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Examining Correlates of Attitudes Toward Gay Men Among Vietnamese College Students

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Abstract: The current study investigated correlates of attitudes toward gay men among 455 Vietnamese students (219 females). The Vietnamese Version of Attitudes toward Gay Men scale (VATG) was used as the dependent variable in four hierarchical multiple regression analyses, with gender, traditional male role attitudes, knowledge about gay issues, and number of gay friends as the independent variables. The VATG formed four factors: Social Distance, Positive Attitudes, Moral Condemnation, and Effeminacy. The results indicated that knowledge about gay issues predicted four subscales of the VATG. These relationships were moderated by gender. Effects of traditional male role attitudes on four subscales of the VATG were significant for both genders. Social Distance and Moral Condemnation were predicted by the number of gay friends. This study suggested a potential role of knowledge about gay issues in improving Vietnamese attitudes toward gay men.

Key words: Anti-gay, Traditional Male Role Attitudes, Knowledge about Gay Issues, Vietnam

Despite the normalization of homosexuality, numerous studies have shown that heterosexuals generally hold anti-homosexual attitudes (e.g., Feng, Lou, Gao, Tu, Cheng, Emerson, & Zabin, 2012; Wada, 2008). A cross-sectional survey on 17,016 adolescents in three Asian cities (e.g., Hanoi, Shanghai, Taipei) showed that Vietnamese adolescents held the strongest negative view of homosexuality, compared with Chinese and Taiwanese adolescents (Feng et al., 2012). Furthermore, explicit discrimination and prejudice toward homosexuals happens everywhere: at home, at school, and in the workplace. In an online survey of 1025 gay, lesbian and bisexual Japanese, 15% reported that they had made suicide attempts, 70% expressed high levels of anxiety, 13% showed high levels of depression, 83% had experienced school bullying and 60% were verbally harassed because others had perceived them to be homosexual (Hidaka & Operario, 2006). Within the family context, a structured-interview survey on 29 male teenagers in the United States who self-identified as gay. Of those teenagers, 43% experienced a negative reaction from their parents when they came out (Remafedi, 1987). In the context of American high schools, a recent national survey on 8584 lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students between the ages of 13–20 revealed that an overwhelming majority (92.3%) had experienced verbal harassment at some point in the past year. Almost half of them (44.7%) had been physically harassed, and 63.5% expressed that they felt unsafe (Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, Boesen, & Palmer, 2012).

In workplace settings, an experimental study in the United States that sent 1769 pairs of fictitious but realistic resumes (a fictitious applicant who appeared to be gay was randomly attached to one

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of the resumes) in response to the same job postings in seven states showed that fictitious gay job applicants were 40% less likely to be called for an interview (Tilcsik, 2011). High rates of prejudice and discrimination not only resulted in negative psychological consequences (e.g., depression, anxiety, social withdrawal, self-harm behaviors, suicide) in homosexual individuals (Poteat & Espelage, 2007), but also, prejudice and discrimination put them at a disadvantage when they confessed or revealed their sexuality (Corrigan & Matthews, 2003). Many lesbians and gay men conceal their lifestyles (Day & Schoenrade, 1997) and live as heterosexuals. This concealment also leads to negative outcomes, e.g., psychosomatic illness, unwanted emotions, and other symptoms (Lane & Wegner, 1995). Thus, it is important to understand the attitudes and behaviors of heterosexuals against homosexuals, as well as the factors that shape these attitudes and behaviors.

Past research that employed a scale to measure Vietnamese's homonegativity including the adaptation of Japanese Version of Attitudes Toward Homosexuals (Nguyen, Kimura, & Morinaga, 2016) and a 3 binary-item scale (Nguyen & Blum, 2014) demonstrated that both scales lacked construct validity and had low internal consistency and that neither scale distinguished between attitudes toward lesbians and gay men consistently. Given these identified gaps, Nguyen, Morinaga, & Nakashima (under review) constructed and validated a scale to measure Vietnamese attitudes toward gay men. While exploring the perceptions and attitudes toward gay men among 252 Vietnamese college students, they found that anti-gay attitudes are prevalent in Vietnam. Approximately 25% of 574 coded fragments were positive while almost 46% of them comprised negative perceptions, attitudes and behaviors, negative emotions, moral condemnation, and negative stereotypes about gay men (Nguyen et al., under review). According to the Minority Stress Model, which is described as a relationship between minority and dominant values and resultant conflict with the social environment experienced by minority group members (Meyer, 2003), such expressions of anti-gay attitudes and outright behaviors create hostile and stressful social environment that may cause mental health problems of LGB people. Typically, Vietnamese gay men had greater likelihood than the general population for risk-taking behaviors that included substance use, anonymous sex with multiple partners, sexually transmitted infections, and suicide attempts (Le, Vu, & Bui, 2012). Interventions aimed at altering anti-gay attitudes and behaviors in society would change the stress-inducing environment and, in turn, would decrease mental health issues in gay population (Meyer, 2003). Understanding mechanisms underlying anti-gay attitudes sets a foundation for future research and facilitate the design of appropriate interventions to reduce anti-gay attitudes and behaviors. Thus, the aim of this study was to examine factors that help explain Vietnamese heterosexuals' anti-gay attitudes.

Perhaps a first factor that relates to Vietnamese attitudes toward gay men is knowledge about gay issues. In Vietnam, gay people are often considered not to be truly homosexual, but rather "temporarily following a Western fashion or trend" (Colby, Cao, & Doussantousse, 2004). They were also labeled as a "social evil", a sin comparable to gambling, prostitution and drug trafficking (The Body, 2002). Such erroneous assumption can often lead to negative attitudes, which in turn affect behaviors toward gay men. Thus, to reduce Vietnamese anti-gay attitudes, it is important to promote the acquisition of accurate knowledge about gay issues. To achieve this objective, the association between Vietnamese college students' anti-gay attitudes and their knowledge about homosexuals should be elucidated. As suggested in the literature (Alderson, Orzeck, & McEwen, 2009; Nguyen et al., 2016; Well & Franken, 1987), I hypothesized that respondents who had more ample knowledge about gay issues would be less likely to be anti-gay.

A second factor that may predict Vietnamese attitudes toward gay men is having gay friends. The relationship between intergroup contact and attitudes toward the relevant "outgroup" has long been studied by many social psychologists. Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) tested meta-analytically the relationship between intergroup contact and prejudice-reduction using 713 independent samples from

515 studies. They indicated that greater intergroup contact was generally associated with lower levels of prejudice. These contact effects were not only devised for racial and ethnic encounters, but could also be extended to other groups, including sexual minorities (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Moreover, both the quantity and quality of contact with members of an outgroup predicted more positive outgroup attitudes (Burke et al., 2015; Pettigrew, Tropp, Wagner, & Christ, 2011; Tausch et al., 2010). In line with these studies, I tested whether respondents who had (a larger number of) gay friends would be less likely to be anti-gay.

Traditional male role attitudes is a third predictor of Vietnamese attitudes toward gay men. The endorsement of traditional male role attitudes is associated with a range of problematic individual and relational outcomes including negative attitudes toward gender equality (Wade & Brittan-Powell, 2001), neosexist attitudes (Martinez & Paterna-Bleda, 2013), perpetration of intimate partner violence (Santana, Raj, Decker, La Marche, & Silverman, 2006), and homonegativity (Davies, 2004). However, Nguyen et al. (2016) indicated that traditional male role attitudes significantly predicted homonegativity among Vietnamese females but not their male counterparts, although males scored higher in traditional male role attitudes. These results were attributed to a small sample size for males, as well as to the invalidation of the attitude scale used to measure Vietnamese attitudes toward homosexuals. Based on these literature sources, it was unclear whether traditional male role attitudes would have an effect on attitudes toward gay among Vietnamese males; this study, therefore, sought to address the predictive potential of this relationship.

Method

Participants and Procedures

This study used data from Nguyen et al. (under review). The site of this study was four large urban universities in Ho Chi Minh City and Ha Noi. Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the course coordinator in these universities. The researcher surveyed six Engineering Drawings classes, three Japanese Culture and Language classes, a Pile Foundation Analysis and Design class, a Physics Engineering class, and a Transport Economics class in two sessions during September 2014. Of the 588 in the initial sample, we excluded respondents who were absent from either session one or two ($n = 70$), and those who declined to participate in the study ($n = 5$). We also excluded individuals who gave suspicious responses, had incomplete data ($n = 26$), or did not provide a research ID number ($n = 17$). Another 15 respondents, who were non-heterosexuals or refused to answer the sexual orientation question, were also eliminated. The final sample consisted of 455 heterosexual students (48% female, mean age = 19.42, $SD = 0.77$). Of these 455 participants, 310 were unaffiliated, 93 were Buddhist, 43 were Catholic, 3 were Protestant, 4 were Cao daist, and 2 were Hoahaoist. Ethical approval was obtained from the ethics committee of Hiroshima University Faculty of Education.

To ensure an adequate level of response, the survey was administered in two sessions, at one-week intervals. Each survey session took approximately 15–20 minutes to complete. Each participant was given two questionnaires that contained 55 items (session 1) and 59 items (session 2). Participants were first asked to read and sign the Participant Consent Form. At the end of this form was a place for them to write the last three digits of their student identification number followed by the last three digits of their mobile phone number (Participant ID number). This was used to match responses across sessions. The author assured participants that their individual responses would be kept confidential and that only the consolidated information would be released. The author then verbally described how each instrument was to be completed. Written instructions were provided on each inventory as well. Each participant was rewarded with a 100-yen (approximately 1 US dollar) ballpoint pen upon completion.

Measures

The Vietnamese Attitudes Toward Gay Men (VATG). According to Nguyen et al. (under review), this 34-item scale consisted of four factors measuring Positive Attitudes (e.g., “Gay men should be free to live their lives as they please.”), Social Distance (e.g., “I keep away from gay men because I do not want to be in troubles”), Moral Condemnation (e.g., “Male homosexuality is against filial piety”), and Effeminacy (e.g., “Most gay men have heart of a woman”). Responses were made on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The confirmatory factor analysis indicated that the four-factor model was adequate fit ($\chi^2(488) = 752.96, p < .001, CFI = .97, GFI = .91, RMSEA = .04$). Their alpha values ranged from .70 to .91.

Knowledge about Gay Issues. The Knowledge about Gay Issues scale contained 31 True/False/Don't know items adapted from previous scales measuring knowledge about gay issues. Items 1 through 10 (e.g., “Gay men can usually be identified by certain mannerisms or physical characteristics”) were modified from myths about LGBTQ (Perrin, Bhattacharyya, Snipes, Calton, & Heesacker, 2014). Items 11 through 18 (e.g., “If children are raised by openly homosexual parents, the likelihood that they themselves will develop a homosexual orientation is greater than if they were raised by heterosexual parents.”) were modified from Alderson et al. (2009)'s Sexuality Knowledge Questionnaire. Items 19 through 24 (e.g., “In the last 25 years there has been an increase in homosexuality.”) were modified from Wells and Franken (1987)'s Homosexual Information Scale, and items 25 through 27 (e.g., “There is a good chance of changing homosexual people into heterosexuals.”) were modified from Harris et al. (1995)'s Knowledge About Homosexuality Questionnaire. I developed items 28 through 31, which related to knowledge about gay events in Vietnam (e.g., “In 2013, Vietnamese government has given same-sex couples the right to live together and hold wedding ceremonies.”). A correct answer was given 1 point, while a wrong answer was given 0 points. The scale score was computed by summing item scores. Higher scores denoted more accurate knowledge about gay men. Reliability and validity of the scale has not been investigated.

Number of Gay Friends. Interpersonal contact with gay men was assessed using the following question: “How many male gay friends, relatives, or close acquaintances do you have?” Participants responded by filling in a blank representing the number of gay men they are associated with.

Traditional Male Role Attitudes. Traditional Male Role Attitudes (Pleck, Sonenstein, Ku, 1994) is a validated 8-item scale which assesses attitudes toward masculinity (e.g., “I admire a guy who is totally sure of himself”). Items were coded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*), with higher scores corresponding to more traditional beliefs about masculinity. The confirmatory factor analysis demonstrated that the single-factor model adequately fit the data ($\chi^2(11) = 13.74, p = .16, CFI = .99, GFI = .99, RMSEA = .02$). The internal-consistency reliability was adequate enough to proceed with the main analyses ($\alpha = .62$).

Sexual Orientation. Considering confounding factors, we asked participants to disclose their sexual orientation according to the following response options: Only attracted to females, mostly attracted to females, equally attracted to females and males, mostly attracted to males, only attracted to males, not sure, or I do not want to answer. Those who self-identified as gay, lesbian or bisexual, or who were unsure of their sexual identity were omitted from analysis (e.g., Male respondents who reported only attracted to males, mostly attracted to males, equally attracted to females and males, not sure, or I do not want to answer were omitted from analysis).

Results

Preliminary analyses

A series of Welch's t-tests showed that there were significant gender differences in three

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subscales of the VATG. Males desired more social distance from gay men ($M_{\text{men}} = 2.70$, $SD_{\text{men}} = .70$, $M_{\text{women}} = 2.24$, $SD_{\text{women}} = .63$, $t_w [452.36] = 7.39$, $p < .001$), more strongly condemned gay men ($M_{\text{men}} = 2.74$, $SD_{\text{men}} = .72$, $M_{\text{women}} = 2.37$, $SD_{\text{women}} = .66$, $t_w [452.96] = 5.84$, $p < .001$), and held less positive attitudes toward gay men ($M_{\text{men}} = 3.31$, $SD_{\text{men}} = .62$, $M_{\text{women}} = 3.63$, $SD_{\text{women}} = .52$, $t_w [448.76] = -5.94$, $p < .001$) than females. Additionally, males showed stronger endorsement of traditional male role attitudes ($M_{\text{men}} = 3.25$, $SD_{\text{men}} = .51$, $M_{\text{women}} = 2.92$, $SD_{\text{women}} = .45$, $t_w [451.96] = 7.23$, $p < .001$), and knew less about gay issues ($M_{\text{men}} = 7.14$, $SD_{\text{men}} = 4.36$, $M_{\text{women}} = 8.19$, $SD_{\text{women}} = 4.29$, $t_w [451.35] = -2.59$, $p < .01$) than females. No significant differences were observed in Effeminacy ($M_{\text{men}} = 3.00$, $SD_{\text{men}} = .74$, $M_{\text{women}} = 2.88$, $SD_{\text{women}} = .85$, $t_w [433.29] = 1.48$, $p = .14$) and Number of Gay Friends ($M_{\text{men}} = 0.89$, $SD_{\text{men}} = 2.17$, $M_{\text{women}} = 1.09$, $SD_{\text{women}} = 1.94$, $t_w [452.46] = -1.07$, $p = .29$) between males and females.

Pearson's correlation coefficients were calculated between the four subscales of the VATG and the three predictors (see Table 1). For females, all four subscales of the VATG were significantly related to the three predictors ($r_s > .14$, $p_s < .05$). For males, all four subscales of the VATG were significantly related to Traditional Male Role Attitudes and Knowledge About Gay Issues ($r_s > -.17$, $p_s < .01$). The Number of Gay Friends was only significantly related to Positive Attitudes among males ($r = .14$, $p < .05$).

Table 1: Correlations between predictor variables and dependent variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Predictors							
1 Traditional Male Role Attitudes	---	-.20 **	-.01	.36 ***	-.22 **	.36 ***	.29 ***
2 Knowledge About Gay Issues	-.07	---	.26 ***	-.18 **	.32 ***	-.34 ***	-.17 **
3 Number of Gay Friends	.06	.26 ***	---	-.08	.14 *	-.12	-.06
The Vietnamese Attitudes Toward Gay Men							
4 Social Distance	.22 **	-.46 ***	-.30 ***	---	-.55 ***	.48 ***	.30 ***
5 Positive Attitudes	-.24 ***	.49 ***	.22 **	-.63 ***	---	-.67 ***	-.11
6 Moral Condemnation	.14 *	-.50 ***	-.24 ***	.56 ***	-.67 ***	---	.17 *
7 Effeminacy	.15 *	-.33 ***	-.20 **	.44 ***	-.37 ***	.35 ***	---

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Males (upper right half), Females (lower left half)

Main analyses

To examine the relative contributions of the predictors to respondents' ratings of four subscales of the VATG, four four-step hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted. Social Distance, Positive Attitudes, Moral Condemnation, and Effeminacy served as the predictors in all steps of four regressions. Gender was entered at Step 1; Traditional Male Role Attitudes, The Number of Gay Friends, and Knowledge about Gay Issues were entered at Step 2; the two-way interactions for Gender and Traditional Male Role Attitudes, Gender and Knowledge about Gay Issues, Traditional Male Role Attitudes and Knowledge about Gay Issues were entered in the third step; finally, in Step 4, a three-way interaction for Gender, Traditional Male Role Attitudes, and Knowledge about Gay Issues was entered into the model. In all steps, the predictors were centered to their means to allow interpretation of the linear effects as average effects (Aiken & West, 1991). Predictive regression models for the VATG are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Predictive hierarchical multiple regression models for the VATG

Predictors	Social Distance		Positive Attitudes		Moral Condemnation		Effeminacy	
	R^2	ΔR^2	R^2	ΔR^2	R^2	ΔR^2	R^2	ΔR^2
Step 1	.11 ***		.07 ***		.07 ***		.00	
Gender	-.33 ***		.27 ***		-.26 ***		-.07	
Step 2	.26 ***	.16 ***	.25 ***	.18 ***	.28 ***	.21 ***	.11 ***	.11
Gender	-.21 ***		.16 ***		-.15 **		.02	
Traditional Male Role Attitudes (TMRA)	.27 ***		-.19 ***		.22 ***		.20 ***	
Number of Gay Friends (GF)	-.11 *		.08		-.09 *		-.07	
Knowledge about Gay Issues (KAG)	-.22 ***		.33 ***		-.35 ***		-.19 ***	
Step 3	.28 ***	.02 **	.27 ***	.01 *	.29 ***	.02 *	.13 ***	.02
Gender	-.21 ***		.15 **		-.14 **		.02	
TMRA	.28 ***		-.21 ***		.23 ***		.20 ***	
GF	-.11 *		.08		-.08 *		-.06	
KAG	-.22 ***		.35 ***		-.36 ***		-.18 ***	
Gender × TMRA	-.07		-.02		-.09 *		-.05	
Gender × KAG	-.15 ***		.09 *		-.10 *		-.11 *	
TMRA × KAG	-.03		.10 *		-.07		.03	
Step 4	.29 ***	.00	.27 ***	.00	.29 ***	.00	.13 ***	.00
Gender	-.20 ***		.14 **		-.14 **		.01	
TMRA	.27 ***		-.21 ***		.23 ***		.20 ***	
GF	-.11 *		.09 *		-.08 *		-.06	
KAG	-.21 ***		.33 ***		-.35 ***		-.19 ***	
Gender × TMRA	-.08		-.01		-.09 *		-.04	
Gender × KAG	-.14 **		.07		-.10 *		-.12 *	
TMRA × KAG	-.02		.09 *		-.06		.03	
Gender × TMRA × KAG	.05		-.05		.01		-.04	

Note. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

As indicated in Table 2, results of the regression models were generally consistent across four subscales of the VATG. When two-way interactions were added at Step 3, Traditional Male Role Attitudes ($\beta s > .20$, $ps < .001$) and the interaction effect between Gender and Knowledge about Gay Issues ($\beta s > .09$, $p < .05$) did generally significantly impact the four subscales of the VATG, with ΔR^2 values ranging from .01 to .02. However, the addition of three-way interaction at the fourth step did not explain any more of the variation observed in all four regressions. Since the interaction between Gender and Knowledge about Gay Issues were significant at step 3, simple slope analyses were conducted to further identify the moderating influence of Gender on the relationships between Knowledge about Gay Issues and the four subscales of the VATG. These results indicated that Knowledge about Gay Issues significantly predicted Moral Condemnation and Positive Attitudes, with the effects being greater for females ($\beta = -.46$, $p < .001$; $\beta = .41$, $p < .001$, respectively) than for males ($\beta = -.25$, $p < .05$; $\beta = .26$, $p < .001$, respectively). Moreover, the associations between Knowledge about Gay Issues and Social Distance, and between Knowledge about Gay Issues, and Effeminacy, were negative, and significant for females ($\beta = -.35$, $p < .001$; $\beta = -.31$, $p < .001$, respectively), but not for males ($\beta = -.07$, n.s; $\beta = -.08$, n.s, respectively).

Furthermore, the interaction effect between Traditional Male Role Attitudes and Knowledge about Gay Issues significantly predicted Positive Attitudes of the VATG. A simple slope analysis

indicated that respondents who endorsed strong traditional male role attitudes were less likely to hold positive attitudes toward gay men at both low and high levels of knowledge about gay issues ($\beta = -.35, p < .001$; $\beta = -.13, p < .05$, respectively). Finally, Social Distance and Moral Condemnation were also predicted by the Number of Gay Friends. These results suggested that respondents who had more gay friends were less likely to have social distance from ($\beta = -.11, p < .05$) and morally condemn gay men ($\beta = -.08, p < .05$).

Discussion

Some explanations for the present results should be noted. First, the regression revealed that the relationship between Knowledge about Gay Issues and the VATG was moderated by Gender, with the effects being greater for females than for males. Although the result should be confirmed by subsequent studies, it could be explained as follows. Due to gender-based discrimination, Vietnamese females usually have lower status (e.g., less access to productive resources, education, skill development, and employment opportunities) than their male counterparts (International Labor Organization, 2015). Lower-status individuals were greater at reading emotions (Kraus, Piff, & Keltner, 2010) and more other-oriented in their thoughts and feelings (Kraus, Piff, & Keltner, 2011). Moreover, individuals who identify as gay face struggles with societal oppression related to their sexual minority status (Fassinger & Arseneau, 2007). As such, Vietnamese females in this study, who had ample and accurate knowledge about gay issues, might have greater empathy toward gay men. This might lead to females being less anti-gay. Although the effects of knowledge about gay issues on attitudes toward gay men are stronger for females than males, our findings are consistent with previous research (e.g., Alderson et al., 2009, Well & Franken, 1987) and offer an important perspective that ample and accurate knowledge about gay issues may alter anti-gay attitudes.

Second, while Knowledge about Gay Issues showed negative effects on anti-gay attitudes, Traditional Male Role Attitudes did the opposite. Specifically, regardless of gender, those who endorsed strong traditional male role attitudes tended to exhibit anti-gay sentiments and were less likely to hold positive attitudes toward gay men. These results contradicted Nguyen et al. (2016), but supported Davies (2004). Beliefs about the male gender role are culturally constructed from birth (Kimmel, 1997). A man is expected to be “dominant”, “tough”, and “heterosexual”. By contrast, a gay man is equated with being “submissive”, “weak”, and “homosexual”, which violates the norms of masculinity. An individual who violates these norms are punished (Rudman & Fairchild, 2004). These help to explain why strong adherence to traditional male role attitudes would lead to Vietnamese anti-gay attitudes.

Third, we found that respondents who had more gay friends were less likely to have social distance from gay men, and less likely to morally condemn gay men. These results are consistent with those of Burke et al. (2015), Pettigrew et al. (2011), and Tausch et al. (2010). Thus, interpersonal contact experiences with gay men, especially having gay friends, might enable one to empathize with and take the perspective of a gay man, which might lead to more favorable attitudes toward gay men. Overall, the three hypothesized predictors mostly, but not fully explained attitudes toward gay men in Vietnam.

Although this study has numerous strengths, it also has some limitations. Other groups may differ from our group of college students in their attitudes toward gay men as well as factors related to these attitudes. Future research should examine these issues among other groups (e.g., older, less affluent, rural, more religious). Furthermore, as noted by Herek (2000) and Ratcliff, Lassiter, Markman, & Snyder (2006), attitudes toward gay men and attitudes toward lesbians should be distinguished. We highly recommend that future studies develop a well-suited psychometric to evaluate Vietnamese' attitudes toward lesbians. Overall, this study indicates that Knowledge about Gay Issues is an important factor in predicting anti-gay attitudes in Vietnam; further research is encouraged in pursuit of effective

interventions designed to reduce anti-gay attitudes (e.g., improving knowledge about gay issues).

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