

Shift in public view of gays: Study

By JENNANI DURAI

VIEWS on gays and lesbians have become slightly more positive over a five-year period, a survey by a research team at the Nanyang Technological University has found.

The team from the university's Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information polled nearly 1,000 Singaporeans and permanent residents in 2005, and then again in 2010. The results, released by the university yesterday, showed that in 2010, 64.5 per cent held negative attitudes – down from 68.6 per cent in 2005.

Just over a quarter displayed positive attitudes towards homosexuality, up from 22.9 per cent in 2005, while those who remained

neutral also went up from 8.5 per cent to 10.2 per cent.

Professor Benjamin Detenber, who led the team, said that while the change in attitudes was small, it was significant as it suggests a temporal shift in Singaporeans' values and views.

He said: "Clearly, public opinion is still highly polarised on this issue but slightly more people are sharing the middle ground in 2010, compared with 2005."

The survey also found that respondents who had higher interpersonal contact with gay men and lesbians or watched more films and TV shows with homosexual characters were also more likely to express friendlier attitudes.

The 2010 survey asked respondents questions to distinguish be-

tween their privately held attitudes and their outward willingness to accept and interact with gay or lesbian people.

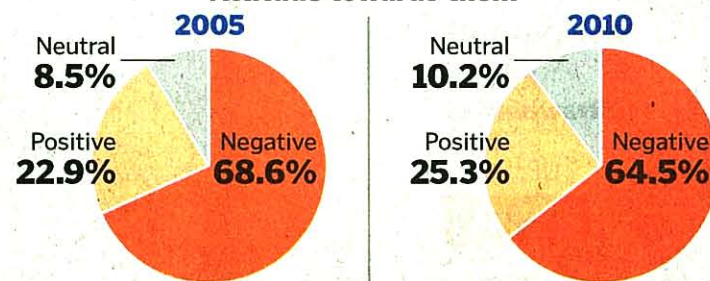
They were asked to agree or disagree with six statements, including "Sex between two men is just plain wrong" and "Female homosexuality is a natural expression of sexuality in women".

Their acceptance was measured by asking to what degree they would accept five different types of individuals if they were homosexual – a co-worker, teacher, friend, neighbour and family member. The results were split almost evenly, with 44.9 per cent found to be not accepting of homosexuals and 40.4 per cent accepting. The rest were neutral.

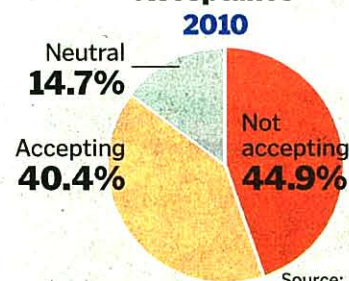
Academic and gay rights activ-

■ HOW GAYS AND LESBIANS ARE SEEN

Attitude towards them



Acceptance



Source: NTU

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ist Russell Heng said that while he was wary of surveys in general, he was heartened by the small increase in positive attitudes. A change in attitudes will take time in Singapore, as it did in many other countries where homosexuality is now widely accepted, said the 61-year-old, who is also president of migrant workers' rights group

Transient Workers Count Too.

Sociologist Paulin Straughan said the survey results were not surprising. She said: "Singapore as a society has become more tolerant of alternative lifestyles and people have become very careful not to exclude any specific group of people."

"We see a lot of popular celebri-

ties 'coming out', and that tends to normalise the perception of a gay man or a lesbian woman."

She added that the shifts in attitude were still marginal but that was to be expected: "I'd be very suspicious of a survey that told me there was a drastic change. Norms change very slowly."

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