

Study explores sexuality and gender gaps in political perspectives among college students

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Meredith Worthen is an associate professor in the Department of Sociology, OU College of Arts and Sciences Credit: University of Oklahoma

A University of Oklahoma sociologist, Meredith Worthen, has published a new study in the journal, *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*, on sexuality and gender gaps in political perspectives among lesbian, gay, bisexual, mostly heterosexual and heterosexual college students in the southern United States. Worthen confirms a clear "sexuality gap" between exclusive heterosexuals and all others as well as gender gaps among mostly heterosexual and lesbian, gay and bisexual students, though some gaps are in the opposite direction from the results expected.

"This study fills the gaps in the research, expands our knowledge about sexuality and gender gaps in [political attitudes](#) and contributes to new ways of thinking about the perspectives of mostly heterosexual and lesbian, gay and bisexual people," said Worthen, associate professor in the OU College of Arts and Sciences. "This study works toward a deeper understanding of ways college students can promote political change and

advocate for social justice."

Overall, Worthen proposes that social justice perspectives may be more common among lesbian, gay and bisexual people as a group, and especially among lesbian and bisexual women due to their oppressed identities. She suggests that these patterns may lead to more liberal lesbian, gay and bisexual political views and contribute to sexuality and [gender gaps](#) in political perspectives. In this study, liberal refers to liberal ideology, feminist identity and attitudes toward the death penalty and abortion.

The study found a distinct "lavender liberalism" among mostly heterosexual, lesbian, gay and bisexual college students. Exclusive heterosexuals, on the other hand, are significantly less liberal. Research indicates mostly heterosexual individuals are a growing and visible group on college campuses, so this study's inclusion of mostly heterosexuals as a distinct group that differs from exclusive heterosexuals contributes to the gap in the existing literature.

Overall, these findings support the stereotype that "all gays are liberal." When Worthen explored other sexuality gaps, among mostly [heterosexual](#) and LGB respondents, findings were less consistent. However, among the results, there is evidence of a bisexual woman consciousness that relates to liberalism among bisexual college women. In previous literature, a [sexuality](#) gap in political perspectives between lesbian and gay and bisexual people indicates lesbian and gay people are more liberal than bisexual people, however, findings do not support this and indicate that bisexual people are more liberal than gay and [lesbian](#) people. This finding has important implications for future work that centers [bisexual women](#) in conversations about political attitudes and liberal ideology.

More information: Meredith G. F. Worthen, "All the Gays Are Liberal?" Sexuality and Gender Gaps in Political Perspectives among Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Mostly Heterosexual, and Heterosexual College Students in the Southern USA, *Sexuality Research and Social Policy* (2018). [DOI: 10.1007/s13178-018-0365-6](https://doi.org/10.1007/s13178-018-0365-6)

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