may have engaged in absolutist thinking. They had the potential of looking at the same topic in different ways, but did not. Instead, they tended to be one sided in their arguments, and did not see weaknesses in their own viewpoints. Low complexity scores could have been a function of the overwhelming support for the topic. Granting free speech to gays may simply not be a controversial issue at all for the participants. Alternatively, the more complex arguments on the liberty issue may be attributed to the fact that heterosexuals were ambivalent about same sex marriage. They may have been struggling with the pros and cons of the issue. Most were able to demonstrate the potential to view the topic in different ways. These complexity levels also may be due to motivational factors. The heterosexuals in the study may have felt that the issue was irrelevant and did not apply to them so they did not feel the need to defend their stances. These differences between

topics indicate that homosexual issues have a broad base and should not be categorized together. Heterosexuals have different opinions about gay rights than gay liberties.

Based on the research of individuals such as Peter Suedfeld, Phillip Tetlock, and their colleagues (1986, 1992, & 1994) predictions can be made on how certain variables would impact complexity. All of these predictions can be made on the assumption that these variables are independent of each other. This study hypothesized that individuals who were undecided about granting civil rights and liberties would be more complex than those who had a definitive opinion because the undecided give more merit to multiple views on the same issue. Those who perceived themselves as in the minority would be more complex than those in the majority. This is assumed because those in the minority tend to be more familiar with their critic's arguments than those in the majority and therefore argue in ways that are more complex. It was also hypothesized that those familiar with gay rights and liberties would be more complex than those who knew little about the topics because the more knowledgeable one is, the more one can develop arguments. However, topic familiarity is conceptually related with value conflict and perceived status. This study examined whether this relationship could be confirmed empirically. Finally, this study predicted an interaction of value conflict and perceived status. It was expected that those who experienced a high level of value conflict and felt that they were in the minority would possess the most complex arguments, and those who exhibited a low level of value conflict and felt that they were in the majority would have the least complex responses.

Because males and females were roughly represented equally in the study the findings are representative of both sexes. The participants were typical college students

with the median age of 22. A majority of them knew someone who was homosexual but felt that they were either not very close to them or relatively close to them. In this specific study sample the average level of value conflict was 3.9 ranging from 1.34 to 10. 23. Given the 15 values that were ranked, the potential range of levels was from 1 (highest value conflict) to 29 (lowest value conflict). Relative to the potential scale, the participants were experiencing rather high levels of value conflict. Thus, they recognize the importance of traditional family structure and keeping gender roles distinct, as well as valuing equal opportunities for everyone, and freedom in expressing sexual preferences. The participants not only ranked these conflicting values highly, but they also ranked them closely.

Predicting complexity of arguments on topic 1. The majority thought they knew just as much as others about the pros and cons of granting the freedom of speech to homosexuals. The fact that there was no statistical relationship between position taken and familiarity with the issue indicates that people can take a stance for or against the issue regardless of how much they know about it.

The more one endorsed the free speech of homosexuals, the more he or she viewed him or her self as in the minority. In other words, those who definitely thought that homosexuals should be allowed to discuss their sexuality believed that most people felt that such speech should be suppressed. This may be a result of society's condemnation of the homosexual culture as a whole.

It was clear from the study results that perceived status, value conflict, and issue familiarity were not predictive of complexity. The results indicate that these variables were not predictive of complexity either alone or in combination. The first prediction that

those who were undecided would be the most complex could not be assessed because of the overwhelming support for free speech rights for gays. Very few people were undecided about the issue, and those who were did not significantly differ from those who had definitive opinions. Contrary to the findings of Suedfeld & Wallbaum, (1992); Tetlock, (1986); Tetlock, Armor, & Peterson, (1994) those who experienced greater degrees of vale conflict did not argue in more complex ways than those who experienced little conflict. Because value conflict was not a predictor of complexity in this study, it implies that even though participants may be conflicted when it comes to free speech as an issue, they have already made a decision to uphold the right to free speech. The prediction that those in the minority would be more complex than those in the majority could not be tested because there was very little variation in this factor. Only one participant felt that they were in the majority. Finally, the variable of issue familiarity was neither correlated with nor predictive of conceptual complexity. Contrary to the findings of Stein, Bernas, & Calicchia, (1997) who found that individuals who have greater issue familiarity on a topic tend to think more complexly than those who are unfamiliar with the topic. This study found no complexity differences between those who thought they were ignorant of the topic versus those who thought they were experts on the topic. This result may imply that those with little knowledge about the topic can argue in similar ways as experts on the topic. This may be because regardless of issue familiarity, people support free speech rights for gays. Overall, for topic one, despite the fact that participants varied on value conflict experienced and familiarity of the issue, these factors did not matter. All the participants were definitive about their stance on the issue and were similarly less complex in their arguments.

Predicting complexity of arguments on topic 2. When making statements about the legalization of gay marriages, most people did not feel they were experts on the topic or were ignorant of the issue. The majority of subjects thought they knew just as much as others did about the pros and cons of legalizing homosexual marriages. The lack of a relationship between position taken and issue familiarity indicates that familiarity with the topic had little to do with one's opinion.

Position on the topic and perceived status were significantly related. The more one endorsed gay marriages, the more he or she felt as if he or she was in the minority. Therefore, those who definitely thought that homosexuals should be allowed to marry thought that most people believe it should be outlawed. This may reflect the great condemnation of homosexual marriages in American culture. It remains unclear if this attitude is perceived or a cultural fact.

When trying to predict complexity scores from the variables it became clear how complicated the issue of homosexual marriages was. First, it is important to state that the predictors were very closely associated with each other. The variable of value conflict and a person's position were closely related. The more one endorsed gay marriages, the more value conflict he or she experienced. Individuals who endorsed gay marriages valued both the expression of homosexual love and the sanctity of marriage in a traditional heterosexual sense in similar ways. Conversely, those who thought gay marriages should be outlawed recognized the importance of keeping marriage a heterosexual tradition and disregarded the value of homosexual liberties. As with the first issue, position on the topic and perceived status were closely associated. The more one endorsed gay marriages, the more he or she felt like they were in the minority. Value

conflict and perceived status were also related. The more people thought they were in the majority, the less they experienced value conflict.

These correlations indicate that those who experienced high value conflict were also those who supported the legalization of gay marriages and thought they were in the minority. These are those who, despite being value conflicted, have made a definitive stance for same sex marriages. They value traditional families and clear gender roles just as much as they value equality and freedom of sexual expression. However, they have decided to sacrifice one set of values over the other and argue for same sex marriages. They do not think, however, that other people feel the same way they do.

Those who experienced low value conflict, on the other hand, were those who argued against homosexual marriages and thought they were in the majority. These are those who are not conflicted about these values. They certainly value traditional families and distinct gender roles more than equality and freedom of sexual expression. Thus, they are against same sex marriages. They also believe that most people share their sentiments and beliefs about the issue.

When predicting complexity from value conflict and issue familiarity, the influence of perceived status and position taken had to be statistically removed because of their close association with the predictors. The results indicate that the influence of familiarity on complexity depends on value conflict. For those with little knowledge of the topic, it did not matter whether they were value conflicted or not. They argued at the same level of complexity. Value conflict, however, had an impact among those who were more familiar with the issue. Those who were familiar but had low value conflict were the most complex. These same participants were also non-supportive of same sex

marriages and thought that they were in the majority. Therefore, there are two reasons why they were more complex. The first is a cognitive explanation. Even though the participants did not experience much value conflict (which, in theory would lower complexity), their previous knowledge of the topic served as a base for generating complex arguments. These individuals were familiar about same sex marriages so they could state their opinions and elaborate on them. Their familiarity with the issue allowed them to discuss, in detail, their thoughts about gay marriages. The second explanation is motivational. Contributing to complexity was the fact that these people thought they were in the majority. This made them feel secure in their stance so there was no need to defend their position because they were not defensive, these participants readily discussed the pros and cons of the issue. In sum, these individuals were more accepting of alternative arguments because they were not guarded and they knew more about conflicting opinions. People with the least conceptual complexity were those who were familiar with the topic and had high levels of value conflict. The same cognitive and motivational elements can explain this result. These individuals were also the ones who supported same sex marriages and thought they were in the minority. Even though these participants were highly conflicted and highly knowledgeable (which in theory should increase complexity), they have made a definitive stance supporting gay marriages. Despite the fact that they know the pros and cons of the issue and that they regard the opposing values highly and closely, they have made the decision to recognize one set of values over another and support homosexual marriages. Motivationally, they feel that most people do not share their opinion, therefore there is a need for them to defend their stance. Their defensiveness leads them to argue in a one-sided manner, dismissing

alternative views. These individuals want their opinion to be legitimized even though it is not popular so they must defend their stance by criticizing other stances.

Another interaction among the variables was prognostic of complexity. When predicting complexity from perceived status and issue familiarity, the influence of value conflict and position taken had to be removed because of their relationship to the predictors. When participants were in the majority their levels of complexity did not vary according to how familiar they were with the topic. However, if they were in the minority, they were more complex if they were less familiar with the topic than if they were more familiar. The results indicate that the impact of perceived status on complexity depends on issue familiarity. Among those in the majority (who were also non-supportive of homosexual marriages), issue familiarity was not predictive of how they would argue. Despite the fact that they were definitive about their stance, being in the majority does not put them in a defensive position. There was no need to defend their stance because they believed most people shared their thoughts. Therefore they were more comfortable bringing up both sides of the issue. However, among those in the minority, more complex arguments resulted when they were less familiar with the topic. These were the same individuals who were supportive of gay marriages and who were highly conflicted. Those in the minority who knew little about the topic may have been more complex because they did not have enough knowledge to resolve their high level of value conflict. Although they made a definitive stance (probably due to pressure to be politically correct), their inability to resolve the issue is reflected in their mentioning of different options. However, those in the minority who were familiar with the topic may have had lower levels of complexity because they had sufficient knowledge to resolve their high

level of value conflict. They made a definitive stance and argued in a one-sided manner. Because they felt that others did not share their opinion, they may have been defensive when discussing the topic. Therefore their refutations of other opinions may have made them less complex.

Suggestions for Further Studies

Based on the theory, methodology, and results of this study, future research may benefit from modifications in design and conceptualization. These revisions may assist future researchers in explaining the way homosexuals argue about homosexual issues. Such improvements may also help in clarifying the existing data.

A major concern occurred when trying to interpret the result that heterosexuals were ambivalent about the legalization of gay marriages. Two assumptions were made when trying to explain the motives behind this. The first, explained within complexity theory, is the notion that the participants were figuratively torn between the basic freedom that should be granted to all and the perceived moral compromises involved in legalizing homosexual marriages. However, the second motive, and probably the more accurate one, was related to motives and interest in the topic. Some volunteers may have been ambivalent about this topic because they simply did not care about it. They may have had little interest in the topic because it did not apply to them. Furthermore, straight people will never have their marriage liberties questioned so they may have given little thought to the topic. Therefore, future studies may benefit from assessing individuals' interest in the subject matter. This would clarify participants' motivations behind possible ambivalence.

Revisions may also be made in the methodology of the study. For example, the participants were Eastern Illinois University college undergraduate and graduate students who were recruited through announcements on the psychology research bulletin board and class announcements. This did not provide the ideal sample for the study because it was too homogeneous. This resulted in a very limited range of value conflict, familiarity with the issues, perceived status on topic one, and position on topic one. This homogeneity may have explained the lack of significant results on topic one in particular. Therefore, it would be helpful to future researchers to obtain a sample with diverse attitudes toward homosexual issues, varying levels of knowledge about the topics, and possibly varying interests and commitments towards fostering homosexual rights and liberties

Another suggestion for those attempting to assess heterosexual thoughts about homosexuals would be to clarify the notion of homosexuality itself. This study assumed that homosexuality was a general term that included individuals physically and emotionally attracted to people of their own gender. Furthermore, it was accepted that this group shared a similar culture and that homosexuals had related values and beliefs. This study also presumed that heterosexuals had a common perception of homosexuals. However, the homosexual society is made up of two separate groups: gay males and lesbians. Straight individuals may have different opinions about gay men than lesbians. For example, do lesbian relations tend to be more accepted in the media than gay ones? When future research about heterosexual opinions regarding homosexual civil rights and liberties is conducted, it may be beneficial if perceptions of gay men are separated from lesbian women.

Possible revisions in the study may be done when explaining the differences in opinion among topics. The results indicate that heterosexuals overwhelmingly support homosexual free speech rights, but are ambivalent about legalizing gay marriages. Possible explanations may be found in the notion of the cognitive-affective split (Van de Ven, Bornholt, & Baily, 1996) explained earlier, or in society's general acceptance of homosexual rights and disregard of liberties. However, the actual explanation remained a mystery. Future research can be conducted to ascertain why an individual had differences in opinion between homosexual rights and liberties.

A final suggestion for future research relates to the method used to measure cognitive complexity. To measure complexity in this study, a method developed by Baker-Brown, Ballard Bluck, deVries, Suedfeld, & Tetlock (1992) and Tetlock and Tyler (1996) was used. Scoring of complexity was done on a 1 to 7 scale with 1 being the lowest and 7 being the highest. The content of the statement must be completely ignored and the raters must be objective when scoring. However there seems to be a major flaw in this system because individuals who are ambivalent about the topic are given higher complexity scores than those with definitive opinions even though there is little difference in structure between the two responses. Baker-Brown, Ballard Bluck, deVries, Suedfeld, & Tetlock (1992) continually stress the importance of ignoring the content of the statement while scoring an essay and applying a rating based on structure alone, but their method of assessing complexity inherently considers the content of an argument. For example a statement such as "Well, I can understand why homosexual marriages should be legalized because everyone deserves to be treated the same, but I also can empathize with those who think it should remain outlawed because it doesn't make sense

evolutionarily. I guess I would be undecided about it because I haven't given it too much thought." This statement would clearly be given a score of three because there is clear differentation. However, consider the statement "Well, I can understand why homosexual marriages should be legalized because everyone deserves to be treated the same, but I also can empathize with those who think it should remain outlawed because it doesn't make sense evolutionarily. I guess I would be against it because that's the way it's been." This statement would receive a two because there is an implication of differentation, but the author's definitive opinion hinders his or her complexity score. Obviously, there is very little difference in these two statements, and there is virtually no difference structurally between them, but two completely different complexity scores had to be assigned. It is quite clear that this method punishes subjects for having strong and definitive opinions, on the issue. Under this method some of the most complex individuals will be considered cognitively simple due to their convictions. Therefore, future studies should devise a more sensitive measure of complexity that makes a distinction between those who are ambivalent and those who are definite about the issue while assessing structural differences.

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