

# A Comparative Analysis of Korean and American Prospective Teachers' Perceptions of LGBTQ Issues

**Kyunghee Shin**

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2009-2470>

Nambu University, South Korea

khshin@nambu.ac.kr

## Abstract

Korea and the US have different levels of tolerance toward homosexuality. At the same time, the school in both countries is considered to reinforce homophobia and heteronormativity. This study focuses on juxtaposing Korean and American prospective teachers to compare their past and current understanding and attitudes toward homosexuality. The research highlights the differences and similarities between the attitudes of the prospective teachers from the two countries and analyses reasons behind these attitudes. This study also examines how the participants face their own biases, understand the complicated issues related to sexual minorities, challenge their own perceptions, and decide whether they would change or keep them. Ten Korean and 10 American prospective teachers participated in a journal writing project guided by anti-homophobic discourses. In the beginning of the project, the Korean participants displayed greater homophobia in a more drastic way than the American participants did. However, the difference between the two countries might be only superficial in that heterosexuality is placed as a norm in both countries. In other words, even though homosexuality is more tolerated in American society, it does not mean that it is accepted as part of the norm. At the end of the project, the American and the Korean participants agreed that heterosexist beliefs and practices permeate society and that such social institutions as schools play an important role in reproducing and reinforcing homophobia. However, three American participants remained silent on the final question of whether they would fight against homophobia and three Korean participants decided not to support homosexual issues. If one says nothing, one cannot be accused of homophobia. By their silence, they voiced their true feelings on the issue, that they didn't support it, showing that silence is far from neutral in a heterosexual society.



Education as Change

<https://upjournals.co.za/index.php/EAC>

Volume 23 | 2019 | #2099 | 22 pages

<https://doi.org/10.25159/1947-9417/2099>

ISSN 1947-9417 (Online)

© The Author(s) 2019



Published by the University of Johannesburg and Unisa Press. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>)

**Keywords:** homosexuality; heteronormativity; homophobia; prospective teachers; teacher education

## **Introduction**

South Korea (hereafter, simply “Korea”) and the US have different levels of tolerance toward and acceptance of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) issues. Talking about homosexuality is taboo in Korean society. It is considered to threaten the social order, in which ideologies of homogeneity and standardisation are played out in everyday practices (Seo 2015). Relative to Korea, LGBTQ issues are known to be more accepted in the US. While one comedian came out for the first time to the public as gay in 2000 in Korea, thousands of homosexual individuals in the US have opened up about their sexual identity and joined a massive grassroots gay liberation movement since the 1960s. Tolerance toward homosexuality has risen since then and the US Supreme Court legalised same-sex marriage in 2015. Such a brief historical background shows that Korea and the US have different levels of public acceptance toward homosexuality.

Despite the differences in the levels of tolerance, sexual minorities in both countries are commonly victims of discrimination and rejection in the specific institutional setting of the public-school system. In the schools, LGBTQ people experience more prejudice and discrimination than in any other social institution (Gorski, Davis, and Reite 2013; Kang and Ha 2005; Kim 2013; Kumashiro 2004). In the schools of both countries, sexual minorities are frequently bullied and harassed because of their sexual orientation. It is also necessary to note the recent responses of both governments toward homosexuality issues in schools. In 2015, the Ministry of Education in Korea officially removed the word homosexuality from its sex education guidelines (Seo 2015). In 2017, the Trump administration withdrew Title IX, the federal law which prohibits discrimination against sexual minorities in schools. The administration delegated the making of detailed rules concerning how or whether to accommodate transgender students to each school district. Despite local differences, LGBTQ individuals in American schools could be expected to experience more widespread discrimination than before (Melnick 2018).

Many teacher educators and education scholars insist that schoolteachers should be at the core of discussions about sexual minorities to provide much clearer views about the issues and problems (Bromseth and Sorensdotter 2014; Ferfolja and Robinson 2004; Kumashiro 2004; 2008; Robinson and Ferfolja 2001). They suggest that teacher education programmes should be designed to help prospective teachers identify themselves as change agents (see Goldstein, Collins, and Haler’s [2007] anti-homophobia education, Kumashiro’s [2004; 2008] anti-oppressive education, and Bromseth and Sorensdotter’s [2014] norm critical education).

This study focuses on juxtaposing prospective teachers who grew up in the different social contexts of Korea and the US in order to compare their past and current

understandings, views, and attitudes toward sexual minorities and challenges them to fight prejudices and discrimination against LGBTQ individuals in their own countries. To reach the research goal I chose participants who are representative of each culture. For instance, the Korean participants live in an ethnically homogeneous society and have only recently been exposed to LGBTQ issues. Meanwhile, the American participants live in an ethnically diverse community and have been exposed to different minorities, including sexual minorities. Such a social/cultural difference seems to present a sharp contrast. However, in both countries, the school can and often does function as a mechanism to reinforce heterosexuality as the moral norm (Kang and Ha 2005; Kim 2009; Kumashiro 2004). Thus, prospective teachers in both countries have the same task: to fight through the mechanisms of compulsory heterosexuality and the internalisation of homophobia in the school.

My research invited both American and Korean prospective teachers to participate in the same journal writing project through which participants reflected on their own beliefs about sexual minorities and decided whether they would be change agents or not. The research took place from fall 2012 through spring 2013. The prospective teachers in both countries read the same materials, wrote their thoughts about prejudice and discrimination toward sexual minorities, and examined their roles as possible agents of change. The reading materials were selected to challenge the participants to critically examine themselves and their socio-cultural structural contexts, and to practise anti-homophobic education. This method was guided by Guðjónsdóttir et al.'s (2007) self-study approach, providing prospective teachers with opportunities to examine their changing attitudes and beliefs.

This study took up the following research questions: 1) What are the original perceptions of sexual minorities by prospective teachers in Korea and in the US? 2) Would those subjects be able to identify the mechanisms that influence their attitudes and beliefs about sexual minorities? 3) Would they identify themselves as change agents? In exploring these research questions, I highlight the differences and similarities between the attitudes of the prospective teachers from the two countries and analyse reasons behind those attitudes. In doing so, this study examines how the participants faced their own biases, understood the complicated issues related to sexual minorities, challenged their own perceptions, and decided whether they would change or keep them.

The following literature review seeks to provide a better understanding of sexual minorities and of the shifting roles of teachers in contemporary culture. The literature section includes queer theory and related research in order to examine how heteronormativity and homophobia are constructed to maintain the masculine, patriarchal hegemony. It also includes a review of anti-homophobia education, which defines teachers as change agents and emphasises a teaching philosophy respecting all students in all their diversity.

## Literature Review

### Theorising Sexual Minorities in Different Cultures

It is necessary to raise awareness about the common understanding of gender and sexual identity by deconstructing the dominant ideologies of sexual orientation and gender. Butler (1999) argued that gender and sexuality cannot be separated, but are mutually produced through the heterosexual matrix which ensures privileges for straight individuals by shaping their identities to be normative and neutral. Heterosexuality assures its superiority through the construction of homosexuality as an inferior identity, as a reviled category of knowledge, as a deviation from the standard of “normal” heterosexuality. This oppression process is used by ones who try to maintain their privilege within a hierarchical social structure governing social identity and gender.

Homophobia is loosely defined as the bias of heterosexuality. Heterosexuality is a norm in every society, but heterosexual bias has wide variations. Many scholars emphasise that the degree of homophobia varies for individuals of different social locations based on gender, race, and ethnicity, in how they perceive sexual minorities (Herek 2002; Schope and Eliason 2000; Sinnott 2010; Williams 2009). Schope and Eliason (2000) found that males express more negative attitudes toward lesbians and gays than females. Worthen (2014) emphasised that gender boundaries are reinforced more by males, especially when they express their hetero-masculinity to show that they are straights with normal status. This can be explained more effectively with the term “homohysteria.” McCormack and Anderson (2014) used the concept of homohysteria in order to explain how men police their gendered behaviours in the masculine hierarchy. For instance, boys and men distance themselves from homosexuality and femininity in Western societies where hetero-masculinity has been traditionally privileged (Connell and Connell 2005). In this homohysterical culture, hetero-masculinity requires rejecting all things feminine and is accompanied by homophobia. Homohysteria, along with homophobia and misogyny, is used to construct masculinity, which gives advantaged positions to straight men and disadvantaged positions to women (Anderson 2010).

Nadal (2017) stated that LGBTQ individuals in Asia must contend with the perceived threat they pose to traditional gender norms. They have to deal with oppressive environments that render them invisible or subject them to public humiliation, assault, imprisonment, or execution. Laurent (2005) argued that Asian values which put emphasis on family and social harmony are in contradiction to homosexuality. Sexual minorities in Asian communities have to negotiate their freedom, lifestyle and identities in an atmosphere of homophobia. Liu and Chan (2003) reported that Asians denied even the existence of lesbian, gay, and bisexual people. Confucianism, which influenced Asian cultures, does not attack homosexuality in an overt way. Instead, it includes social and familial hierarchical schemes that strictly stress traditional moral norms (Kim 1996; Molony, Theiss, and Choi 2016).

Koreans have only begun to recognise the existence of sexual minorities. Until recently, homosexuality has not been freely or openly discussed in Korea. The first queer festival was held in 2000. Since then the festival has consistently been confronted with severe opposition. For instance, the first queer festival in the city of Incheon, in 2018, was severely delayed due to a 1000 anti-gay protesters who even physically attacked and blocked 300 homosexual individuals. The police did not stop the anti-gay protesters, rather asking the sexual minorities to end the event as soon as possible (Lee 2018). Homosexuality is not illegal in Korea. At the same time, however, there is no regulation outlawing discrimination against sexual minorities. Such forced invisibility of sexual minorities shows a manifestation of homophobia in Korea rather than the nonexistence of homophobia. It means that there is systemic invisibility of any sexuality that is not heterosexual (Joo 2017; Kim 2009; Seo 2015). Kim (2013) argued that Koreans are raised to follow a gender hierarchy rooted in Confucian ideals of gender differentiation and segregation. The rigidity with which gender has been constructed causes heterosexual people to have direct, obvious negative feelings and attitudes toward individuals who do not fit traditional gender norms (Joo 2017; Kim Kim and Choi 1999).

Many scholars emphasise that heterosexuality is built differently in different cultural settings. More importantly, schools in most countries internalise homophobia and naturalise heterosexuality (Crocco 2001; Glimps 2005; Levstik and Groth 2002). In addition, teachers are considered to reproduce the heteronormative power structure. Teachers are even seen to be reluctant to confront homophobia and heterosexism in schools (Msibi and Francis 2011). Many scholars, however, argue that teachers need to be redefined as change agents rather than passive deliverers of existing knowledge. They assume that teachers have the capacity and willingness to fight the lesbian and gay inequalities which are embedded in each culture. Their perspective will be examined in the following.

### **Agents of Change in the Classroom**

On LGBTQ issues, schools have kept a neutral stance by being silent. Schools, however, can never be entirely neutral when they prefer to be silent on the issues. Silence on LGBTQ issues is not a neutral stance, but one that gives a tacit approval to the status quo (Mitchell 2012; Plummer 1999). The silence of schools implies that teachers avoid addressing the injustices that already exist. Kumashiro (2008) argued that silence can be biased, as the failure to act in the face of discrimination serves to sanction such discrimination. In order to challenge a homophobic environment, many scholars emphasise the necessity to identify, problematise, and transform the social structures and cultural ideologies that sustain privilege-oppression, and to challenge students to become aware of, critique, and challenge them (Bromseth and Sorensdotter 2014; Epstein, O'Flynn, and Telford 2000; Kumashiro 2004; Meyer 2010). In this context, the role of teachers is crucial. Teachers are expected to play a major role in transforming the school system that reproduces heteronormativity and discriminates against sexual

minorities. Many teacher education researchers emphasise that it is important to raise teachers' awareness of inequalities toward those with marginalised sexual identities and to foster a sense of responsibility for engaging in anti-homophobia education in their classrooms (e.g. Bromseth and Sorensdotter 2014; Ferfolja and Robinson 2004; Goldstein, Collins, and Halder 2007; Hulsebosch and Koerner 1993; Kumashiro 2004).

Taylor (2002) argued that teachers must act as "change agents" who recognise and confront the homophobia of the school culture in order to transform schools from sites where homophobia is internalised and reinforced into ones where students can denaturalise homophobia. By using the term anti-oppressive education, Kumashiro (2004; 2008) supported anti-homophobia discourses in order to empower teachers to denaturalise heterosexuality and contest homophobia. He highlighted the processes by which norms create and establish hierarchical difference, and teachers' roles in these processes. By suggesting norm-critical education, Bromseth and Sorensdotter (2014) also took a similar stance on anti-homophobia discourses. They emphasised that teachers and preservice teachers need to critically examine the everyday decisions of teaching and learning in order to work actively and ethically toward social justice.

Anti-oppressive work, however, is made more difficult when attempted in schools as institutions that transmit oppressive ideologies as common sense. Since homophobia is a form of prejudice that is accepted as normal in many communities, this takes courage and commitment on the part of teachers (Taylor 2002). In order to challenge heteronormative ideas and preconceptions, Sullivan (2003) emphasised the need to "denaturalize heteronormative understandings of sex, gender, sexuality, and the relations between them" (2003, 81). Kumashiro (2004) reported that for the process of denaturalisation, teachers need to teach paradoxically by questioning their own attitudes and perceptions. In other words, teachers should be critical and problematise what is being taught to whom and for what ends. Bromseth and Sorensdotter (2014) also assumed that change is achieved through the practice of undermining and "disturbing" the taken-for-granted norms in society. Just as Kumashiro emphasised, Bromseth and Sorensdotter also insisted that teachers need to deconstruct, undermine and question the dominant norms in society in order to stand at the forefront of anti-oppressive struggles.

McCaskell and Russell (2000) presented the self-reflexive procedure as an anti-homophobia education principle through which teachers could encourage students to understand hetero-normativity as hegemony and to challenge it. Through such self-reflexive questioning, teachers could be prepared for activism, seeking to change accepted notions of what is normal.

Although teacher educators criticise the school as an institution that reinforces the dominant constructions of gender and sexuality, Ferfolja and Robinson (2004) also found in their survey research that many teacher educators fail to include LGBTQ equity issues or anti-homophobic perspectives in their teacher education coursework. Ferfolja

and Robinson (2004) emphasised that if teacher educators intend to teach for social justice, they have to be involved in anti-homophobia education, which counteracts the inequities and damaging impact of homophobia and heterosexism. Goldstein, Collins, and Halder (2007) emphasised that this self-reflexive process is intended to critically examine one's teaching to affirm social justice in the classroom. Taylor (2002) argued that although confronting homophobia sometimes involves hearing hurtful words, it usefully problematises the ethical status of homophobic students and challenges them to adopt less oppressive behaviours. Her argument emphasised that despite the discomfort, a social justice approach should be applied to the school system. This approach requires teacher education programmes to be challenged to prepare prospective teachers to be self-reflective of their critical role as active agents who will resist the prevailing discrimination against and oppression of sexual minorities in the school.

So far, I have reviewed important discourses on sexual minorities and explained anti-homophobia education in order to show how anti-homophobia discourses could be applied to education and to emphasise that heteronormative discourses cannot be undone without adequate teacher support. In the next section, I explain how I recruited prospective teachers in Korea and the US to participate in the journal writing project, collected writing data from the participants, and analysed that data.

## **Methods**

I focused on choosing the research targets in order to show the differences and similarities between the two countries more effectively. For this aim, I selected two universities, one in Korea and one in the US, which were similar in size. In Korea, prospective teachers from N. University were recruited. N. University is a private university which is located in the southern area of Korea. N. University, like other universities in Korea, follows the standardised teacher education programmes monitored by the government. In the US, prospective teachers from S. University were selected. The school is located in a city in the Intermountain Region. The city has a large population of Hmong people. There are multicultural programmes for ethnic minority groups. Teacher education programmes of S. University deal with several diversity issues, including sexual minorities.

Volunteers were recruited through postings on the school board. I also advertised the journal writing project to the students who were enrolled in one of my teacher education programmes, asking whether they wished to participate in the journal writing project after completing the programme. I made sure that the project did not affect the participants' grades. I also asked an American professor at S. University who was teaching a multicultural teacher education programme to recruit participants who wanted to participate in the journal writing project. She explained my project in her classroom. She assured the students that participation was voluntary and would not affect their grade.

All participants in both countries signed informed consent documents and were informed of the research process before I conducted the study. They were assured that the confidentiality of their participation in the research would be maintained, that their participation would be voluntary, and that they could stop participating at any time. Ten Korean students, six female and four male, agreed to participate in the project, and all of them completed all the journal writing. Likewise, 10 American students, eight female and two male, initially participated in the project, but three of them adamantly refused to submit their final journal writing.

The following tables summarise the background information of the American and Korean participants. For the Korean participants, a dash (-) was added to aid pronunciation. In addition, Korean male participants’ names end with “suk.”

**Table 1:** Prospective teachers in the US

<i>Name</i>	<i>Race</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Contacts with LGBTQ</i>
Sarah	White	Female	
Rachel	White	Female	
Megan	White	Female	
Heather	White	Female	
Jane	White	Female	Best friend
Cindy	White	Female	Ex-husband
Jim	White	Male	Son
S1	White	Female	
S2	White	Female	
S3	White	Male	



**Table 2:** Prospective teachers in Korea

<i>Name</i>	<i>Race</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Contacts with LGBTQ</i>
Eun-young	Asian	Female	Classmate
Ji-young	Asian	Female	
Mi-young	Asian	Female	
Yu-jung	Asian	Female	Classmate
Yae-eun	Asian	Female	
Su-jung	Asian	Female	
Min-suk	Asian	Male	
Ha-suk	Asian	Male	
In-suk	Asian	Male	
Jun-suk	Asian	Male	

The participants in both countries were engaged in the four-week journal writing project. For the first week, the participants conducted self-reflexive inquiry by writing narratives of their existing attitudes and perceptions of LGBTQ issues. Then, the American and Korean participants read the same materials on gay and lesbian issues. The reading resources consisted of three key themes. The first article focused on the LGBTQ individuals' struggles in their daily lives. The second article highlighted pedagogical issues in which teachers deal with LGBTQ youths who couldn't adjust in traditional schools. The third article encouraged participants to examine heterosexual ideologies prevailing in society and make suggestions for dismantling such ideologies. The materials are commonly used in teacher education programmes in the US. In comparison to the US, it is difficult to find any appropriate teaching materials in the Korean context. This also shows a different atmosphere toward sexual minorities between the two countries. It is hard to imagine teaching about LGBTQ issues in Korea. For instance, the Ministry of Education gave as the official guidelines for in-service teacher programmes about LGBTQ issues, "Do not mention it" (Seo 2015). The National Human Rights Committee (NHRC) of Korea also reported in 2014 that most prospective teachers and in-service teachers had not been taught about LGBTQ issues (NHRC 2014). This is why I and the American facilitator decided to use American reading materials and their Korean version. The reflexive writing project was processed as shown in the following table.

**Table 3:** Journal writing project

Week 1	Writing their experiences related to sexual minorities
Week 2	Reading I: <i>On Being Gay: Thoughts on Family, Faith and Love</i> by B. McNaught
Week 3	Reading II: <i>Teaching Ideas: What Do We Say When We Hear Faggot?</i> by L. Gordon
Week 4	Reading III: “Who Gets Called Queer in School? Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Teenagers, Homophobia, and High School” by A. O’Connor

For the initial coding of the data, I created analytical notes. Each journal writing was content analysed using open coding. This process involved dividing each journal writing into meaningful content segments, and coding each segment according to an evolving set of themes. I solidified some possible categories and continuously modified the list throughout the analysis procedure. Based on the recurring phrases and themes, I examined the ways the categories and the data were arranged. In the following, I will attempt to identify some of the recurring themes throughout the narratives, paying special attention to the ways in which American and Korean participants understand social structure, prejudice, and stereotypes, and think about their own responsibility.

## Results

### Examining Their Own Attitudes about LGBTQ Issues

American and Korean participants wrote about their personal beliefs and ideas related to sexual minorities. Their written discourses looked very different in two ways. More Korean participants recorded negative attitudes and emotions toward homosexuality. In addition, they expressed them in a more drastic way in more strongly negative language. Most of the American participants wrote about their acceptance of homosexuality. Two participants wrote about the negative attitudes and emotions that they had toward gay and lesbian people before the project. However, they expressed them in subtle and indirect ways. Sarah (US\_Sarah, journal, Week 1) admitted that she had been very homophobic at one time:

I have been scared of [homosexual people]. Not only that, but I have also had a very dominate stereotype in my mind when it comes to people who have a different sexual orientation. If there was a lesbian, or bisexual, I just thought they were disgusting and didn’t want to associate with them at all. I tried not to think about homophobia but it actually scared me.

Rachel echoed Sarah’s opinion. Reading the first article and discussing it, she found that her existing thoughts were quite close to that of the fundamentalist Christian, Anita Bryant: “I shamefully must admit that I used to have similar views to that of Anita

Bryant. I used to think that gay and lesbian people were trying to get attention” (Week 2).

In the case of the Korean participants, most of them believed homophobia was widespread and common sense. They assumed that conventional morality requires the concealment of homosexuality at the societal level, making it taboo. For instance, Ha-suk hardly imagined anything except the traditional assumptions about heterosexual relationships. Ha-suk (Kr\_Ha-suk, journal, Week 1) explained his original view on sexual minorities:

I thought homosexuality was not even something for thinking about. It was never something acceptable in our society. I used to believe that gay and lesbian relationships should not be accepted. Homosexuality always reminded me of abnormal sexual behaviors and gay-bars in which men eagerly tried to touch each other. I assumed that this was really disgusting and abnormal.

Some Korean participants described their disapproval of homosexuality in a more explicit and direct way. Yu-Jung described her feeling when she first encountered a lesbian classmate who sent a secret phone message to her lesbian friend: “Once I saw it with my eyes, I felt a strong dislike to it. I felt contempt for them” (Week 1). Other participants’ writings also included explicit homophobia. For instance, Ji-young said, “Yuck! Why did they do that? This was my gut response” (Week 1). Similarly, Jun-suk expressed, “Ew, disgusting! This was my first response” (Week 1).

American and Korean participants’ journal writings, especially of Week 1 and Week 2, showed the cultural differences which Nadal (2017) and Laurent (2005) pointed out. As for the American participants’ equity awareness, self-awareness and political correctness, the American participants showed higher political correctness, which made them suppress their prejudiced attitudes, and show greater support for the values of diversity. Meanwhile, the Korean participants showed stronger negative attitudes toward homosexuality than the American participants. Unlike the American participants, the Korean participants did not bother to replace their direct expressions with less offensive ones. However, although the American participants produced more favourable responses to homosexuality, their responses showed that homosexuality is still merely tolerated, rather than accepted as part of the norm. The participants commonly expressed their fear of and aversion to homosexuality (Crocco 2001; Glimps 2005). Despite the differences, the participants in both countries shared a common belief that “normal” people in the society are heterosexual (Butler 1999).

### **Examining Mechanisms That Reinforce Heterosexism**

Both the Korean and the American participants examined the control mechanisms that are often used to enforce gender roles and ideas. Through reading the second material, they gave more attention to exploring how people absorb the negative attitudes and

stereotypes toward sexual minorities in schools. Their written responses are categorised into two types: school atmosphere and teachers' attitude.

In terms of the school atmosphere, the American participants emphasised peer group pressure and the Korean participants highlighted patriarchal values in school. The American participants assumed that the school system reproduces a heteronormative hegemony by reinforcing rigid gender roles. Heather noted gender stereotypes in the playground and classroom: "Boys enjoy basketball, football, and baseball. Girls want to dance, perform, and sing. These expectations form boundaries for maleness and femaleness" (Week 3). As she reflected on the reading, Megan (US\_Megan, journal, Week 3) also found how gender stereotypes influence homophobia in school:

They were bullied because of what their sexual orientation was perceived to be by their peers. This issue was addressed briefly in the article, "what do we say when we hear 'faggot'?" It mentioned males who engage in traditionally "female-only" activities such as cooking or sewing, and girls who have close relationships with other girls being targeted as examples ... Through peer pressure and bullying, children are forced to endorse hegemonic masculinity which is bound to heterosexuality.

The American participants assumed that adolescent boys and girls face increased pressures to conform to stereotypical gender roles, especially in school. However, the Korean participants did not emphasise gender boundaries enforced by students' peers as much as the American participants did. After reading the second article, Mi-young (Kr\_Mi-young, journal, Week 3) said that she was surprised that there are rigid gender boundaries in American society:

I found that Americans face more pressures of fitting into feminine gender ideas. It is quite common in Korea that two girls hold hands and lock arms. It is not a big deal. We do it all the time in school. Also, many of the girls in Korea dress like tomboys. I saw many boys wear pink. Few people would think that they are gay or lesbian.

Other participants also believed that there is less peer pressure in Korea that enforces gender boundaries. Rather, they mentioned teachers who emphasised patriarchal values that openly devalue women and girls. Ji-young stated, "I graduated a girls' high school. Many teachers emphasized femininity. They used to say, 'Go to a prestigious university and marry a man with a more prestigious occupation. You should be a good wife and wise mother'" (Week 3). She wrote that it was hard to even think about the possibility of various forms of sexual identity in such a traditional heterosexual context.

Korean male participants also emphasised the discrepancy between homosexuality and the traditional patriarchal beliefs in Korea. Jun-suk explained in his journal writing that Korea is a Confucian society. In-suk (Kr\_In-Suk, journal, Week2) also mentioned the incongruity between traditional values and homosexuality:

After reading McNaught's article, I thought about the possibility of gay men in high school. I and my friends took for granted that men and women are different; men acted like men; women need to act like women. The existence of homosexuality does not seem to fit in our culture.

In addition to the different emphasis in the school atmospheres of the two countries, the American and Korean participants presented different responses when questioned about teachers' attitudes toward sexual minorities. Some of the Korean participants mentioned homophobic bullying by teachers. Eun-young (Kr\_Eun-young, journal, Week 3) described how a gay classmate had been harshly beaten by the homeroom teacher:

When I was in middle school, we had a regular counseling program. One of my male classmates confessed that he felt love for another male classmate. Soon after this coming-out, he was beaten by the homeroom teacher in front of the classroom. In counseling time, teachers used to tell us, "You can tell me anything." However, this did not mean that you can talk about your different sexual desires. It meant, "You can say anything related with your studying."

She asserted that the classmate was the first gay person she had ever met. At the same time, he was the last gay person she saw in her daily life. She also emphasised that "[e]ven though the homeroom teacher did not say anything about homosexuality, he gave a clear message about gay and lesbian people."

The American participants did not talk about teachers' direct discrimination against sexual minorities. They highlighted teachers' indifference to LGBTQ issues. Heather described her teachers: "They were merely indifferent to gay issues. I never saw a school teacher who confronted prejudice against gays and lesbians" (Week 3). Sarah provided a similar opinion about teachers' deliberate indifference. She (US\_Sarah, journal, Week 3) stated that her school teachers did not show overt homophobia, but at the same time, they did not challenge prejudices and stereotyping:

I never had a teacher who challenged the problem. Teachers were indifferent to homophobic insults. Teachers either were unaware of it, or seemed to choose to ignore it. I cannot imagine the type of teacher that I would have been, had I chosen this profession earlier in my adult life. I cringe to recognize that I would likely have been a teacher who did not stand up for gay students being openly discriminated against in my school and classroom, and might have even been part of the problem.

In her view, most teachers maintained an attitude of silence on homosexual issues. She admitted that if she had not reflected on Gordon's essay in Table 3, she would have become one of the silent teachers.

Both the Korean and the American participants sensed control mechanisms for both women and men to keep them in their place. Their responses showed heterosexuality is compulsory, both in America and in Korea. However, they showed that heterosexual

bias is represented in different ways in the different cultural contexts. The American participants emphasised rigid gender boundaries. As Archer and Lloyd (2002) argued, the American participants reported that boys and girls experience strong peer-group pressure to conform to their gender role. The Korean participants pointed out the patriarchal context of Korea, where traditional Confucian beliefs operate as social control mechanisms for both women and men to keep them in their place (Kim 1996; Molony, Theiss, and Choi 2016). Another difference between the two countries is teachers' attitudes toward homosexuality. The Korean participants remembered that their teachers used to subject homosexual youths to public humiliation. The American participants wrote in their journals that their teachers used to keep silent on or avoid dealing with homosexual issues.

### **To Transform or Not**

The participants had an opportunity to make a decision either to challenge homophobia at school or not. Many of the participants in both countries mentioned that once they become a teacher, they would challenge the taken-for-granted understandings of sexuality. They decided to be engaged in the difficult work of transforming their perspectives on social and organisational structures and their roles in the classroom. Mi-young and Su-jung assumed that silencing the dialogue on homosexuality was also a type of homophobia. Su-jung (Kr\_Su-jung, journal, Week 4) especially emphasised that teachers should be responsive to homophobia and heterosexual bias:

Silencing problems is not right as a teacher. Teaching gay and lesbian students how to stand up against their friends who use offensive words for gay and lesbian people is educating all students about the true sense of ethics. For me, teaching students to resist any kinds of oppression is the right as well as the responsibility as an educator.

In her final writing, Su-jung emphasised that she would prepare her students for social activism as part of her struggles for social justice. The Korean participants who showed a strong negative feeling toward homosexuality admitted that gay and lesbian people must be protected in school. For instance, Yu-jung wrote about her changed view: "I had been totally ignorant. If I go back to that time, I would give personal support to my lesbian friend" (Week 4).

Like the Korean participants, many of the American participants showed their intentions for anti-homophobia education. Some of them overcame their own homophobia. For instance, Rachel actually had written about her prejudice against homosexuals in her first writing: "Gay and lesbian individuals were just trying to get attention" (Week 1). As she (US\_Rachel, journal, Week 4) continued in the journal writing project, she determined that she would attempt to counter any type of inequalities in her classroom:

As a future educator, I want to make my classroom a safe and fun learning environment where ALL of my students can learn and participate without feeling scared. I want to stress the importance of equality in my classroom. I will not allow name-calling or snide

remarks to anyone. My students will know that I respect them and that I expect them to respect others as well. My ultimate goal is to inform my students of the issues surrounding homosexuality so as to not let my students be so judgmental, as I once was.

As seen in the above quotation, many participants showed their intentions to change the environment of their future classrooms to one of more openness to and acceptance of sexual minorities.

Even though many of the participants answered that they would be actively involved in struggles against heterosexism and homophobia, some of them did not want to be involved in anti-homophobia work. Three Korean and three American participants refused to see themselves as change agents as teachers. Their refusal patterns differed by their nationality. American participants Amy, Anna, and Mark decided to make no comments on the homosexual issues in the last session of the project. They decided to be silent at the moment of making a decision and did not submit their journal writings. Three Korean participants made clear why they decided not to be change agents. They asserted that homosexuals might be harmful to the conservative Korean society. In his first writing, In-suk emphasised that he had never thought about homosexuality itself in his entire life. Through the project, he admitted that he was prejudiced against gay and lesbian people. Even though he recognised the issues, he maintained his initial beliefs even in his (Kr\_In-suk, journal, Week 4) final writing:

I thought it was not even worth reflecting on homosexuality in a religious or moral way. Through the project, I came to admit that their rights as a human being need to be respected. However, even if the era was changed and other countries protect their rights, the sexuality is not something that could be accepted in Korea, which respects such Confucius values as filial piety and courtesy.

He emphasised that Korean society is not yet ready for those people and he subordinated his will to the dominant opinion. Another male participant, Min-suk (Kr\_Min-suk, journal, Week 4), expressed concerns about homosexuals and decided to “help” them in his own way, treating homosexuality as a disease needing a cure:

As a teacher, I feel that I should teach that a man lives as a man and a woman lives as a woman. I assume that a teacher has to help students to construct healthy identities. If I become a teacher, I would rather examine the causes of homosexuality and be at the front in resolving them.

As seen in the above quotation, some of the Korean participants refused to be involved in anti-homophobia education and rather hoped to actively “correct” homosexual individuals.

Except for the three American and three Korean participants, the participant prospective teachers in both countries improved in their understanding of the issues and problems, and understood their possible roles in anti-oppressive education. However, some of the

American participants suggested that change is often very hard to attain. Cindy was an American participant who had a gay family member, her former husband. She described her own struggles and deliberations over difference. She (US\_Cindy, journal, Week 4) explained her agony caused by this process:

When he came out of the closet and told me, “I think I am gay,” my world, beliefs, and fantasy came crashing down around me. How did I not see the signs, ignore the red flags, and only view him through heterosexual eyes? How was I gullible, trusting, and confident that life would have the happily ever after ending? Did I want a perfect life that was thought and modeled to me, so desperately, that I put blinders on and looked at him through rose colored glasses? I could not believe my ears; I dropped to the floor in anguish and sobbed uncontrollably, pleading with God to take this trail from me.

After constantly questioning normality, she decided to abandon her privileged position as a heterosexual individual and decided to change her daily life. This was one of the main reasons for her to decide to be a teacher who challenges heterosexual bias in society as well as in school. She also opened her house to homeless LGBTQ youths: “My home became a haven for some of the outcasts and misfits that society labeled these children because they were different from the accepted norm” (Week 4). Her journal showed that real change in her life was the result of her painful deliberation.

Cindy’s journal writing vividly described the process Butler (1999) proposed by which the deconstruction of normative models of gender legitimates lesbian and gay subject positions. Her personal experiences also showed that acting as “change agents” is difficult in a community where heterosexuality is exclusively considered as normal, appropriate and acceptable sexual behaviour. As Taylor (2002) assumed, anti-oppressive work in this context takes courage and commitment.

The written narratives by the 20 prospective teachers portray the process by which the teachers in each country confronted their own prejudice, explored the mechanisms through which their prejudices were constructed, and saw the leading roles of teachers against homophobia. In the following section, I summarise their responses, describe the differences or similarities between the American and Korean participants, and tie them to the theoretical framework adopted in this research. Finally, I expand my discussion to suggest implications for teacher education in the concluding section.

## **Discussion**

In the beginning of the journal writing project, the American and Korean participants were asked to acknowledge their attitudes and feelings toward homosexuality, which they had not explicitly stated before. Their journal writing results showed radical differences in expressing their homophobia. As scholars have pointed out (Sinnot 2010; Williams 2009), the research findings showed that the degree of homophobia is different among different cultures. More Korean participants expressed negative attitudes and



emotions toward homosexuality than American participants. In addition, Korean participants described them in a more drastic way than American participants did. The Korean participants were direct, overt, visible, and dramatic in describing their negative feelings. However, the American participants did not express prejudices towards homosexual people in such a way. They were more cautious in expressing their own prejudices against homosexuality. They suppressed their prejudiced attitudes and showed support for the values of tolerance.

The differences in the responses can be explained by their different social contexts. Korea is a rare example of an ethnically homogeneous nation. It is largely homogeneous in language, ethnicity, and culture. Korean culture is an expression of conservative Confucianism combined with a high degree of homogenisation in social values and norms (Laurent 2005; Seo 2015; Shin 2006). Meanwhile, American culture is the result of large numbers of people who have different cultural identities stemming from ethnic and racial difference. It leads to a belief that diversity lies at the centre of its social and cultural structures (Naylor 1998). Such different contexts are likely to cause American and Korean participants to have different levels of social tolerance and cultural sensitivity to diversity and difference.

Such social and cultural differences are also related to another finding. In the last period of the project, three Korean and three American participants did not express an intention to combat homophobia. They showed their intentions in different ways. The different expressions of the participants reflected the different social contexts. The three Korean participants concluded that the notion of gay rights is fundamentally irreconcilable with Confucian social order. The three American participants did not express their opposition to gay rights by remaining silent. At the same time, however, it is difficult to see their silence as a neutral stance. Kumashiro (2008) refused to accept that silence on LGBTQ issues is neutral. Just as schools in US society did not openly disapprove of the issues (Kumashiro 2008), the American participants might feel pressure to hide their intent in a multicultural society where direct and overt opposition to minorities might be seen as socially taboo. This is why many scholars see the silence as a tacit approval of systemised inequalities (Mitchell 2012; Plummer 1999).

On the surface, the responses of the Korean and the American participants might look polarised. The Korean participants did not hide that they still supported the traditional gender roles and hegemonic sexuality, even after knowing about the discrimination against homosexual people. In contrast to the overt form of disapproval, the three American participants did not express any negative responses to the call for fundamental changes in education. Even though they participated in the project for the first three weeks, they remained silent and refused to submit their journal writing for the last week's session. Once they became conscious of the social structure, they could not be in an objective and neutral position. In this situation, their silence would hardly be positive. Just as Kumashiro (2008) argued, it might be equated with withdrawal,

rejection, and disapproval. It is true that they expressed no direct disapproval. As Howard Zinn (2002) explained through his metaphor of a moving train, neutrality is impossible by remaining silent in a biased society. While the Korean participants vociferously encourage homophobia, the American participants' silence results in maintaining the social mechanisms of homophobia and heterosexism.

There are two limitations to the research findings. First, they did not show, effectively, differences between male and female participants, since the number of male participants was small. My research depended on voluntary participation. More female teacher education students in both countries showed their interest and decided to participate in my study. This also corresponds to what Schope and Eliason (2000) mentioned about gender differences in attitudes toward homosexuality. They highlighted that women are much friendlier toward sexual minorities. However, further research is still necessary to detail the gender difference between different countries. Second, the American female participants emphasised typical gender boundaries, while the Korean participants highlighted traditional gender order. Anderson (2010) and Connell and Connell (2005) showed that hetero-masculinity leads to homophobia. The research failed to describe the hetero-masculinity of the male participants. The reason is that one American male participant did not finish the journal writing project and the other one, whose son is gay, did not emphasise masculinity, and two Korean male participants were more concerned with Confucian order. Thus, further research should pay more attention to the relationship between masculinity and homophobia in both countries.

Despite such limitations, my research findings have many implications, especially for teacher education. The findings showed that the school in both countries is a crucial inequality-generating mechanism and that teacher education should be at the centre of anti-homophobia discourses. The American and the Korean participants agreed with many scholars who argue that heterosexist beliefs and practices permeate society and that such social institutions as schools play an important role in reproducing and reinforcing homophobia. This is why most of them agreed that teachers should combat homophobia. Although Korean society and American society have different levels of tolerance toward homosexuality, the difference might be only superficial. It is necessary to note that heterosexuality is placed as a norm in American society as well. The fundamental dominant structure remains intact in both countries unless the teacher confronts the oppressive ideology which is reproduced in the school. This also shows that being conscious of heterosexism and homophobia is not enough for real change to take place. In order to actualise homosexual equality in both countries, teacher education programmes in both countries should challenge teachers to identify themselves as change agents to confront the homophobia of the school culture.

## **Acknowledgement**

This work was supported by the National Research Foundation of Korea (Grant Number: 2017S1A5A8022323).

## References

- Anderson, E. 2010. *Inclusive Masculinity: The Changing Nature of Masculinities*. New York, NY: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203871485>.
- Archer, J., and B. Lloyd. 2002. *Sex and Gender*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139051910>.
- Bromseth, J., and R. Sörensdotter. 2014. "Norm-Critical Pedagogy." *Gender Studies Education and Pedagogy* 24: 24–38.
- Butler, J. 1999. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Connell, R. W., and R. Connell. 2005. *Masculinities*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Crocco, M. S. 2001. "The Missing Discourse about Gender and Sexuality in the Social Studies." *Theory into Practice* 40 (1): 65–71. [https://doi.org/10.1207/s15430421tip4001\\_10](https://doi.org/10.1207/s15430421tip4001_10).
- Epstein, D., S. O'Flynn, and D. Telford. 2000. "'Othering' Education: Sexualities, Silences, and Schooling." *Review of Research in Education* 25 (1): 127–79. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X025001127>.
- Ferfolja, T., and K. H. Robinson. 2004. "Why Anti-Homophobia Education in Teacher Education?" In "Anti-Homophobia Teacher Education," edited by T. Goldstein, K. H. Robinson and T. Ferfolja, special issue, *Teaching Education* 15 (1): 9–25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1047621042000179961>.
- Francis, D., and T. Msibi. 2011. "Teaching about Heterosexism: Challenging Homophobia in South Africa." *Journal of LGBT Youth* 8 (2): 157–73. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19361653.2011.553713>.
- Glimps, B. J. 2005. "Students Who Are Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, or Transgender." *Current Issues in Education* 8 (16). Accessed October 10, 2016. <http://cie.ed.asu.edu/volume8/number16/>.
- Goldstein, T., A. Collins, and M. Halder. 2007. "Anti-Homophobia Education in Public Schooling: A Canadian Case Study of Policy Implementation." *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Social Services* 19 (3–4): 47–66. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10538720802161540>.
- Gorski, P. C., S. N. Davis, and A. Reiter. 2013. "An Examination of the (In)Visibility of Sexual Orientation, Heterosexism, Homophobia, and Other LGBTQ Concerns in U.S. Multicultural Teacher Education Coursework." *Journal of LGBT Youth* 10 (3): 224–48. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19361653.2013.798986>.

- Guðjónsdóttir, H., M. Cacciattolo, E. Dakich, A. Davies, C. Kelly, and M. C. Dalmau. 2007. "Transformative Pathways: Inclusive Pedagogies in Teacher Education." *Journal of Research on Technology in Education* 40 (2): 165–82. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15391523.2007.10782503>.
- Herek, G. M. 2002. "Gender Gaps in Public Opinion about Lesbians and Gay Men." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 66 (1): 40–66. <https://doi.org/10.1086/338409>.
- Hulsebosch, P., and M. Koerner. 1993. "What Does Cultural Identity Have to Do with the Preparation of Teachers? Methodology and Findings." Paper presented at the National Council of Teacher of English Conference, Pittsburgh, PA.
- Joo, C. H. 2017. "Hidden Lives of Korean LGBT Adolescents: A Qualitative Case Study." *Journal of Education and Culture* 23 (1): 175–215. <https://doi.org/10.24159/joec.2017.23.1.175>.
- Kang, B. C., and K. H. Ha. 2005. "A Study on Homosexual Adolescents' Sexual Identity and Suicidal Risk." *Korean Journal of Youth Studies* 12 (3): 267–89.
- Kim, A. R. 1996. *Women Struggling for a New Life: The Role of Religion in the Cultural Passage from Korea to America*. New York, NY: SUNY Press.
- Kim, K. 2009. "Gay and Lesbian Adolescents and Counseling Intervention: Focusing on One-to-One, Group, Family, and School Counseling." *Asian Journal of Education* 10 (2): 135–68. <https://doi.org/10.15753/aje.2009.10.2.005>.
- Kim, M., C. Kim, and E. Choi. 1999. "History, Current Status and Social Implications of US Gay Movement." *Korean Society* 2: 267–87.
- Kim, S. 2013. "Same-Sex Intimacies: 'Non-Normative' Life Experiences that Challenge and (Re)form Heteronormative Marriage/Family Norms in South Korea." *Journal of Korean Women's Studies* 29 (1): 85–125.
- Kumashiro, K. K. 2004. *Against Common Sense: Teaching and Learning Toward Social Justice*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Kumashiro, K. K. 2008. *The Seduction of Common Sense: How the Right Has Framed the Debate on America's Schools*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Laurent, E. 2005. "Sexuality and Human Rights: An Asian Perspective." *Journal of Homosexuality* 48 (3–4): 163–225. [https://doi.org/10.1300/J082v48n03\\_09](https://doi.org/10.1300/J082v48n03_09).
- Levstik, L. S., and J. Groth. 2002. "'Scary Thing, Being an Eighth Grader': Exploring Gender and Sexuality in a Middle School U.S. History Unit." *Theory and Research in Social Education* 30 (2): 233–54. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00933104.2002.10473193>.

- Liu, P., and C. S. Chan. 2003. "Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Asian Americans and Their Families." In *Asian Americans: Vulnerable Populations, Model Interventions, and Clarifying Agendas*, edited by L. Zhan, 89–104. Sudbury, MA: Jones and Bartlett Publishers.
- Lee, C. 2018. "Queer Festival Severely Delayed by Violent Anti-Gay Protests in Korean Port City." *The Korean Herald*, September 9. Accessed April 13, 2019. <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20180909000245>.
- McCaskell, T., and V. Russell. 2000. "Anti-Homophobia Initiatives at the Former Toronto Board of Education." In *Weaving Connections: Educating for Peace, Social and Environmental Justice*, edited by T. Goldstein and D. Selby, 27–56. Toronto: Sumach Press.
- McCormack, M., and E. Anderson. 2014. "Homophobia: Definitions, Context and Intersectionality." *Sex Roles* 71 (3–4): 152–58. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-014-0401-9>.
- Melnick, R. S. 2018. *The Transformation of Title IX: Regulating Gender Equality in Education*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.
- Meyer, E. J. 2010. *Gender and Sexual Diversity in Schools*. Explorations of Educational Purpose, vol. 10. Dordrecht: Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-90-481-8559-7>.
- Mitchell, J. 2012. "A Culture of Silence." Morrisville, NC: Lulu.com.
- Molony, B., J. Theiss, and H. Choi. 2016. *Gender in Modern East Asia*. New York, NY: Westview Press.
- Nadal, K. L., ed. 2017. *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Psychology and Gender*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483384269>.
- Naylor, L. L. 1998. *American Culture: Myth and Reality of a Culture of Diversity*. Westport: Greenwood.
- NHRC. 2014. *The National Survey for Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientations*. Seoul: Kong-Kam.
- Plummer, D. 1999. *One of the Boys: Masculinity, Homophobia, and Modern Manhood*. London: Psychology Press.
- Robinson, K. H., and T. Ferfolja. 2001. "'What Are We Doing This For?' Dealing with Lesbian and Gay Issues in Teacher Education." *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 22 (1): 121–33. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01425690020030828>.
- Seo, D. 2015. "Why Cannot I Come Out in Times of Homosexual Friend Overflow?" *Culture and Science* 83: 174–88.

- Schope, R. D., and M. J. Eliason. 2000. "Thinking versus Acting: Assessing the Relationship between Heterosexual Attitudes and Behaviors Toward Homosexuals." *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Social Services* 11 (4): 69–92. [https://doi.org/10.1300/J041v11n04\\_04](https://doi.org/10.1300/J041v11n04_04).
- Shin, G.-W. 2006. *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea: Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Sinnott, M. 2010. "Borders, Diaspora, and Regional Connections: Trends in Asian 'Queer' Studies." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 69 (1): 17–31. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021911809991586>.
- Sullivan, N. 2003. *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*. New York, NY: New York University Press.
- Taylor, C. 2002. "Beyond Empathy: Confronting Homophobia in Critical Education Courses." *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 6 (3–4): 219–34. [https://doi.org/10.1300/J155v06n03\\_18](https://doi.org/10.1300/J155v06n03_18).
- Williams, W. L. 2009. "Strategies for Challenging Homophobia in Islamic Malaysia and Secular China." *Nebula* 6 (1): 1–20. Accessed April 3, 2019. <http://www.nobleworld.biz/images/Williams.pdf>.
- Worthen, M. G. 2014. "Blaming the Jocks and the Greeks?: Exploring Collegiate Athletes' and Fraternity/Sorority Members' Attitudes toward LGBT Individuals." *Journal of College Student Development* 55 (2): 168–95. <https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2014.0020>.
- Zinn, H. 2018. *You Can't Be Neutral on a Moving Train: A Personal History of Our Times*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.