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From the closet to the campaign trail: Homosexuality and elections

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From the closet to the campaign trail: Homosexuality and elections

Abstract

Despite growing movements in the United States toward equal rights for the gay community in the areas of employment, marriage, and housing, there persists a significant underrepresentation of the gay community in elected office. This study used an innovative survey method to examine a sample of college students to discern whether or not this negative bias persists among younger voters. If, in fact, younger voters differ from older voters, this could have vital implications for the electability of gay candidates, and force policy changes towards a more accepting society for non-heterosexual Americans generally.

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From the Closet to the Campaign Trail: Homosexuality and Elections

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Despite growing movements in the United States toward equal rights for the gay community in the areas of employment, marriage, and housing, there persists a significant underrepresentation of the gay community in elected office. This study used an innovative survey method to examine a sample of college students to discern whether or not this negative bias persists among younger voters. If, in fact, younger voters differ from older voters, this could have vital implications for the electability of gay candidates, and force policy changes towards a more accepting society for non-heterosexual Americans generally.

The LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender) movement has been gaining momentum in recent years, with several notable advances in rights and public acceptance. Presently, six states license gay marriage, and several other states recognize such partnerships from these states; the military's 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' policy has been overturned, permitting gay servicemen and women to serve openly; and laws continue to crop up protecting LGBT individuals in the areas of housing and employment (Human). However, there still exists a glass

ceiling for openly gay individuals seeking public office. This has continued a tradition of a significant underrepresentation of the LGBT voice in politics, which is seen to significantly obstruct this community as it struggles in the legal realm to achieve its aims. This is significant because, even assuming a figure on the extreme low end of estimates, 3% of Americans identify as gay- and so this research speaks to the representation of an entire class of Americans who are not having their voices heard at the same volume as Americans who identify as heterosexual.

In spite of this normative concern, there does appear to be a neglect of this area of underrepresentation, in favor of studying racial and economic barriers to one's chances of successfully running for public office. However, this is a particularly relevant area of study in this time in history, given the dramatic changes that have come for this community in only the past decade, after many more decades of systematic exclusion. To study exactly how much of an effect that this personal characteristic has upon the outcome of an election is to measure one of the most private and uncensored ways that Americans judge others, and to set a marker for exactly where the LGBT community stands in politics today.

More specifically, this study's focus upon the college student population will provide a vital insight into the future for LGBT-identified candidates and their favorability in elections as this young population moves into regular voting and becomes the voting majority. It will suggest whether their attitudes mirror those of their parents' generation, and whether they will shift as they age. This research is a vital part of understanding exactly how much, if at all, this issue matters to voters, which ought to be a subject of intense concern to students of public opinion and LGBT issues as they study the representation of this community.

Literature Review

The fields of political science and women's and gender studies are rich with data on gay candidates and elections. Historically, there is much literature about the bias that Americans have held against the gay community generally. There is a narrower body of knowledge about how these attitudes have extended to elections and voting. Narrower yet is the study of the successes of those gay candidates who actually choose to run for office.

Surely, Americans have liberalized their attitudes toward the gay community dramatically over the course of the past several decades. One previous study, entitled "America's Liberalization in Attitudes Toward Homosexuality, 1973 to 1998," details how institutionalized discrimination has been ushered out to a large extent (Loftus 779). The author gives the example of the status held by the gay community in 1960. At this time, there were no specific protections for gay persons in law at either the city or state level, every state had anti-sodomy laws in place, and there was not a single openly gay person holding elected office. Conversely, by 1997, over a fifth of states had instated protective laws for homosexuals, thirty states and the District of Columbia had taken their anti-sodomy laws off the books, and a number (albeit a small number) of openly gay people held elected office (Loftus 779). In fact, the first local law to prevent discrimination based upon sexual orientation was passed in East Lansing, Michigan, in 1973 (Cook 679).

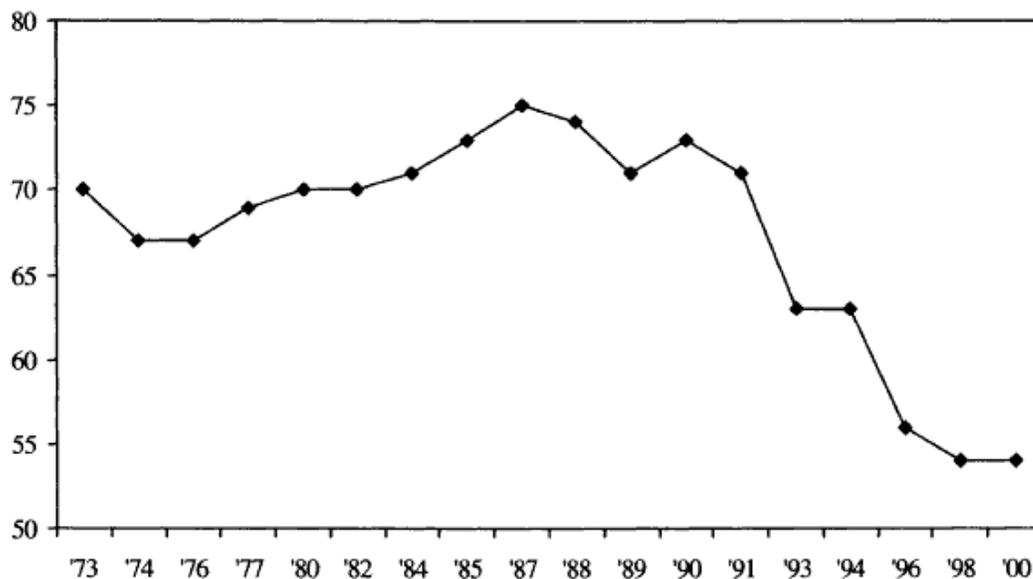
These laws follow closely the shifting public opinion of homosexuality and LGBT rights. For example, a 1965 poll found that 70% of the Americans believed that homosexuals were more harmful than helpful to American life, a figure which tied them with prostitutes (Herek 41). This figure was starkly divided along gender lines; the men agreed with the above statement at a rate of 82%, compared with 58% in women (Herek 41). This effect has been demonstrated to persist

into modern day, with women expressing considerably more understanding and approval of homosexuality (Herek 42).

Historically, public approval of homosexuality has ebbed and flowed. Despite a general consciousness that equality for homosexuals is gradually gaining momentum and support, the movement has not been stable (Brewer 1209). It seems largely as though the children of the baby boomer generation have led recent advances in public opinion for the gay community.

Figure 1

Percentage of Respondents Saying that "Sexual Relations between Two Adults of the Same Sex" is "Always Wrong" (General Social Survey, 1973–2000)



Presumably, the replacement in the electorate of less tolerant older Americans with younger people is a driving force behind the sudden changes in Figure 1 (Brewer 1209).

Despite general liberalization toward the gay community in the United States, challenges to the LGBT rights movement remain common. In 2004 and 2006, twenty-two states attempted to pass amendments to their respective constitutions that would ban same-sex marriage. A 2009

study found that levels of support for such bans were highest among counties with large Evangelical and Republican populations. Notably, the study found that on average, for every 10% increase in a county's population that had a bachelor's degree or higher, support for these bans decreased 7.4%. In addition to educational attainment, Catholicism was associated with lower levels of support for gay marriage bans (Fleischmann et. al. 134-5, 141-3).

One author notes the relative absence of political research focused *specifically* on the subject of the gay community and gay politicians (Cook 680). As of the time he wrote his piece (twelve years ago), he noted that neither the NES, nor the General Social Survey, both leading sources of political opinion information, had ever asked a question that pertained to the sexual identity of the respondent. He wrote that in addition to the relatively small pool of data related to homosexuality and elections, the study of them tends to be highly sensitive and is often viewed as politically motivated. Therefore, the credibility of the work is called into question; the assumption becomes that because for someone is interested in the subject, therefore they bring a bias to the table. (Cook 680).

A study done about a 1990 and 1992 election in New York sheds some light on the demographic that homosexual candidates reach (Cook 683). The candidate was an openly lesbian woman who was running for the state legislature; she won in both elections. In these elections, an exit poll suggested that 2-3% of the voters identified as homosexual. What was most interesting, however, was that the political leanings exhibited by these homosexual voters in 1990 and 1992 seemed to mesh well with the demographic of youth voters at large today. The study noted that the homosexual voters were "more liberal, more Democratic, supportive of government intervention, and feminist." Further, policy priorities meshed well, "less concerned about taxes, more concerned about health care and the environment" (Cook 683).

There are larger trends that point to the liberalization and growing acceptance of homosexuality in the political sphere. For example, one study explains a growing trend towards the belief that homosexuality is something that a person is born with, rather than a choice (Yang 477-480). One potential cause is the concurrent increase in the number of people who have ties to someone who is openly homosexual (a family member, close friend, etc). Further, a stable majority of those surveyed acknowledged that homosexuals face “a fair amount” or “a great deal” of discrimination. The author points to 1996 as a turning point of sorts, after which attitudes towards homosexuality in general tended to become more accepting and positive. However, throughout the decades that this study was administered, there was found to be roughly a 50-50 split of persons who believed that being homosexual should exclude one from holding elected office, versus those who did not (Yang 477-480). It would seem, then, that the larger population should yield notably negative responses to homosexual candidates and LGBT sympathizers in an election.

Framed amongst other common voting biases, homosexuality still ranks among the characteristics which produce the greatest amount of resistance from voters. A Gallup poll released in June 2011 estimates that 32% of Americans would not vote for a gay candidate. The only characteristic which ranked as more deterrent to voters was if a candidate identified as Atheist, at 49%. However, closer examination of this poll suggests an interesting theme as to which biases are acceptable to acknowledge. Only 5% of Americans say that they would not vote for a black candidate (Gallup). However, the documented ‘Bradley effect’ suggests that this number may not be accurate. The ‘Bradley effect’ refers to the 1982 California gubernatorial race, in which polls just before election day had shown Tom Bradley- a black candidate- to have had a significant lead. However, when the results came in, his white opponent had won. This

effect was observed throughout nail-biter elections in the 1980s, and even into the 2008 New Hampshire primary- in which Barack Obama's lead in the state polls vanished when the votes came in and Hillary Clinton won (Altman). If the 'Bradley effect' is real, it begs the question of whether or not such an effect comes into anti-gay bias in elections. If so, this would only exacerbate the problem that gay candidates already face in getting elected. If not, then there is some divide between the amount that poll respondents feel the need to censor their biases about black candidates, versus gay candidates.

Notably, the gender of a gay candidate does not seem to make a difference in how well he or she is received; a 2003 Scripps poll showed 27% opposition to a gay congressional candidate, alongside a similar 28% for a lesbian congressional candidate. This poll is unique in that it included an option for 'more likely to vote for,' in contrast to most other polls on the subject, which recorded only whether knowing this information made the candidate less attractive, or made no difference. Lesbians were more likely to receive the votes of 3% of those polled, and gay men were more likely to receive the votes of 2% of those polled (SHOH25).

Given that gender does not play into anti-gay voting bias, it is important that research is done into what exactly it is that turns off voters. Although voting behaviors do presumably reflect personal values, they could also be taken to reflect the kinds of policies which the voter believes are best. Perhaps voters that shy away from gay candidates do so, not because they have a problem with the candidate's sexuality, but merely because they assume that LGBT rights will take legislative priority over other issues that they feel are more important. That in mind, there could well be a line between aversion to a gay candidate because he engages in homosexual acts, versus aversion to a gay candidate because his legislative priorities could be assumed to include gay issues. This divide has been played upon successfully by racial minority candidates in a

strategy called ‘deracialization.’ In essence, a black candidate would specifically shy away from ‘black issues,’ favoring instead only those political issues which appeal relatively equally across races. It sends an important message to voters, that the candidate is not interested in giving preferential treatment in the discharge of his duties to people who fit into his particular group (Wright 751). This concept could apply to gay candidates, as well; the key would be in marketing the candidate as someone who belongs to represents the population at large, but who happens to belong to a particular minority group.

A factor of particular concern to more politically conservative LGBT candidates is the chance that their sexuality could be construed as an indication that they lean liberal, politically. That is, voters may associate membership in the LGBT community with liberal politics, and place LGBT candidates into that ‘box’ without cause. This effect has been well-documented among other characteristics, such as race and gender. A study entitled ‘Context Matters: The Gender Gap in Senate Elections,’ suggests that female voters may be artificially motivated to vote for a female Democratic candidate because they assume that the candidate holds congruent views with their own (Ondercin 14). Given the heavy politicization and party lines drawn around this one personal characteristic, it isn’t a stretch to assume that voters may use candidate sexuality as a hint toward the candidate’s political values.

Today, the gay community is starkly underrepresented in politics. In his 2010 book *Out and Running*, Donald P. Haider-Markel noted the lack of gay officials serving openly on the local, state, and federal levels of government (Haider-Markel 34). Even assuming a very conservative number of LGBT individuals in the general population (3%), Haider-Markel notes that there would need to be a 500% increase in the number of offices that they hold in order to be proportionately represented in politics. However, he argues that this is not the result of

discrimination; rather, it is the result of a narrow pool of potential candidates, and attempts to seek office among those ideologically opposed on this one issue (Haider-Markel 31, 34). For example, an LGBT candidate running on a Republican platform would likely be received less favorably than if he were running on a Democratic platform, seeking votes from Democrats. Openly gay Republican candidates demonstrated fewer endorsements, making clear the ideological chasm they attempt, often fruitlessly, to bridge (Haider-Markel 59).

Although significant advances have been made in the areas of rights and acceptance for the LGBT community, there remain inequities. Marriage equality is not yet nationwide, and there persist gaps in protective legislation for this community. There is a well-documented and significant inequity in the number of LGBT public officials, relative to the number of LGBT individuals in the general population. Yet, there is a deficit in the research as to exactly what pressures play into this inequity, and what trends are being seen for the future prospects of LGBT candidates in elections. This study seeks to address that deficit in the literature.

Data and Methods

This study employed a survey to collect data. The persons surveyed were undergraduate students at Eastern Michigan University, divided into two major groups: freshmen taking mandatory introductory-level writing or speech courses, and upperclassmen taking writing-intensive courses across the curriculum. The survey was introduced in class and either taken in-class or taken home and returned to the next class session. The survey consisted of three fictional elections, with two candidates in each. The respondents were instructed to read each candidate's biography, and then answer a smattering of questions about each candidate and the election in which they were hypothetically running. The questions for each candidate were as follows:

- *How qualified is this candidate to hold office?*
- *Does this candidate share your values?*
- *Does this candidate have good ideas?*
- *Is this candidate trustworthy?*

The options for response were on a scale of one to four, with one being ‘not at all’ and four being ‘absolutely’ or ‘extremely.’ Following these questions for each candidate in an election, the respondent would then be asked who they would vote for, with the options being ‘Definitely [candidate one]’, probably [candidate one], probably [candidate two], and definitely [candidate two].’

Following these questions, a separate form measured emotional response to candidates. Respondents were asked to circle the name of any candidate who made them feel any of the following emotions:

- *Angry*
- *Afraid*
- *Comfortable*
- *Proud*
- *Disgusted*

Finally, a demographic form inquires as to basic demographic information, as well as a few questions about political involvement. Those questions are:

- *How often do you follow political affairs?*
- *Please place yourself on this ideological scale:*

- *1: Very liberal*
- *6: Very conservative*
- *Note: On the survey, 2, 3, 4, and 5 are listed between these two extremes, sans labels, to provide a continuum upon which respondents could best self-identify*
- *Which number [on the above ideological scale] would you assign to President Barack Obama?*
- *Which number [on the above ideological scale] would you assign to John McCain?*

The latter two questions are used in conjunction to determine the political sophistication of the respondent. Responses that placed both Barack Obama on the liberal side and John McCain on the conservative side were marked as ‘correct,’ and any misaligned answers were marked as ‘incorrect.’

The experimental element of the survey comes in with the four different versions of the survey. Respondents were randomly assigned to a particular version. Candidates that were manipulated for study were rotated specifically through a control version, and experimental versions including LGBT ally, gay with one mention, and gay with two mentions.

The experimental conditions were identical to the control version, with the addition of only one or two sentences subtly identifying the candidate as gay or an LGBT ally. Rather than blatantly writing, ‘John likes men,’ or ‘John is gay,’ a biography might have a sentence added such as, ‘John enjoys walking his dogs with his partner Paul on the weekends.’ In this way, an effort was made to mediate the risk that a respondent would realize that the LGBT question was what was being studied and answer differently. Valid responses are best obtained when the respondent is unaware of what the researcher intended to study.

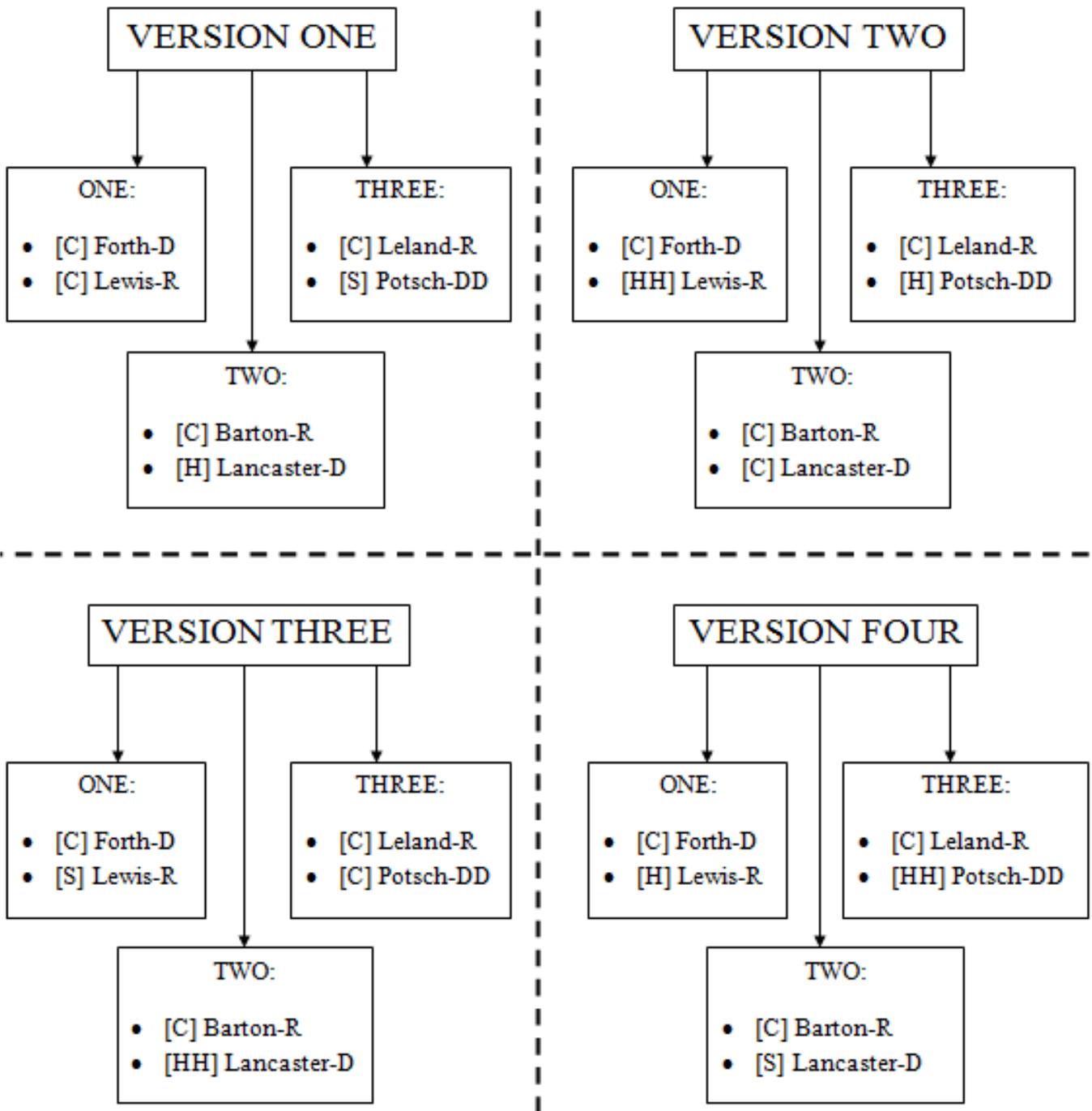


Figure 2

Legend

- [C] : Control
- [S] : Sympathizer/Ally- supports LGBT causes
- [H] : Homosexual- mention made of sexuality
- [HH]: Homosexual- two mentions made of sexuality
- R : Republican
- D : Democrat
- DD : Democrat (extremely liberal)

The four conditions were rotated such that respondents were each exposed, out of the six biographies that they read, between three and four controls, and as many as three experimental conditions. Efforts were made to spread the controls and experimental conditions across political ideologies, such that the effects of other political opinions would not be accidentally measured instead. Figure 2 describes the rotation of the various conditions throughout the four survey versions that the respondents were randomly assigned to. A respondent who received survey version one would first read biographies of Forth, a Democrat, and Lewis, a Republican. Both would be controls, so there would be no mention of sexuality. Next, the survey would include the biographies of Barton, a Republican, which makes no mention of sexuality, and Lancaster, a Democrat, which makes note that he is gay. The respondent would last read about Leland, a Republican, and Potsch, a strong Democrat. In this circumstance, Leland's biography would make no mention of sexuality, and Potsch would be portrayed as a strong Democrat who identifies as a supporter of LGBT rights.

The results themselves largely satisfied the null hypothesis, which states that a candidate's status as gay or an LGBT ally has a minimal effect on how well they are received in voting, compared with a straight, control candidate.

Table 1 describes the responses at large. Possible scores ranged from 1-4, with four being unanimous and full support for the candidate. Therefore, higher numerical values denote higher 'votes.' As can be seen in Figure 3, there does not appear to be a trend related to the experimental conditions, so clearly, there is no great preference for or against any of the conditions. Among the entire population of respondents, candidates who are gay, or perceived as allies of the gay community, do not appear to suffer electorally for that particular characteristic.

Table 1

	Election One	Election Two	Election Three
Straight	2.24	3.07	2.95
LGBT Ally	2.38	3.11	3.07
Gay (1 mention)	2.04	3.28	2.99
Gay (2 mentions)	2.24	3.01	3.01
Total N-values range from 318-323. Values in the table denote likelihood of voting for the particular candidate under the given circumstance, where 1 equals the lowest likelihood of voting for the candidate and 4 equals the highest likelihood.			

A few notable factors failed to forge any notable change in how well-received the experimental versions of candidates were. One was race; comparisons of the two largest reported racial/ethnic groups failed to turn up any significant differences. Similarly, no pattern emerged in comparing the white students (who comprised the largest group) with all others combined (results not shown).

There was also no significant difference in how well freshman-level respondents versus students in senior-level courses reacted to the different conditions (see Table 2 for these results). The freshmen demonstrated as much indifference toward a candidate's sexuality or support for LGBT rights as the senior-level students did. This suggests that despite the popular narrative to the contrary, at least in the area of LGBT rights and acceptance, universities do not have a significant impact upon the attitudes that people hold toward the gay community. Here again in Table 2, higher values denote higher support.

Table 2

	Election One		Election Two		Election Three	
	100-level	400-level	100-level	400-level	100-level	400-level
Straight	2.41	1.89	3.04	3.14	2.91	3.04
LGBT Ally	2.48	2.12	3.05	3.23	2.97	3.3
Gay (1 mention)	2.07	1.96	3.21	3.43	2.9	3.17
Gay (2 mentions)	2.33	2.04	2.91	3.25	2.95	3.15

N-values for 100-level range from 219-223, and from 99-100 for 400-level.

Values in the table denote likelihood of voting for the particular candidate under the given circumstance, where 1 equals the lowest likelihood of voting for the candidate and 4 equals the highest likelihood.

Although in Table 2 the senior-level students cool considerably toward candidate two, this is the case across all conditions; it would seem that the candidate's sexuality or support for LGBT causes matters equally little for each group.

Respondents also showed little variation on the basis of political sophistication. Political sophistication, for the purposes of this study, was assumed for respondents who were able to correctly identify both Barack Obama as liberal and John McCain as conservative. Only about 67% of respondents could do so.

Again, in Table 3, there is little difference in the responses between these two conditions. Although there are odd outliers here and there, the data still lack any sort of trend in relation to the experimental conditions. This is notable, because it establishes feelings toward gay candidates less as a political issue, than as a personal one. Whether or not a voter is capable of understanding the platform of a candidate, and the deeper implications of it, doesn't seem to matter; these gut moral judgments, for better or for worse, trump any changes that an understanding of the material would forge. Taken in consideration with the lack of change throughout college careers, it would seem that no amount of socialization or education can

change the public's opinions on gay candidates, toward either end of the spectrum. These data suggest that this could be a fundamental, learned attitude.

Table 3

	Election One		Election Two		Election Three	
	Politically Sophisticated	Not Politically Sophisticated	Politically Sophisticated	Not Politically Sophisticated	Politically Sophisticated	Not Politically Sophisticated
Straight	2.23	2.14	3.09	3.26	3.14	2.83
LGBT Ally	2.27	2.54	3.12	3.14	3.16	2.86
Gay (1 mention)	2.09	2	3.31	3.14	3.04	3
Gay (2 mentions)	2.2	2.16	3.11	2.92	3.12	2.76

Total N-values for the politically sophisticated ranged from 190-193; N-values for the non-politically sophisticated ranged from 91-93.

Values in the table denote likelihood of voting for the particular candidate under the given circumstance, where 1 equals the lowest likelihood of voting for the candidate and 4 equals the highest likelihood.

Contrary to historical research that has indicated that women are more tolerant of LGBT candidates than men are, there did not appear to be a gendered trend for or against any of the conditions. As can be seen in Table 4, there were differences between the ways that men and women received different candidates. However, their differences did not indicate a trend in relation to the experimental conditions.

Table 4

	Election One		Election Two		Election Three	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Straight	1.79	2.48	3.16	3.12	3	2.98
LGBT Ally	2.23	2.46	2.88	3.26	3.29	2.98
Gay (1)	2.12	2	3.3	3.25	3.08	3
Gay (2)	1.96	2.36	2.68	3.24	2.85	3.11

One final factor which failed to produce significant variance in likely voting decision was that of the *number* of mentions of the candidate's sexuality. There were two experimental conditions in which the candidate was identified as gay, one in which this factor was mentioned once, and one in which it was mentioned twice. Between these two conditions and across the three elections, there emerged no pattern of preference for one condition over the other. Simply put, if a candidate is gay, it did not seem to matter much to respondents how integral of an issue it is in the candidate's personality or likely political priorities; rather, a sole mention of it suffices to make whatever changes there will be in the candidate's reception by voters.

With these factors in mind, there are two areas in which there was a pattern of bias toward the control condition and away from the ally or gay biographies. First, consider self-identified conservatives; these were respondents who identified themselves as a '5' or a '6' on the 1-6 ideological scale. This group showed a definite bias toward the straight/control candidate, with a broad voting difference (see Table 5). Notably, though by a narrower margin, the LGBT ally was least popular of all. This can possibly be explained by the political nature of the ally condition. While the two other experimental gay conditions note the candidate's sexuality, they frame it largely as a personal, ascribed characteristic of the candidate. The ally, however, makes political arguments for LGBT rights; it is just this ideological disagreement that is perhaps most discerning of all three experimental conditions for the conservative respondents.

It is worth noting that in Election Two, there is an odd result- namely, the straight candidate is least popular among conservatives. In light of the significant preference shown by these respondents for the straight candidate in the other two elections, it seems most likely that this is the result of the respondents reacting to something else. Election Two's experimental candidate is defined by his association with a cornerstone liberal cause- full funding of public

education. Perhaps, by shifting the focus momentarily toward statements about the gravity of the fight for LGBT rights, the respondents were distracted away from a topic that they otherwise may have balked at.

Table 5

	Election One		Election Two		Election Three	
	Liberal	Conservative	Liberal	Conservative	Liberal	Conservative
Straight	1.74	3.08	3.33	2.5	3.52	2.69
LGBT Ally	2.09	2.46	3.34	3	3.49	2.25
Gay (1 mention)	1.9	2.56	3.47	3.15	3.42	2.5
Gay (2 mentions)	1.95	2.6	3.41	2.85	3.25	2.22

N-values for liberals range from 106-107, and from 44-45 among conservatives.

Table 6

	Election One	Election Two	Election Three
Conservative Significance	0.035	0.094	0.189

Looking at these values and their individual relationships to each other, they are largely not statistically significant. This is owed, at least in part, to the small N in each specific category. However, in looking across the three experimental conditions, there does not exist a pattern of preference for or against any of the three. Thus, in grouping the three experimental conditions together into a larger category of any mention of LGBT, and placing it in opposition to no mention of LGBT, a more statistically significant result is yielded. This comparison better illustrates the pattern that whether a candidate is gay, or simply an ally, does not make a great difference to voters. For those who would cast their vote based upon this information, being gay or an ally places the candidate in the 'gay camp' - perhaps because it is assumed that the political agendas of allies and gay candidates on this issue would be similar. Thus, the breakdown of the

data into all four categories is still reproduced, to illustrate this effect. All following tables and significance tables will be reproduced in this fashion.

Notably, liberals (those who responded ‘1’ or ‘2’ on the political ideology form) and moderates (who responded ‘3’ or ‘4’) did not show a great preference toward any particular condition. This is surprising, and not just in light of the conservative responses. Given that LGBT persons and allies tend toward the liberal end of the spectrum, it is somewhat surprising that the liberals would not have taken these personal statements and characteristics of the candidates and used them as heuristics to discern which candidates share their personal values. Perhaps this is merely a reflection of their indifference to ‘gay issues.’ Alternatively, it could well reflect a holistic reading of the campaign platforms; this is not the only issue at play for these voters, and is merely taken into account along with the others.

The second group which showed a strong bias for the control candidate was that of nontraditional students. For the purposes of this study, nontraditional students were comprised of all those respondents who were aged 25 or older. As Table 7 shows, the bias toward the straight/control candidate is strong.

Table 7

	Election One	Election Two	Election Three
Straight	2.25	3.29	3.08
LGBT Ally	1.93	2.85	3.25
Gay (1 mention)	1.83	3.67	2.71
Gay (2 mentions)	1.86	3	3.08

N-values vary between 45-46.

In examination of Table 8, it is clear that these numbers are not conventionally statistically significant. Again, in lieu of a larger sample size, it is difficult to draw conclusions from these particular figures. However, in Election One in particular, there is certainly a trend that approaches statistical significance.

Table 8

	Election One	Election Two	Election Three
Nontraditional Significance	0.246	0.719	0.959

The numbers in Table 7 are not out of line with national studies on older voters, who tend to rank LGBT candidates among their least likely voting choice and least likely to trust. And within this sample, there is no basis for an explanation that the older voters are simply more conservative- in fact, though by a small margin, the older respondents were more liberal than the surveyed population at large (see Table 9). Here, higher values relate back to the 1-to-6 political ideology scale, with higher numbers indicating greater conservatism.

Table 9

	Traditional Students	Nontraditional Students	All
Political Ideology	3.07	2.82	3.04

In spite of this, they significantly oppose the three experimental conditions. This lends credence to the concept discussed earlier, that this is not a political or ideological matter, but a reflection of base values developed from a very young age; and once formed, these ideas are unlikely to budge.

The most important lesson to draw from the results of the nontraditional students is that of generational replacement. These respondents are more representative of the voting population at large, as young people are known to turn out in miserably low numbers for elections. So, as these older voters pass away and drop from the voting rolls and are replaced by today's college and high school students, the tide should shift away from LGBT rights and status as a political liability to a non-issue. Again, this effect should occur even if today's young moderate and liberal students become more conservative with age; just as the bias against the LGBT candidates and ally candidate spanned political ideology among nontraditional students, indifference toward these same issues should stick with them.

Directions for Further Research

If undertaking this or similar research in the future, a few possible changes are worthy of consideration. First, omission of the emotional response form would be a good idea. Not only did many respondents seem not to understand how to fill it out, but those who did produced unsurprising results. Given the imposing length of the survey at large, not only would this focus respondents' energies on more productive data collection, but it would help to ensure that sufficient time remains for respondents to fill out the demographic form accurately and fully.

A second possible adjustment to the survey design would be to include a brief quiz about the content in the biographies. Although there was enough change in warmth of responses that a significant amount of the sample seemed to be responding to the experimental conditions, it is possible that some respondents glazed over those finer points in their haste to read and were not responding in an informed way to all candidate characteristics. A content quiz would serve a dual

purpose of encouraging respondents to read thoroughly, as well as providing a means by which respondents who are not aware of the characteristic being studied can be weeded out.

Third, the combination of the gay (one mention) and gay (two mentions) conditions into one gay condition would simplify analysis immensely. The difference between the two conditions, even among populations that showed bias against them, was negligible. Thus, combination of the two conditions into one would make more clearly the distinction that exists for these voters between straight and any mention of homosexuality.

On a similar note, it would be worthwhile to write one of the campaigns such that the issue of gay rights defines the candidate. As it stands, LGBT rights is merely one issue among many for these candidates; however, it would be telling to measure the response when LGBT rights became the central aim of a candidacy.

Finally, consideration ought to be given to revision of ‘conservative’ and ‘liberal’ in the ideological scale questions to ‘Republican’ and ‘Democrat.’ Originally, the more technical terms were employed so as to tap into which respondents had a deep enough understanding of politics to be familiar with and able to use these common terms. However, the more popular political party names are still significant. Although knowing that oneself is a Republican or Democrat does not demonstrate as deep of an understanding of politics as identifying as liberal or conservative in an informed manner, that doesn’t matter much at the polls. A voter with an understanding that he identifies with a certain party will vote accordingly- and for the purposes of this research, it is more valuable to know *that* with accuracy, than to know how politically sophisticated that the respondent is.

Conclusions

This study yielded telling results as to the future of gay candidates who run for public office. It seems as though today's college-aged population simply does not count sexuality among important attributes of a candidate, in sharp contrast to their parents' and grandparents' generations. Thus, as those older voters leave the voter rolls, and younger voters replace them, there will be a sharp liberalization in the way that gay candidates are received. Although nontraditional and conservative students still show resistance to gay candidates, the nontraditional students feed into the generational replacement theory, and the conservative students do not have a negative enough bias to effect the voting decision of the population as a whole. This suggests that, some years from now, the trend of underrepresentation for gay candidates will narrow, and perhaps vanish.

This survey has strong implications for the future of politics. It seems as though, in spite of the historic voter bias against gay candidates in the United States, today's college-aged generation at large does not perceive such a status to be politically undesirable. Despite popular belief to the contrary, college education itself does not seem to liberalize young people on this particular issue, as those surveyed at the very beginning of their college careers did not present with very different responses than those preparing to graduate. The respondents entered college indifferent to a candidate's sexuality and support for LGBT causes, and left the same way. Age was the true theme of these data; although the nontraditional students showed comparable political ideologies when compared with the student population at large, they were significantly biased against the three experimental conditions- to the point where that one issue would have decided the election in their voting population. Thus, as today's college-aged population moves into regular voting, and their parents' and grandparents' generations cease to vote, the sexuality

of a candidate for public office will shift from a historically significant issue to an irrelevant personal characteristic.

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Appendix

Note that Candidate Two in each election is the candidate being manipulated.

Election One Biographies:

1. Bryan Forth

Bryan Forth started his political career at the age of ten, when he participated in anti-Vietnam-War rallies. Upon his graduation from Washington State University, Forth spent a year abroad in the Middle East, working with the Bowen-Anderson Paper Company to expand their business overseas. He succeeded in building a strong presence in Azerbaijan, but returned to America strongly dedicated to peace. ‘That time away from home,’ he said, ‘taught me more than any class could about why America has a responsibility to set a good example- but not impose it upon the world.’ Today, Forth is still working for Bowen-Anderson, having risen through the ranks to Vice President of Expansion and Corporate Responsibility.

Forth has a domestically-focused plan for America, if elected. He believes that by withdrawing from the wars that America is involved in and cutting USAID programs to oppressive regimes, those funds can be diverted back to American interests, such as education, welfare programs, and housing cost relief. Forth believes that the wars America takes part in do not advance America’s place in the world, and in fact cause ill-will that decrease national security and frustrate international business dealings. ‘So many candidates have to choose a niche,’ said Forth. ‘When you keep American tax dollars in America, you don’t have to choose. I am a champion of education, health, small business, big business, students, seniors, and the working class. My opponent, Roxanne Lewis, is only looking out for the moneyed elites.’ He is running on a platform of increasing social programs through ending US involvement in foreign wars.

2. Roxanne Lewis

Roxanne Lewis grew up near Yale, where her father taught Political Science courses. Naturally, growing up amongst the Connecticut political elites, she was introduced to politics in a very powerful way. Lewis has been quoted as saying, “Those men taught me so much. They taught me how to campaign, debate, and hold office. But more importantly, they taught me how *not* to campaign, debate, and hold office.” Upon her graduation from Notre Dame, Lewis had a choice: start a family with her new husband, Mark Lewis, or take the path laid so carefully before her- politics. Lewis chose to stay in the home as she raised three boys- Arnold, Turner, and Patrick. Now that they are grown, Lewis sees this as the opportune moment to realize the potential that she has for politics. “I have seen the world through the eyes of a mother,” she said, “so I understand how frustrating it can be when your taxes are raised again and again, while our kids are saddled with the bill for entitlement programs that we can’t afford.”

It is on this sentiment that Roxanne Lewis launched her campaign slogan: “On taxes, Lewis isn’t clueless.” Lewis wholeheartedly believes that the real way to stimulate economic activity is by putting funds in the hands of businesses. Her reasoning is that while the middle class hoards tax breaks away for a ‘rainy day,’ business owners have constant demands that ensure the funds will be spent immediately, boosting the economy. “I know my ideas aren’t popular with people who don’t work for what they have,” she said, “but the free ride’s over. My kids aren’t going to be stuck paying for some welfare queen’s Cadillac. And I challenge Bryan Forth to give me one good reason why they should.”

***Experimental alterations:**

- **Ally:** addition of, “And while our politicians are supposedly moving us towards a perfect society, we still can’t even manage to provide civil rights to LGBT individuals.”
- **Gay (1):** addition of, “Lewis had a choice: move in with her partner, Linda...”
- **Gay (2):** addition of, “Lewis had a choice: move in with her partner, Linda...” and “...I want to see rights for my partner and myself...”

Election Two Biographies:

1. Destiny Barton

Destiny Barton got into politics as a child, when her parents brought her along to local city council meetings in their hometown. “Those men were so talented,” said Barton, “They knew what it took to bring business to town, and they weren’t afraid to do it.” It is in this spirit that Barton’s campaign looks to bring big incentives to small business. “The odds that a new business will fail are staggering,” said Barton, “And it isn’t good for crime rates, schools, and especially the local economy to have vacant spots in town when they do fail.” Barton plans to found a new agency that provides services to new small businesses- from instructional classes on payroll, workplace harassment, and cost-cutting measures, to grants to keep a vital business afloat or reward success in a difficult economic environment. Barton, along with her husband, Daniel, themselves own a local business- Wheels-Go-Round, an upscale bike shop located near the state’s capital. “When we got into that, we had no idea what we were doing,” said Barton, “But we’ve made it for five years.”

Aside from her small-business focus, Barton is interested in reforming some early-childhood state programs. “These free low-income preschools are failing the students and costing the taxpayers obscene amounts of money,” said Barton, “I believe that cancellation of free preschool programs in favor of a paid system will ensure that quality teachers are providing a quality preschool experience- and that taxpayers won’t be on the hook for it. My opponent, Mr. Lancaster, seems to think that throwing more taxpayer dollars at a failing school system will fix it- but I’m running to reflect the opinion of most citizens in the state.”

2. Aaron Lancaster

Aaron Lancaster is a schoolteacher at a high school in the southeast corner of the state. “I’m the civics teacher who actually practices what he preaches,” said Lancaster, “I put my students out there to be active members of the community- volunteering at the community center, the food bank, the animal shelter, and at a tutoring center I helped found as an after-school program- but I’m out there with them. I don’t enjoy much in life quite as much as the satisfaction of seeing a smile of gratitude.” Lancaster also encourages his students to work on political campaigns during election years. “There are a lot of poor opinions out there about what politics is all about,” said Lancaster, “But I always tell my students- if you play dirty, sure, politics is dirty. But if you’re in it to make a real difference, people will stand up and support you.”

Lancaster is looking to make a real difference. He plans to bring some budgetary decisions directly to the people, because, he believes, the taxpayers should have some say over where their own dollars go. He would most like to see some fundamental changes in tax structures, such that the quality of public education is not dependent upon the wealth of the area in question. “I care so deeply about the education of our young people,” said Lancaster, “I don’t know that politicians today really stop and think about what they’re cutting every time K-12 sees a hit- it could be art class, gym class, social studies- the things that are less likely to get you a job, but which build character, and make you a more well-rounded person and citizen. Destiny Barton is paying for her tax break plan by robbing the K-12 system- and that attitude is absolutely backwards from how to stay competitive in the world.”

*Experimental alterations:

- **Ally:** addition of, “at a really visionary LBGT counseling program” to list of community projects
- **Gay (1):** addition of, “...they’d never vote to deny basic rights to myself and my partner...”
- **Gay (2):** addition of, “...they really backed my partner and I and buckled down on some great LGBT causes...” and “...it[LGBT rights movement]’s the most important fight of this century...”

Election Three Biographies:

1. Donald Leland

Donald Leland’s career did not begin like that of most politicians. He dropped out of high school when he was seventeen to act as a home health aide for his mother, who was ill with cancer. After her passing, at the age of twenty, Leland went back to school for his GED, and

got a job at a local ice cream parlor. Within three months, he had become a manager, and when the owner retired, Leland purchased the business from him. “When I dropped out,” said Leland, “I ever expected to own my own business at the age of twenty-five. I consider the chain of events that transpired to be some sort of divine intervention.” Leland has found the business to have tremendous potential for growth, and has opened four franchises across the state.

Politically, Leland likes to look at the big picture. “Incentivizing ‘green technology’ hasn’t gotten us far- no one can afford our fancy green cars and solar panels,” said Leland. “The key is to focus on the industries that do make us money right now, and leave the ‘green’ stuff alone until there’s legitimate public demand. Then prices will drop, and it will be the buyers who fund this technology- as it should be.” Leland hopes, instead, to divert these funds into greater military research. “By spending the money in this sector, we are saving our soldiers’ lives, making our allies safer, and creating good American jobs, doing what Americans do best. I don’t know that Mr. Potsch is terribly patriotic, for his opposition to the military, but I can tell you that at least *I* believe in this country and the great things it can do.”

2. Alan Potsch

Alan Potsch is a deep believer in the potential that today’s youth have to make or break America’s destiny. “You look at the programs that grab our kids, teach them how to be leaders, how to be healthy,” says Potsch, “And you realize very quickly that not only are these programs being gutted to their bones, but they are vanishing, with nothing to fill that hole. And that, to me, is the government telling our kids that they’re *just not worth it*.” Potsch is making his top priority in office the maintenance and introduction of those programs which focus on the human capital that is America’s youth. He is most interested in those programs which make higher education attainable for young and old alike. “Yes, these programs aren’t cheap,” says Potsch, “But we can’t realistically cut taxes and programs and expect that no societal ills will come of it. I feel that if someone wants to invest so much of themselves into getting an education, they should not have to live without dignity to do so.”

Potsch is also a strong advocate for withdrawal from foreign wars. “Our military is massive. Positively huge. And as much as I respect and honor our men and women in uniform, I can’t fathom why America is still the nanny of the world in this day and age. I feel that our technological genius and funding would be far better directed towards the betterment of *our own people*, through an increased focus on medical and alternative energy research. Although good Mr. Leland would have us bankroll our misguided wars on our children’s backs, I’m more of a ‘big picture’ guy in that regard.”

***Experimental alterations:**

- **Ally:** addition of, "...these kids are going to make waves, especially in the realms of green technology and LGBT civil rights."
- **Gay (1):** addition of, "That kind of thing really scares my partner and I..."
- **Gay (2):** addition of, "Potsch and his partner, Don..." and "...focusing on the education of young people and the protection of LGBT students' rights and gender inclusivity in the classroom setting."