

Essay Content Checklist

Definitions and Examples for Coding Attitude Functions

These codes were developed from essays written by undergraduate students at the University of California, Davis, in 1982-83. Because public discourse about sexual orientation has changed since the codes were developed, they should be used only as a guide for creating new content analysis schemes for heterosexuals' attitudes toward homosexuality.

For details about the use of these categories in coding attitude functions, see Herek (1987).

01) **Positive stereotypes/generalizations.** Respondent makes a general statement characterizing all lesbians or gay men as possessing some trait that is *not* specifically related to sexual orientation; this trait is of a sort that most people would consider to be positive or desirable, or it is positive or desirable in the eyes of the respondent. Examples:

- Homosexuals are not violent people.
- Homosexuals take the intellectual and discreet way of presenting their ideas.
- Homosexuals are well-educated, intelligent, and cultured.
- Homosexuals are generally more sensitive, artistic, and creative than straight people.
- Homosexuals are usually more well-adjusted and self-fulfilled than heterosexuals.
- Most homosexuals are nice people.

02) **Negative stereotypes/generalizations.** Same as #1, except that the characteristic ascribed to homosexuals is *not* desirable or is negative, at least from the respondent's point of view. Examples:

- Most male homosexuals have some identifiable feminine characteristics.
- I can usually spot a lesbian by her masculine appearance.
- Many male homosexuals have a fetish for women's clothing.
- A large number of violent crimes have been committed or caused by homosexuals.
- I tend to see homosexuality in relation with decay of personality or with crime.
- Homosexuals often seduce young children.
- Lots of male homosexuals find work as hairdressers or interior decorators.

03) **Lack of contact/ignorance (negative).** Respondent claims to be lacking knowledge about homosexuality or has never been in contact with a gay man/lesbian, and this has resulted in the respondent's generally negative attitudes; this category also includes statements that respondent is confused about homosexuality or cannot understand it *provided that* respondent is trying to deal with homosexuality in some cognitive or rational way (note that this excludes statements such as "I can't understand why anyone would want to be gay" if they actually are meant to be derogatory). Examples:

- My negative feelings stem from my relative ignorance on the topic of homosexuality.
- I have generally negative attitudes because I have never known a person who is homosexual.
- Except for television and the newspapers, I don't know much about homosexuals .
- I've never talked to anyone who is gay.
- I cannot really understand homosexuality, although I am trying.

- I am not familiar with homosexuality and this makes it a bit scary. It baffles me how someone could have a homosexual preference.

04) **Lack of contact/ignorance (positive)**. Same as #3, only respondent indicates that lack of contact or knowledge has resulted in *positive* attitudes. Examples:

- I have no real reason to feel negative toward homosexuals because I have not had much opportunity to come into contact with any of them.
- I have generally positive attitudes because I rarely am affected by homosexuality.
- I feel generally positive toward homosexuals because I have no real reason to feel negative toward them.
- Society should not be threatened by homosexuality because it does not hurt anyone directly.
- I don't really understand how a person could be homosexual, but I still have positive attitudes toward them.

05) **Denial of stereotypes**. Respondent explicitly denies that homosexuals are any different from heterosexuals except in terms of sexual orientation; respondent recognizes homosexuals as unique individuals, rather than as members of a homogeneous class that is different from heterosexuals in ways other than sexual orientation; check this category only if there exists a reasonable doubt that the respondent holds stereotypes about homosexuals. Examples:

- I have generally positive attitudes because homosexuals are people like you and me.
- Homosexuals are no different from heterosexuals.
- A person's sexual preference makes no difference to me.
- I accept gay people as I would anyone else.
- I know that sexual preference does not affect a person's other characteristics.

06) **Change**. Respondent indicates that attitudes/opinions could change in the future; respondent explicitly states that s/he can imagine some circumstances under which her/his attitudes might change. Examples:

- I could imagine a homosexual person becoming my friend.
- I don't know if my feelings will change as I get older, but they might.
- My attitudes are generally negative, but it would be possible for someone to convince me otherwise.
- I suppose that if I were to have some really negative experiences with homosexuals it could change my attitudes to unfavorable.

07) **Negative personal experiences with homosexuals**. Respondent's attitudes result from one or more specific experiences with a person who was (or was presumed to be) homosexual; the experience was somehow negative or punishing, *and this has led to the respondent's present negative attitudes*; this category does *not* include negative attitudes resulting from a sexual advance made by a homosexual (code this situation under "approach"). Examples:

- My personal contacts with homosexuals generally have been negative.
- The homosexuals I have known were very strange people.
- I knew some people that were disgusting, and later I learned that they were homosexuals.

08) **Positive personal experiences**. Same as #7, but the experience was rewarding/reinforcing *and this has*

led to respondent's positive attitudes. Examples:

- My personal experiences with homosexuals have been generally positive.
- The homosexuals I have met have all been friendly and intelligent people.
- I know from my contact with them that many gays are kind and fun to have as friends.
- I have had much contact with homosexuals and have discovered that our different sexual orientations do not prevent us from being friends.

09) **Personal discomfort/revulsion; general hostility/emotionality.** This is a broad category that includes statements made by respondents that indicate personal feelings of discomfort about homosexuality or feelings of revulsion associated with it; also included are very emotional and very hostile statements; included here also are statements that use such words as “fag,” “dyke,” “queer” as epithets; if possible, code a statement under categories 10-14, which are more specific than this one. Examples:

- I feel uncomfortable when I am around a person who obviously is a homosexual.
- Homosexuality is completely disgusting.
- Homosexuality is repulsive and ugly.
- The thought of homosexuality makes me sick.
- All homosexuals should be shot.

10) **Sex bias.** Respondent states a dislike for homosexuals of her/his own gender more than those of the opposite sex.

11) **Approach.** Respondent indicates feelings of discomfort at the thought of being propositioned by a homosexual, at being flirted with by a homosexual, at having a homosexual attempt to “convert” her/him, etc.; this category also includes statements that a respondent has been approached in this manner by homosexuals in the past, and this has resulted in discomfort or negative attitudes; the focus is on the respondent's personal discomfort that a homosexual might be attracted to her/him. Examples:

- I wouldn't want a homosexual to come on to me.
- If I were passed at by a homosexual, I would be offended just as I would be if I were passed at by a heterosexual of the opposite sex.
- I have very negative attitudes because just last week a gay person made a pass at me.
- The homosexuals I have met have tried to convert me.
- I don't think homosexuals should force themselves on other people.

12) **“Flaunting” or public display.** Respondent indicates disapproval or personal discomfort when s/he is exposed to homosexuals who are publicly demonstrative or who make known their sexual orientation. Examples:

- I feel uncomfortable when couples display overly affectionate behavior, whether heterosexual or homosexual.
- To see homosexuals together is rather distasteful.
- I tend to look down on outwardly open gays.
- Homosexuals should keep their sex lives to themselves just like anyone else.
- Homosexuals would be more acceptable if they wouldn't flaunt their homosexuality.
- Homosexuals try too hard to make themselves obvious.

- I don't understand why homosexuals have parades and demonstrations.
- Being gay is fine; yelling it to the whole world is not.

13) ***Cross-sex mannerisms.*** Same as #12, except that the respondent specifically indicates disapproval of male homosexuals somehow acting like women (e.g., effeminate gestures, dress) or lesbians somehow acting like men; this category differs from “stereotypes” in that respondent need not think that all homosexuals are this way—what is important is that s/he is offended by those who are.

14) ***Causes.*** Respondent speculates on what causes homosexuality or how homosexuals might have been prevented from becoming that way. Examples:

- I find it fascinating to learn how a person came to be a homosexual.
- Homosexuals become that way because of some problem in their upbringing.
- Something happened in homosexuals' lives to make them go the other way.
- People usually have had traumatic experiences or some kind of emotional or psychological damage that caused their homosexuality.
- Homosexuals would not have become that way if their family or peer situation had been different.

15) ***Positive upbringing/societal/peer influences.*** Respondent holds positive attitudes because of the influence of parents, family, non-gay friends, society in general; influence may be direct or indirect; note that respondent's *present* attitudes must be positive. Examples:

- I have very positive attitudes because my parents brought me up in a very liberal atmosphere.
- I was raised believing homosexuals are good people.
- My father taught me to be fair and not to judge people as society does, but to let them prove themselves.
- My positive feelings were learned from my family, friends, and society in general.
- I have formed my positive attitudes after hearing homosexuality debated in society, in my church, and among my friends.

16) ***Negative upbringing/societal/peer influences.*** Same as #15, but parents, family, friends, society have influenced respondent to hold negative attitudes *at the present time*. Examples:

- I have negative attitudes toward homosexuality because of my upbringing.
- I have been taught to dislike homosexuals.
- Society persuades many people, including me, to think badly of homosexuals.
- My negative beliefs come from my parents, church, peers, and my own reasoning after hearing these others.
- Society has played a major role in determining my negative attitudes by presenting homosexuality as something bad.
- My friends consider gays to be bad and disgusting; this has influenced my attitudes.

17) ***Past change to positive.*** Respondent indicates that family/peers/parents/others influenced her/him to hold negative attitudes, but that now respondent has changed to positive attitudes (the reason for the change may also be coded if present, e.g., positive experiences). Examples:

- My parents are very much against homosexuality, but I have developed positive attitudes as a

- result of having a gay room-mate.
- When I lived in my home-town I had negative opinions about gays because all my friends did, but now I have become more liberal since I came to Davis.

18) **Past change to negative.** Same as #17, but respondent has developed negative attitudes; as with #17, the focus of this category is that respondent's present opinions are in contradiction to those held by important figures in her/his socialization process.

19) **Religious/moral/ethical influences (negative).** Respondent holds negative attitudes toward homosexuality based on religious teachings, moral reasoning, or from influence of a particular member of the clergy. Examples:

- My church believes homosexuality is wrong.
- I hold some negative attitudes because I am a Christian and for centuries the church has preached against homosexuality.
- As a Christian, I love the sinner but hate the sin.
- Homosexuality is against the Bible's teachings.
- God did not intend that people would be homosexual.
- Homosexuals cannot reproduce as God intended, so it is unnatural.
- Men and women were created by God to be each other's sexual partners.
- Homosexuality is immoral.
- Homosexuality is not the right or correct thing to be.

20) **Religious/moral/ethical influences (positive).** Same as #19, but respondent holds positive attitudes toward homosexuality based on moral reasoning or religious teaching. Examples:

- The Bible says we should love all people, and this includes homosexuals.
- I believe that homosexuals were made by God for some reason, just like everything else.
- I believe all people are valuable and are God's children.
- There is nothing wrong about homosexuality.

21) **Nonjudgmental.** Respondent explicitly refuses to condemn homosexuality or to judge it morally (i.e., as right/wrong, good/bad); respondent says they do not have the right to judge another person's lifestyle or sexual orientation; while #19 and #20 involve moral judgments, this category involves a *refusal* to make such a judgment. Examples:

- I do not feel it is my place to pass judgment on others.
- Although homosexuality is not right for me, I cannot say whether it is right for others.

22) **Human/legal/civil rights.** Respondent states that, as people, homosexuals have rights to life, freedom, happiness, freedom from legal discrimination; this category also includes "live and let live" assertions that homosexuals have the right to pursue their sexual orientation as long as they do not bother others; note that a person may hold stereotypes about homosexuals but still think they deserve basic rights. Examples:

- I am open-minded about homosexuality because I live my life the way I want, and so should others.
- Homosexuality is a personal choice.
- A person has a right to their own happiness as long as they don't infringe on the rights of

others.

- Homosexuals may be pretty disgusting, but they still are human beings and should have human rights.
- There should be no laws allowing discrimination against homosexuals.
- Homosexuals' sexual orientation should have no bearing on how society treats them; they should be treated the same as heterosexuals.
- A person's sexual preference has no effect on his job performance.

23) **Denial of rights.** Respondent asserts that homosexuality *should* be a basis for discrimination, at least in some circumstances. Examples:

- I don't think homosexuals should be hired for certain jobs, such as coaches or school teachers.

24) **Societal concern.** Respondent holds negative attitudes because s/he perceives homosexuality as somehow bad for society. Examples:

- I don't think there is a place for homosexuals in society.
- America should not allow gay demonstrations because it impairs our country's reputation.
- Homosexuality is a social illness and is bad for the entire society.
- The heterosexual family holds society together, and homosexuality threatens this bond.

25) **Children.** Respondent indicates concern about interactions between homosexuals and children, whether as parents, teachers, or in some other capacity; do not confuse with “stereotypes;” if respondent says that all homosexuals are child molesters, code under “stereotypes;” if respondent says that homosexuals should be kept away from children because they are a bad influence, code here; if respondent says that homosexuals should not be allowed to teach children, code here and under “denial of rights.” Examples:

- Homosexuality is a real bad example for kids.
- Homosexual parents would harm their children mentally.
- Young children should not be exposed to homosexuality because it could affect the way they grow up.
- I don't think homosexuals should be parents.

26) **Natural/normal.** Respondent states that homosexuality is natural or normal.

27) **Unnatural/abnormal/sick.** Respondent says that homosexuality is unnatural, abnormal, or sick based on some non-religious/moral argument: e.g., evolution/natural selection, the balance of nature, psychiatric opinion; if respondent mentions God or morality in direct connection with this theme, code under #19; if religious reference is ambiguous or questionable, code here. Examples:

- Homosexuality destroys the balance of nature.
- Homosexuality is a form of mental illness.
- It is unnatural for men to be with men and women with women.
- If everyone were homosexual, the human race would quickly die out.

28) **Respondent's heterosexuality.** Respondent explicitly states that s/he is a heterosexual or that s/he is not interested in homosexuality for her/himself.

Bibliography

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