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The American Gaze at the American Gays: Interest Groups, Media, and the Elite Opinions' Impact on Public Opinion

#### **Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3zv215vr>

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#### **Publication Date**

2013-07-10

Undergraduate

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Interest Groups, Media, and the Elite Opinions' Impact on Public Opinion

Honors Thesis 2013

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UC Berkeley

## Abstract

In a recent wave of events, President Obama had announced his open acceptance and support of gay marriage in America; many celebrities have endorsed and said “It Gets Better”, to help with gay teenagers – and the majority of America stands behind them. But the trend towards an acceptance of gays has been established way before Obama, Lady Gaga, or “It Gets Better” Campaign. In this study, I seek the answer to the puzzling question of, “what made the public opinion change regarding the gay population?” After looking at public opinion trend, I seek the answer through some quantitative ways: through the political interest groups’ financial and media data; seeking media infiltration of “gay” in the news and TV shows; and lastly, the elite’s opinion through the channels of Supreme Court of the United States, State of the Union Address, and Presidential Campaign platforms of each parties. My data analysis goes back through roughly last thirty-five years (from 1977 to the present) of what “gay” is, and how it changed in the eyes of the American public. As none of the previous literature does a comprehensive look at all three factors as the change in attitude towards “the gays”, I discover that there is a general pattern, as there are more influences in the interest groups, the media, and the elites’ opinion, the public opinion in America went up, seemingly the former leading the latter; however, that pattern is not always so true – in fact, public opinion may lead elite opinion or media exposure.

*Keywords: Gay and Lesbian rights, Gays and Lesbians in America, public opinion trends*



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*Welcome to Gayamerica*

*Why so Fabulous? The First Look at the American Gays*

In 1989, exactly twenty years after the movement known as “Stonewall Riots” took place, only 23% of Americans supported some sort of legal recognition for gay couples (Klarman 2013). In late 2012, Gallup stated that fully 53% of Americans support gay marriage. In just the last two sentences, one can see the dramatic “progress” that Americans had when it came to the recognition and acceptance of gays and lesbians in the United States that took place in the last few decades. While it is not much of a mystery that acceptance and visibility of gays has gone up in a rather dramatic manner in the last few decades, the much more interesting question at hand is *what* made the acceptance of gays and lesbians change. While the easy answer maybe that of a cultural change, it still leaves a lot more questions than answers. My thesis will take a look at what other factors, besides the simple answer of “cultural change” in understanding of gays, may have changed the public opinion of gays and lesbians in the years 1977 to present.

#### *What’s Been Said About “Those Gays”?*

Although Fiorina (2011) stated in his book *Culture War?* that attitudes towards gays and lesbians have changed nation-wide (and more so in some age groups), he never explained why. Haider-Merkel said that only interest groups with discrete strategies achieved policy success (while never mentioning the impact of said policy on public opinion). Vice President Joe Biden claimed in 2012 that *Will and Grace* “educated” people on gay marriage, before he did a heel-faced-turn on to fully support marriage equality (from his previous lukewarm position); stars of *Will and Grace* tweeted their support of him and marriage equality (Vary, 2012). President Obama also said in 2012 that he supported gay marriage (Calmes and Baker, 2012). Surely, all these things have thoroughly surrounded the American public sufficiently enough. In fact, according to a Gallup survey, American adults responded that that there were more gays and lesbians in America than there were Catholics – they estimated a whopping 24.6% of Americans were gay or lesbian (Morales, 2011). Although this is an absurdly higher number than what reality tells us – Gallup reported that nation-wide, the estimate is about 3.5% of the population identify as

LGBT (Gates, 2013) – it is true that with this high of issue visibility more recently, there are certainly many who voice their opinion regarding the LGBT population.

In most of the studies done about the lesbian and gay population, there are often the ones that point to the obvious – perception of gays and lesbians in America has changed. Either the studies do not tell why the change took place, or they place it vaguely as the individual preference changing (Lewis and Gosset, 2008). Although the point that Lewis and Gosset make is true, they never quite point to a specific factor that could have swayed the individual mind to change. Other studies or opinions tend to overstate the impact of a single factor. As much as *Will and Grace* was a loved show, it surely could not have single-handedly changed the course of American public opinion regarding gays and lesbians (in fact, the show lacked lesbian characters). Even before the Supreme Court of the United States ruled in favor in 2003 about “legal gay sodomy”, and Lambda Legal pushed the case, American adults believed that more than 20% of Americans were gay or lesbian, which was not the case (Morales, 2011). Clearly, Lambda Legal, as much as their legal actions are admirable as the nation’s oldest gay rights interest group, did not change American conception of gays and lesbians. On Obama’s historic declaration of gay marriage, more than half of American revealed that his view would not change the American public opinion (Jones, 2012). This overstatement needs to be accounted for.

*Why Does This Even Matter?*

What does this overstatement of a single factor on public opinion change matter?

Why does public opinion of gays and lesbians matter?

Why does my research matter?

It matters because the gays and lesbians are part of America, too. It matters because representations matter; it matters because *rights* of Americans matter. It also matters because perhaps this research can be taken even further to other marginalized populations as well, who

are perhaps less visible, whether they are sexual minorities, racial minorities, or any other kind of minorities.

### *Public Opinion Change, MK Style*

The research focuses on public opinion change of Americans regarding gays and lesbians. I specifically used two questions to gauge American support of gays and lesbians. I used two questions asked by Gallup organization: “Do you think homosexual/gay or lesbian relations between consenting adults should or should not be legal?” and “Do you think marriages between homosexual/same-sex couples should or should not be recognized by the law as valid, with the same rights as traditional marriages?” I also talk in the section about the wording of the questions and the time frame when the vocabulary of the questions were changed – note that there are two distinct words used in the questions within regards to indicating the certain population group. I also discuss what impact the vocabulary might have had on the public opinion and what the public opinion trends of the two questions yield. Hint: they yield *very* different results, one more dramatic than the other. But still, what can account for the dramatic shift towards the positive reception of the American gays and lesbians?

If previous studies only focused on a single factor (and often overstated the impact of the said factor), my study goes further down – I study multiple factors from 1977 to present that could have possibly changed the course of public opinion: interest group participation, media (both the entertainment and news), and the elite opinions.

The first among these factors are the interest groups’ public movements. I chose Lambda Legal and Human Rights Campaign (HRC), because they are the nation’s oldest and the largest gay rights interest groups, respectively. I measured their spending on public education and services. Although I did not have the full range of fiscal data due to limits on the availability of data, I did a compare and contrast of HRC and LL with similar groups. I also counted their media appearances.



The media section explores the gays and lesbians in the editorial section of two major coastal newspapers, New York Times and LA Times. In addition to news media through NYT and LAT, I also created “entertainment” media sections, which also explore the popular culture from television broadcasts utilizing the data from Nielsen Ratings. With Nielsen Ratings Top 20 TV shows, I hoped to see how many gay characters were in regular or recurring role in the most popular TV shows (which suggests that these “popular” gays and lesbians had a lot of exposure to the public).

The last section, elite opinion of political elite are exclusively used – analyzing the Supreme Court decisions, the presidential rhetoric during State of the Union addresses, and the parties’ platforms during presidential campaigns.

After each of the variables is thoroughly explored, I seek their relationship to acceptance of gays and lesbians and same-sex marriage. I believe that only after careful examinations of all the multiple factors, then and only then, can any judgment be made about the impact of each factor to the public opinion.

#### *But Before we Go On, Some Definitional Clarity*

I would first like to clarify some points about exactly which population that this research will explore. In most of the literature found regarding public opinion of “gay people” or “homosexuals” rarely defined the said “gays”. This limitation seems to come from the political scientists’ desire to simplify the issue, and go with the “typical” gay. Of course, even the word brings up certain images and certain connotations of the “gay” population. This is really unfortunate, because LGBT community aside, there are diverse sociopolitical, economical and racial differences within that very broad LGBT group. Like Grover (1987, 24) stated, “The great diversity of human kind has been reduced to a single stereotype”. As unfortunate as this is, I also take this step in reducing the “gay community” into a single point of simplification for the sake of clarity (i.e. Self-identification only as a gay man or woman, without any of the sociopolitical

background in mind). Aside from the lack of definitional clarity of their research<sup>1</sup>, most of the research on public opinion of gays found an upward trend of general acceptance in the American population. Again, most of them did not exactly *explain or account for the change in the public opinion and did not clearly name possible factors that could have led to the change*.

My research also only focuses on public opinion shift of gays and lesbians (that is, self-identified men and women who clearly show an interest in either romantic or physical sense to the person of same gender) and will exclude certain populations for the sake of simplification as well. The important point to note is that I am not doing any questions with regards to trans and bisexual populations in my thesis. I *only* examine materials regarding gays and lesbians. While many gay rights organizations today *do* include the full LGBT (stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and sometimes Queer) spectrum, that was often not the case in earlier gay rights movement (although drag queens and transgender people fought alongside gays and lesbians in Stonewall in 1969). In fact, even in 2000, a transgender scholar, Minter (2000, 621), claimed that “Historically, clinging to narrow and exclusive conception of gay identity had not only marginalized transgender and gender-variant gay people, but it has also exacerbated divisions based on race and class”. It is another entire struggle for trans men and women, and I believe that for our purposes and discussion, bisexuality and transgender (*and* gay and lesbian/queer people of color) discussions would complicate the discussion more and complicate the model I am pursuing as well. To begin, these issues have been less mainstream than gay and

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1 Avery, A., Chase, J., Johansson, L., Litvak, S., Montero, D., & Wydra, M. (2007). America's Changing Attitudes toward Homosexuality, Civil Unions, and Same-Gender Marriage: 1977-2004. *Social Work*, 52(1), 71-79.

Fiorina, M. P., Abrams, S. J., & Pope, J. (2011). *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America*. (3rd ed. ed.). Longman Pub Group.

Lewis, G. B. and Gossett, C. W. (2008), Changing Public Opinion on Same-Sex Marriage: The Case of California. *Politics & Policy*, 36: 4–30. doi: 10.1111/j.1747-1346.2007.00092.x

lesbian issues in both political and media terms and I lack the time and the resources to fully do justice for Bisexual, Transgender, and QPOC topics.

To dramatically simplify and make our issues clear at stake, I only discuss the general gay and lesbian images and issues: I only focus on public opinions of legality of gay and lesbian relationships and public opinion within regards to what has recently been called the “marriage equality” movement, better known as the “gay marriage” issue.

Welcome to (g)A(y)merica.

## Section 2: How the gaze changed towards Gays – Three Ways

### I. Americans gaze at the Gays – an Introduction

“No matter gay, straight or bi, lesbian, transgendered life, I’m on the right track, baby, I was born to survive.” The hit song “Born This Way” by Lady Gaga in 2011 should speak volumes about the visibility of gays and lesbians in America. In fact, the entire song preaches about not only accepting, but celebrating every individual regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, and any other differences. When it comes to visibility and awareness of not only the existence, but also the “acceptance” of gays and lesbians in America, things have certainly changed since the dark times of Stonewall Uprising; at least, on the surface. With over half of Americans behind gay marriage (Newport, 2012), which widely considered to be the “final frontier” of gay rights, it is really hard to say that public opinion *has not* shifted.

But how exactly did it come to be? In this section, I explore some of the current literature which will offer some explanations to how the perception of gays changed in America as well as literature which explain what kind of change took place over the last forty-five years. In addition, I explain the strengths and weaknesses of each of the explanations that were found in the literature.

First, one of the three general explanations to the influences that could have changed the public opinion of gays in America are the national gay rights advocacy groups, like the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) and Lambda Legal (LL), to name the most influential few. These very influential national advocacy gay groups often work actively and aggressively to pursue clearly “pro-gay” agenda, on both the state and federal level. The advocates of this frame believe that with their resources, the gay interest groups are able to influence the public opinion through directly paying the politicians and affecting what’s on the political agenda. However, this argument leaves a whole lot to be questioned – it never explains how interest groups *directly* affect the public opinion towards gays. While it may be true that gay interest groups are aiming

specifically to change people's public opinion, there has not been much literature of interest groups affecting public opinion – if not in a negative way.

Second, media is often an explanation to affecting public opinion. The media argument states that news sources have a strong impact on affecting the public opinion. Since I am encompassing the news media and entertainment media (such as music, TV shows, and movies) in my definition of “the media”, the media exposure variable to American public is very large, under my definition. Furthermore, since “positive” gay images have slowly leaked onto mainstream media since the nineties (albeit horribly stereotypical), the masses now have had exposure to “friendly gays” and thus should have a favorable, accepting mode for the gay population. As strong as this explanation's effect on the opinion of American public, this argument does not account for every single change that was seen in America; not every TV show or every expert will impact every single American.

Lastly, “elites” affecting the public opinion about gays; many argue that since “elite” views are what reach the public, these “elites” speaking out for the LGB population strongly affects public opinion of gays. Who are these elites? These people can be typically thought of as “experts” or highly well-respected in their respective fields. This school of thought also involves promoting homosexuality as innate from birth, since that's the view that experts have pushed on. However, this school of thought does not fully explain the change because no matter what, some people with certain moral “values” may not accept the explanation (they, however, may have other methods to be convinced); also, different people have different political awareness and perception.

## II. *Did Acceptances of Gays Even Increase?*

Aside from ambiguities in questions offered in polls (there are multiple wordings for many polls, including the ones found in the literature) and ambiguities in definitions of “gays”, it seems that generally speaking, the national sentiment towards gays and lesbians has moved

towards “acceptance”. Taking the definition of “acceptance” provided by Merriam-Webster Dictionary, “the act of accepting; the fact of being accepted. Approval”. Approval of “gays” (generally understood to be two men or two women who are in a relationship), or the approval of gays and lesbians marrying seemed to have dramatically shifted in the last thirty years. Whether it is a national study or state case studies, the results were generally towards to the “trend” of growing acceptance of “gays”. With this approval, I include both the legal recognition of homosexual relationships as well as the “gay marriage question”.

Fiorina’s (2011) analysis has found that Republican, Democrat, and Independent support for “legal homosexuality” has increased steadily from 1982 to 2003 (figure 6.7; 126). Furthermore, “Americans decline to criminalize behavior they believe to be immoral, they explicitly support protection of [gays’] rights...” (114-5). Fiorina also provides tables and numbers, and he even mentions that “young Americans” were “more accepting of legal homosexual relationships” (124).

Similarly, Lewis and Gosset’s (2008) case study of changing public opinion of same-sex marriage, state that “Californians have become strikingly more sympathetic, and now are nearly even split on same-sex marriage” (4). Their tables and figures suggest that in California-wide Field Poll, opinion on gay marriage has increased from 30% in 1985 to 43% in 2005 (Figure 1). However, besides naming “younger generation...education...and race” (9) for causes of those dramatic changes, there are no real explanations about what contributed to the dramatic changes to the public opinion.

While these studies may tell us how much the polling data numbers were changed (by how many points), these sadly do not tell us how exactly these views towards the gays may have changed. In fact, most of the studies seem to be focused on explaining opinion differences across various populations, not explaining the change in opinion over time. But what accounts for those changes in attitudes over the years? Some conventional wisdom tells us that it must have reasons

to change. In the following, I will explore interest group politics, media influences, and elite power over the masses – all affecting public opinion over time.

### III. *Interest Group Politics*

When it comes to interest group politics and prominence, one does not have to look very far. In fact, the cereal for breakfast that you ate may have been endorsed by the Human Rights Campaign (HRC). General Mills was touted by the HRC, as they openly supported “marriage equality” and donated \$1 million to HRC. But how exactly are interest groups effective to changing the public opinion, besides influencing Lucky Charms cereal? In more graspable, “straight” terms, the gay advocacy group’s influences have been well-documented.

Haider-Merkel (1999) suggested that even during the 1990s, where the federal legislatures seemed to be going towards hostile legislations towards the gay populace; interest groups such as the HRC were able to have influence over congressional voting patterns. “Through the use of both financial contributions and the mobilization of constituents, gay interest groups have become a factor in congressional decision-making. Gay groups have been able to influence legislators despite the presence of conditions that should have lessened their influence...” (132). Thus, the large interest groups such as the HRC were able to have influence even when the general national climate did not support homosexuality. In addition, HRC’s PAC is the “largest LGBT PAC” (Smith and Haider-Markel, 2002, 107). In politics, money can often mean a voice and a face. In that way, HRC certainly dominates the interest politics game, and their influences are still felt.

In addition, Lambda Legal, the nation’s oldest LGBT-issue related interest group, is focused on litigations – which bring upon change through the courts. Although some social movement advocates are critical of victories and changes through legal matters, Bernstein, Marshall, and Barclay (2009) claim that “the law has also made it possible to challenge... order...legal conceptions of privacy [in *Lawrence v. Texas* (2003)] have been central to the effort

to decriminalize sodomy...the Supreme Court recognized the right [to privacy]" (9). Lambda Legal won the case that turned the normative order. In short, the interest group challenged the status quo and successfully pursued a pro-gay policy through the courts.

However, there are critiques to this argument. Shapiro, Dempsey and Page (1987) state that TV news content influences positively the opinion change, while "groups and individuals representing various special interests, taken together, tend to have a negative effect on public opinion" (37). So it is even questionable if interest groups really do even affect public opinion in a positive way. Also, Meier and Haider-Markel (2003) suggest that while interest groups can be successful, they can be only successful if "the issue has low-salience and scope of conflict is small" (673). If it gets any bigger in scope, "other factors become important" (674), suggesting that interest groups are no longer as important. Since most issues present today are rarely of low-salience and highly conflicted (like gay marriage), gay advocacy interest groups can no longer hide behind so-called "less radical" politics. That seems to be doubtful.

#### IV. *Media's Influences: Do Ask and Tell!*

As a lead-in to this section and a link from the last section, exists a very unique interest group. Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) is "media watchdog...focused on fair representation of LGBT people in the media" (Smith and Haider-Markel, 2002, 112). In addition, they hold annual events to "award positive representations of LGBT people in the media" (113). So GLAAD polices the images of gay people in the media. What kinds of images of gays in the media are shown to the American population?

Gays have always existed in some format in the movies – documentary based on Vito Russo's *The Celluloid Closet* (1995) ventures onto say that stereotypical images that were meant to be "sissy" gays have infiltrated American cinema as a character made for ridicule since the 1920s. Although not openly stated as "gay", it was hinted that these "sissy boys" were meant to be obviously effeminate men who were emasculated and thus be an object of ridicule. Because



hypermasculinity was still valued, these “sissy boys” were derogatory towards representation of gays and thus implanted a negative image of the gays.

Of course, speaking solely of the past within regards to media would be anachronistic. In recent years, a much wider exposure of gays have been in the media. Multiple studies about gays in the news often show an upwards trend of actual mention of gays as the years pass. But what about those gays and lesbians on modern entertainment TV? Becker (2006) argues that in the nineties, the “network executives found gay-themed television appealing...and audience found it appealing to establish a ‘hip’ identity... because it was socially liberal...upscale American... neoliberal political climate of 1990s” (108). Perhaps because it was so socially and politically appealing, Americans found it easier to access the gays on television and found them to be enjoyable. It was “chic” and “relatively exceptional marker of just how open-minded one was” (129). It was progressive, it was new, it was... trendy. And openly gay was the new black.

Although there really is not a whole slew modern academic literature on Lady Gaga or *Glee*, I will briefly discuss about it within the context of modern media. It still is “cool” to be supportive and open-minded of gays, like Becker’s argument. Lady Gaga is the new Madonna; she is the new trend-setter and media one-stop for both scandals and political LGBT movement (she even met with President Obama to discuss gay teen suicides). She is influential, and so is *Glee*, with its quite colorful array of openly gay relationships, among other popular shows. Certainly, the popular media seems to be with “the gays”, but how does that affect the public’s view on legality of their relationship? What about gay marriage? While TV and these “hip” new shows may have influenced the public opinion on gays, they do not necessarily account for all the gay approval going up.

#### V. *The Elite Power to the Masses!*

This school of thought is perhaps the strongest and the most studied influence of public opinion. “Elites”, as defined by Zaller (1992), “include politicians, higher-level government

officials, journalists, some activists, and many kinds of experts and policy specialists” (6). Zaller argues that elite discourses affect the public opinion, because the elite discourses affect and reach the majority of the public who are less attentive to politics in general (18). In other words, what the elites say directly affects the public opinion – elite opinion leads the public opinion. Lee (2002) echoes this sentiment: “political beliefs and sentiments of ordinary individuals are shaped primarily by elite actors” (3).

Zaller’s analysis of homosexuality and acceptance of homosexuality elucidates clearly what the elite discourse on a certain subject can do. “Hooker, whose research provided the most influential, used standard social scientific research techniques... application of neutral scientific knowledge... a solid foundation of sympathetic opinion from mainstream institution... what matters is procedural correctness” (322-325). Even though Hooker’s research on disproving mental illness status of homosexuality was sympathetic towards gays, she was able to be legitimized and touted as a hero, *because* she did her procedures in the formal way that was legitimate with the scientific community.

Furthermore, researches about the belief of origin of homosexuality (whether you are “born this way” or sexuality as a choice) and acceptance of gays overwhelmingly show the same thing. Those who believe in “born this way” view of sexuality are more accepting of gays than those who think homosexuality is a choice. The “biological attribution” of being “gay” – as in, an “uncontrollable” sexuality led to more support for gays (Joslyn and Haider-Markel 2008). Of course, in recent years, elites have suggested that being gay was innate, a biological thing instead of environment and choice (and in media, there is Lady Gaga, of course, for “Born This Way”).

However, there exist limitations to the elite-centered view of public opinion change. One limitation is a lag time between when elites express the opinion and when the public fully embraces the elite viewpoint. Indeed, mass opinion may precede elite opinion. Lewis (2009) argues that “time trends provide no obvious evidence that media coverage of the scientific

research has much impact. Opinions started shifting long before news reports on LaVey's 'gay brain' research" (683). So perhaps our scientists who are hard at work did not convince everyone or did not affect the public as much. Furthermore, the elite approach never fully considers the media and interest groups quite like I approached. In addition, Rosenberg (2008) argues that "a host of social, political, and economic changes... could plausibly have led to significant social reform without court action" (8). So, with elite opinion and institutions under question, we can plausibly say that elite opinion cannot be the only and absolute answer to changes in public opinion.

#### VI. *Brief Interlude with Homonormativity*

The concept of homonormativity, though not outright stated in any of the interest group tactics nor in the media, it is heavily implied; this is an important enough concept in the queer literature that I think it is important to briefly delineate here.

The concept of homonormativity was first brought up with Lisa Duggan (2003). She defines it to be: "the new neoliberal sexual politics... *the new homonormativity*—it is a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them... [to privatize and depoliticize] gay culture [to make it] anchored in domesticity and consumption" (50). As her statement suggests, queer theory sees itself as at odds with neoliberalism, which gay marriage is neatly tucked underneath. McRuer (2012) states that "This positioning of neoliberalism as more progressive than conservative regulation, and as the wave of development and the future, means that activist projects can become vehicles for neoliberal policies rather than for social change that will actually challenge the distribution of wealth and power in contemporary societies." He goes so far as suggesting that the current LGBT movement is not actually causing social change, but rather conforming to the status quo.

Note that to assimilate and to apply heteronormative institution (i.e. marriage) is closely linked with HRC's and LL's interests. Furthermore, these sorts of "ideals" are shown via Nielsen

Top 20 shows like *Modern Family* and *Will and Grace*. The concept of homonormativity is important when we consider what is “acceptable” to the *public*. Because the idea of homonormativity is so close to neoliberal market and consumerism, the homonormative conceptions of gay and lesbians are much easier to approach and “sell” to the American public. In other words, the idea of two married men or women in a comfortable middle-class living who have enough money to adopt a child together are much easier for the public eye to accept than what the public might not easily consume – like the image of a transgendered person of color struggling to pay her way through expensive gender-reassignment surgeries (sometimes in not-so legal or “safe” ways).

## VII. *Conclusions*

Within the past pages, we looked at the multiple ways that the public opinion could have been shaped within regards to homosexuality. While we cannot really doubt that yes, “acceptance” of gays certainly increased over the last forty years, it is harder to tell what really motivated these changes – was it the interest groups (who has the resources for politics, but are they effective in changing public opinion?), the media (with its problematic images?), or the elites (who “expert” their way into mass opinions?). Although I believe that all three are all plausible answers on their own, they overstate the impact of a single factor to the public opinion. I believe that the strongest factor in changing the public opinion was a combination of all three possible explanations, because they fix and patch the “holes” in the individual argument.

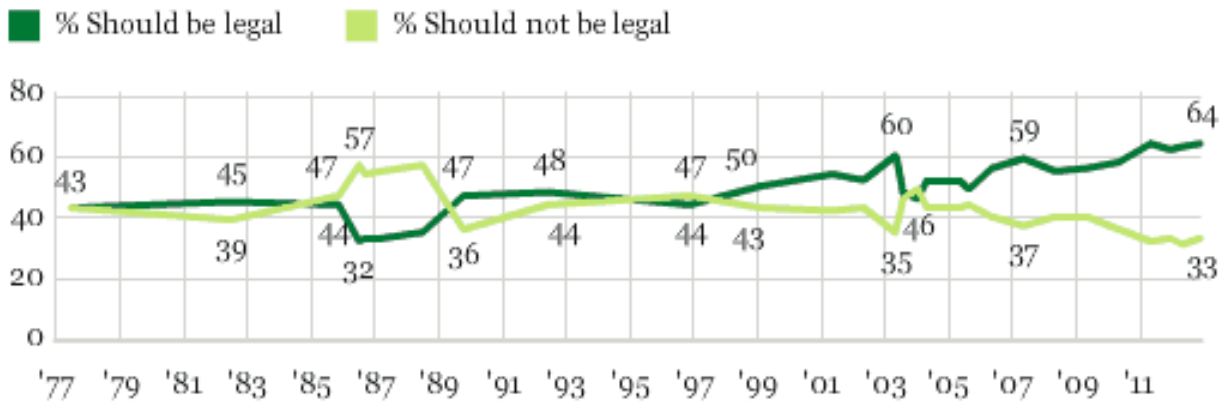
### Section 3: Rise of the Public Opinion?

The main part of this research is dissecting the public opinion’s rise regarding gays and lesbians. There are, of course, many different ways of being “accepting” of gays and lesbians. I picked two things: one, the acceptance of legal relationship between two people of same-sex, and two, the acceptance of legal recognition of marriage between two people of same-sex.

One thing to note about the pattern of public opinion’s liberalization – a pattern that seems to be more dramatic in the last few years – when it comes to the issue of “being okay with gay” is that there seems to be a huge change in vocabulary and attitudes associated being what gay means. Prior to 2008, the word “homosexual” was used in the question about legality of relationships between two adults of the same sex. This sort of change in framing is the concern that Zaller (1992, 33) had within regards to “question-wording effects” actually changing the outcome of the political opinion.

Let’s take a look at how the data works itself out:

*Do you think gay or lesbian relations between consenting adults should or should not be legal?*



1977-2008 wording: Do you think homosexual relations between consenting adults should or should not be legal?

GALLUP

TABLE 1 Public Opinion Regarding Legality of Gay Relationships (2012)

The word homosexual seems to be the outdated way of putting things; in fact, it has a much harsher tone than “gays and lesbians”. The word homosexual also carries with it the stigma of pre-Stonewall and pre-1973 American Psychological Association’s determination that homosexuality was a mental illness and AIDS crisis.

To illustrate the point word choice: there is a very dramatic shift in opinion as seen by single question in 1980 – “What about sexual relations between two adults of the same sex--do you think it is always wrong, almost always wrong, wrong only sometimes, or not wrong at all?” (General Social Survey 1980). This question essentially makes the gay *sexual act* as the *very identity* of the person engaging in the act; this is an error of identity and an error of depiction with a strong emphasis on negativity implied (since sexual acts are considered very discrete and as inappropriate subject matter in general), and along with the rise of AIDS crisis as a serious health and risk among the gay male community<sup>2</sup>, the public opinion, which in 1977 was 43% for “gay and lesbian” population, dropped substantially to 20%. The word homosexual itself also has a heavy, “sexual” tone. Once again, it links *sexual activity* with the *very identity* of the person.

The public opinion, in addition, seems to react to the news events of the day. For example, the low dip in the early eighties seem to particularly reflect the dark times for gays and lesbians (especially gays) – when AIDS were seen exclusively as “the gay plague”. In fact, before 1982, it was named GRID (Gay related Immune Deficiency); an entire disease blamed and named the gays its sole perpetrator<sup>3</sup>. It was a medicalized, scientific discourse of discrimination, fear, and uncertainty. Grover (1995) comments that in the 1980’s, “Hysteria [extended] not only to the visibly ill but to the invisibly ill/infected – the sick homosexual redux” (361). Thus, we see a significant drop from mid-eighties until the late eighties. It was not until at

<sup>2</sup> The chart of the deaths are in the appendix, courtesy of CDC.

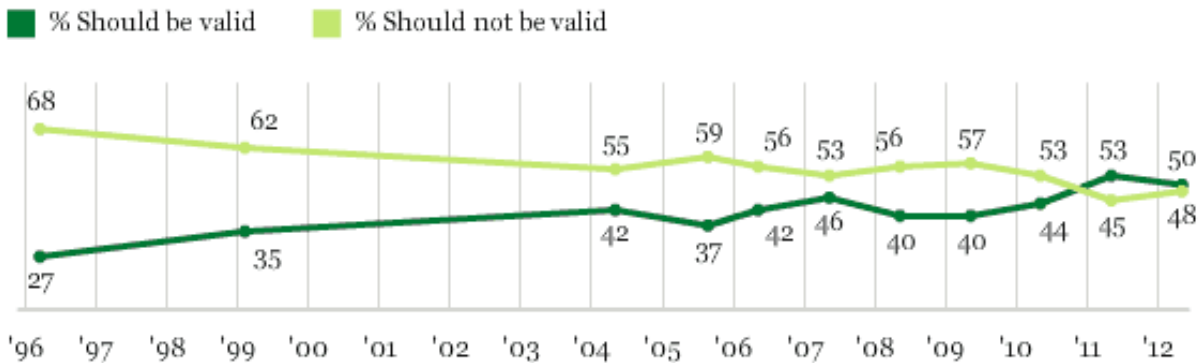
<sup>3</sup> “History of AIDS” (2012). AVERT.org. Retrieved from <http://www.avert.org/aids-history-86.htm>

least mid-eighties that AIDS was seen as a problem for *all* population, a serious health risk for the entire USA, not just for the “promiscuous gays” cruising in gay bars for the next hook-up.

It is very interesting, though, to think that even now with this gradual rise in public opinion regarding gays and lesbians, about 30% of Americans think that gays and lesbians should *not* be able to legally have a relationship. Although the question is seemingly innocuous – “Do you think homosexual/gay or lesbian relations between consenting adults should or should not be legal?” – The reaction is not as positive as one would think in 2012. Think about what kind of different result would be yielded if Gallup asked, “Do you think relations between consenting adults should or should not be legal?” Observers can definitely see that there still is a thick veil of prejudice glazed over American public opinion. Thus, even vocabulary choice/question can impact the public opinion’s rise and/or fall.

The public opinion for gay “marriage”, however, seems to be *faster* on the rise than “legality” of gay relationships. Within 16 years, Americans made a surprising 23% jump about approving marriage among same-sex couples. To gauge this, within the same 16 years, Americans made 20% jump regarding legality of relationship (not even marriage) between consenting same-sex adults. Note the chart below:

*Do you think marriages between same-sex couples should or should not be recognized by the law as valid, with the same rights as traditional marriages?*



Note: Trend shown for polls in which same-sex marriage question followed questions on gay/lesbian rights and relations  
 1996-2005 wording: "Do you think marriages between homosexuals ..."

GALLUP

TABLE 2: Public Opinion Regarding Legality of Gay Marriages (2012)

An interesting fact to note is that gay “marriage” was never an issue until 1990’s. In the seventies it was not even asked, unlike the legality of “homosexual” relationships. Although, recently, we can observe a rather dramatic increase in support for gay marriage, what are the people’s perceptions of it? Although we may never know, but one can imagine that it may be two white middle-class gay guys adopting a child from Vietnam, like the sweet homonormative couple from *Modern Family*. Is it really representative of all or majority of gay couples? Especially since “an estimated 39% of individuals in same-sex couples who have children under age 18 in the home are people of color, compared to 36% of those in different-sex couples who are non-white” (Gates, 2013)? So, regardless of reality, there are different representations and opinions formed around married (or practically married) gay and lesbian couples.

There is also the issue of vocabulary change among same-sex marriage, too. Recently, “marriage equality” has been the favorable term, pushed by Lambda Legal and Human Rights Campaign; gay or same-sex marriage implies that there is a separate institution for gays and lesbians (“when gays marry, it’s not real marriage” it seems to imply; also, where did “lesbian”



marriage go, then?), but marriage equality implies that “marriage” is the same institution and (any and all) people are simply pursuing their equal right to marry. Although the term is not used widely yet, one wonders what the results would be if the question was worded, “Do you support marriage equality?” As we study the steady increase of public opinion change, before we consider other factors, we should consider the question-wording effect on the public opinion data.

As we can see, word play and events of the day *can* impact the rise (or fall) of public opinion. However, is it also impacted by interest groups, media, and elite opinion?

*Section 4: Method to the Madness and the Franken Results*  
*Everything's Gay Ok! Exploring and Quantifying What Made Gay Okay*

*“Make it Work!”: Executing Hypothesis into a Researchable Proof*

*The Intro and the Hypothesis*

In the previous section, I delineated what the existing literatures were on what accounted for the change in the public's approval of gays. These factors included the interest group activity, media exposure and representations, and the elite opinion on gays. How do we exactly measure all of this? This section will lay out the hypotheses for each of the three “variables” (or factors). I hypothesize that all the three factors affected very much the American public's opinion of gays, but the media would have had the most effect.

So, as we have read before, my research will be focused on exactly *what* made “gayness” in American public opinion “acceptable.” We know that the acceptance of gays has increased dramatically since the seventies. I have run through an array of literature to see what has been there in terms of current and past research into the change of public opinion, and what some factors may have been – interest groups, media, and elite opinion. The theory is, the more “positive” involvement our three main variables have with the gay community, the higher the public approval of gays will be. In this section, I will explain what kind of research methods I use in order to prove that point. As Tim Gunn said it famously in *Project Runway*, “Make it work!” is the motto.

*The Research Design*

We know that acceptance of homosexuality has been on the rise since the late seventies, where our data begins. Again, I claim that all three factors – interest groups, media, and elite opinion – have all positively impacted the increase of approval of gays in the American public.

*The Research and Methodology: Putting and Executing the design on Paper*

I will break down my research plan in sections.

## I. The Interest Group

Unfortunately, I was not able to access the fiscal data of Lambda Legal and HRC for the entire period from 1977 to present. However, the idea remains constant the more money the HRC or Lambda Legal spends, the more public should be aware and think positively of the population. Similar idea goes out to the interest groups' appearance in the media. The more the interest groups appear in the media, the more the public should be sympathetic with their causes (especially since their framing is "civil rights" of gays and lesbians).

The variables here are the interest group involvement compared to the public opinion of gays. I mainly use the data from Lambda Legal and Human Rights Campaign, because they are the oldest and the largest LGBT organization in the country, respectively. However, in the media section, I also count any gay interest group activity. The interest group involvement is measured in two ways.

### i. The appearance in the media.

This portion of the research is very closely related to the one in the actual media section, but I coded the appearance of gay interest group along with all other coding. Any mention of the interest groups (HRC and LL, only), I code as 1. The idea is, the more appearance the interest group makes, the more they will be recognized as more legitimate spokesperson for the gay community and their opinions will make an impact on the public, positively.

### ii. Their contribution to public awareness/education programs

Since HRC's and Lambda Legal were among the first gay rights groups to launch a nation-wide media campaign and education campaigns, I sought their 990 forms<sup>4</sup> in about the last ten years to see what kind of campaigns they have been doing. I unfortunately had to settle

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<sup>4</sup> I originally contacted both Lambda Legal and HRC for their fiscal information, but they did not have the information, beyond the three years that are required by law on their website. I also personally called them, but they did not have any clue where it could be. I researched with the PoliSci librarian – the data I needed (990 forms) were only available on <http://foundationcenter.org/findfunders/990finder>.

for last ten years instead of the last 35 years, because both the IRS and the organizations themselves have no easy or feasible means for me to access such data. I sought out what kind of campaigns they pursued and how much money they spent on each of the campaigns. After that, I compared the timeline against the public opinion chart. Since it is unfortunately the last ten years only (out of 35 years or so), this is not the ideal data set, but I do compare LL and HRC to comparable civil rights organizations such as NAACP and NOW and see how they stack up next to them. To simplify this process, I am looking at their 990 forms, especially with a note to their 990 Part III, which looks at “Statement of Program Service Accomplishments”. This should explain what kind of campaign they pursued and what kind of image that they were putting out to influence public’s perception of gays, which should impact the public opinion and make gays more acceptable. This also should compare what the other organizations of similar nature were doing (in terms of spending money).

Of course, there is a limit to how much impact the interest groups’ reach out to public will make, but this is one way to influence public’s opinion of gays.

## II. The Media

The media is a large part of modern society and with a growing depiction of gays, it should account for the growing acceptance and “positive” (as in, non-threatening and non-negative) outlook of gays in the public.

### i. TV Shows

TV shows have featured gay characters more and more and in a larger, more approachable, friendlier roles; perhaps they are the “best friend”, talented singer, or a gay couple with the “new normal” family, complete with adopted or artificially inseminated children.

I use the Nielsen ratings Top 20 TV shows from broadcasting years 1977 to 2013 (current)<sup>5</sup>. The number of main/recurring gay and lesbian characters/contestants (more recently with the rise of popularity in reality TV shows) from those shows is counted. I compare the public opinion of gays before and after the show. I further (briefly) analyze the gay characters on the show and what that implies about “gayness” on Television (and how that may impact public opinion). The “gayer” TV shows are, the more public should be friendlier to/approving of gays and lesbians (if not gay marriage, at least the legality of said relationships).

Note that I will not be able to pick out every single TV show with gay characters or cast members in them, due to the fact that I lack resources and time to go through all the popular cultures. For convenience’s sake, I will only pick out the shows from the Top 20, which had the most viewers for the particular broadcasting year.

## ii. Newspaper Coverage of Gays

The newspaper coverage of gays and major events in the gay rights movement should reach a wide audience, if the newspapers are picked from different regions in America. I chose both the coasts (The New York Times and the LA Times) to gauge the American landscape and subsequent reporting of gays based on regional differences. Using ProQuest database, I went through all the editorials related to “gay and lesbian” from 1977 to now. Coding is as follows: if gays are mentioned in a positive (or supportive/sympathetic) way, I code 1; if the gays are mentioned in a non-flattering way or the viewpoint of the antigay or antigay marriage sentiment is strongly present, I code 0. Not only the number of articles is important, but also the tone of the articles is taken as well.

I put the number of articles and the number of positive coverage into graphs to see if there are any relationship between media coverage of gays and the public opinion of gays. If

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<sup>5</sup> I directly requested Nielsen ratings for Top 20 Rated TV shows from 1977 to present.

there are more positive editorials in the newspapers, that should impact the public's perception of gays and lesbians.

While newspaper is not the news network media (which the original study in the lit review worked with), I did not have the time or resource to cover visual media as well. The print media serves as a good indicator of the news media and it is easier to track and code; for conveniences' sake, I chose the print media. For consistency's sake, I coded all these by myself (548 editorials). It would have been ideal to hire two coders, give them criteria for coding and check their intercoder reliability, but I sadly did not have enough money to hire them.

One thing of note is that I do not have demographic information for the viewers of the top-rated TV shows, but this is consistent with the fact that I do not have demographic information of the public opinion dataset, too.

### III. The Elite Opinion

The elite opinion of gays is measured in the following ways. The function for elite opinion is rather simplistic in my model. The more positive or negative the elite opinion is, the more positive or negative the public opinion should be.

#### i. Presidential State of the Union Address and Campaign Platforms

The Presidential State of the Union Addresses and Campaign platforms were taken from the archive of The American Presidency Project by Woolley and Peters.

Since the Presidential State of the Union Address and campaign platforms are some of the largest ways that the president and the presidential candidates make a direct contact with the public, any mention of gays in such a manner should impact what the American public think of gay people (if anything, the approval or disapproval of a candidate or president could partially be linked to the president's opinion of gays). I combed through all the State of the Union Addresses and each of the Republican and Democratic party platforms from 1970s to now for any mentions of the following words: "gay" or "homosexual\*" and coded each address – 1 for positive

mention (support), -1 for negative mention (disapproval), and 0 for no mention. This should give a good indication of the president or presidential candidate's view of gays and how the public responds to gays with their opinion in mind. While it might not be the only way to read the elite opinion, no one can argue that the president is not elite who has the possibility to reach millions of Americans with variety of messages that can influence a nation.

## ii. Supreme Court Opinions

While there have not been many cases that involve gays on a federal scale, there have been quite a few that have caused a huge impact for gay civil rights – from Romer to Lawrence, I chart out which date the decision came out and what kind of decision they were. When it is favorable to gays, I code 1, if it is not, I code 0. I also seek if the public opinion have jumped dramatically or not, based on the ruling as it tends to the gays.

The three stand-ins for elite institutions I have chosen may not be the complete and total ending to elites available to the public, but since elites are covered by the media, the media section and the elite opinion section are very closely linked to one another.

## IV. The Public Opinion Change

I am using Gallup poll's questions that are from 1977 to the present. However, there are some gaps in Gallup's data as well. While this is not perfect, Gallup's two questions are the most consistent public opinion source that is very reliable.

I used: "Do you think gay and lesbian relations between consenting adults should or should not be legal?" (1977 to present) and "Do you think marriages between same-sex couples should or should not be recognized by the law as valid, with the same rights as traditional marriages?" (1996 to present)

One thing to note is that both questions, up until 2008, used the word "homosexual" instead of "gay and lesbian" or "same-sex". This point is talked about briefly later.

*The Conclusion: Weathering the Judges' Critiques*

I know that there is lots of room for critique, especially within regards to the methods for the interest group selection or the interest group functional measures.

However in a topic like gay rights and existence of gays in America, there has been a great shift in visibility and understanding of the population. Only recently have people come out more and more, because they feel that it is a safer environment to finally do so. Furthermore, within regards to public opinion change, there may be a positive feedback between the independent variables (the three main variables) and the dependent variable (public opinion change) – that is, the more it is acceptable for gays to be in the public, the more public will be willing to talk and support them, causing a loop of upward trend in public opinion of gays.

I believe, though, despite the flaws, the results I will present will be useful, because in the macro run, these will show how exactly the public opinion on an entire group of minority that transcends race and gender could move into a positive direction and perhaps future gay rights movements elsewhere in a more conservative country could apply the tactics used to reach for an extension of rights upon a wider array of people.

#### *Getting Down to Business – Analyzing and Assessing the Data What's the Deal with Everything?*

In this section, I attempt to analyze and assess the data that I have collected. The data, as obvious as it seems, does draw an overall upwards, positive trend, but not quite as dramatic or bluntly as one would imagine. All of the variables – interest group, media, and the elite opinion, do follow the upward trends, but unlike Zaller's hypothesis, the elite opinion does not lead the public opinion. In fact, the trend, oddly enough, suggests that the media led the public opinion way before when we expected the public to. I will explore these strange trends in detail later. Since my thesis implied that *all* the factors – interest groups, media, and the elite opinion impacted the public opinion, the results are rather shockingly stagnant.

#### *The Interest Groups – Do They Matter?*



Again, I divided the interest group section to have money aspects and the media aspects to them. Their presence, it seems, to lead the public opinion, to say the very least.

*The Interested Money*

Although this is dramatically different than other sections in terms of other portions of my thesis concerning the use of dates – this section contains the 990 form money-spending, concerning Part III. I unfortunately was *not* able to get the data going back the last forty years, but I obtained the data going back the last ten years.

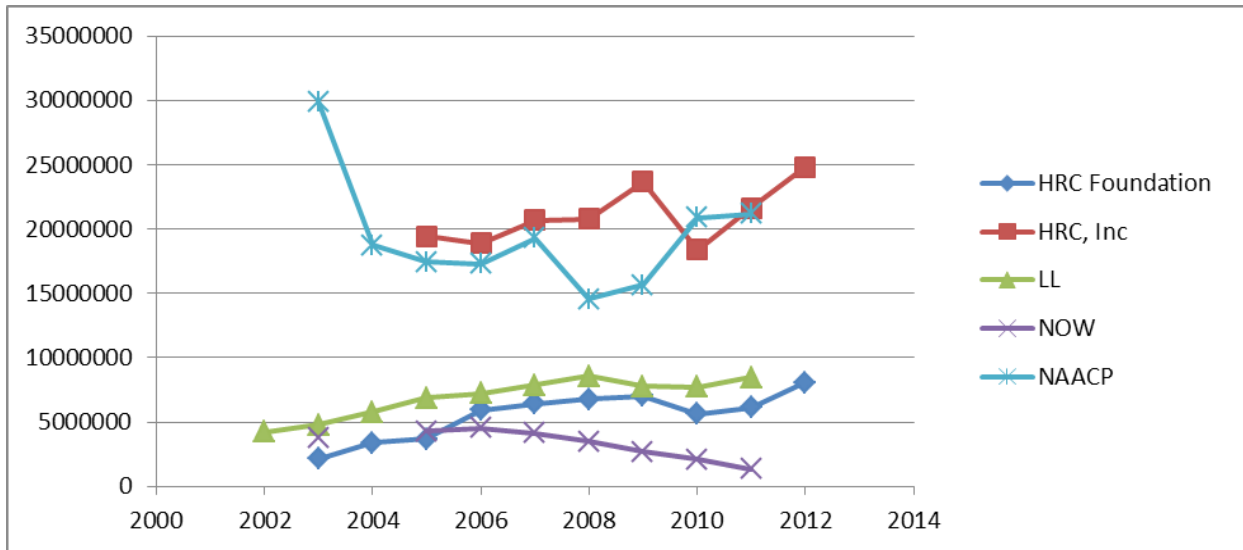


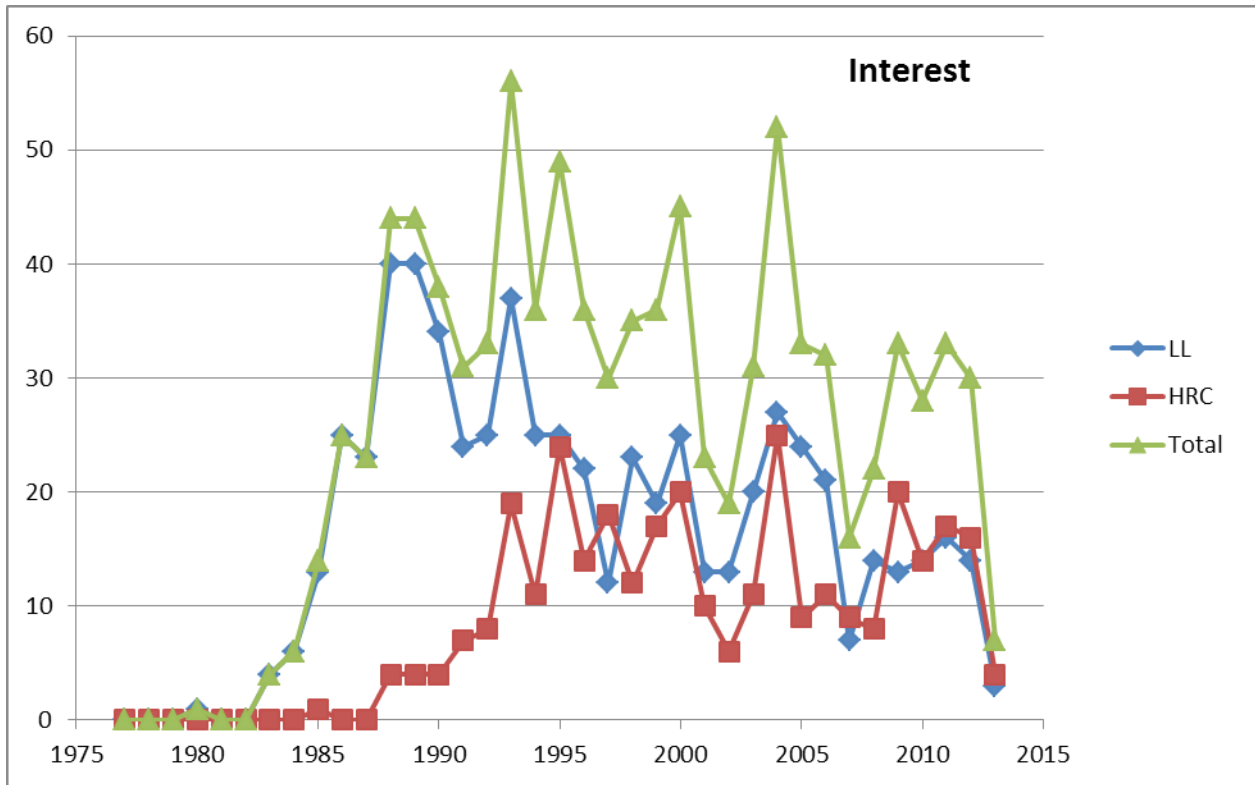
TABLE 3: Interest Group spending comparison, 909Finder (2012)

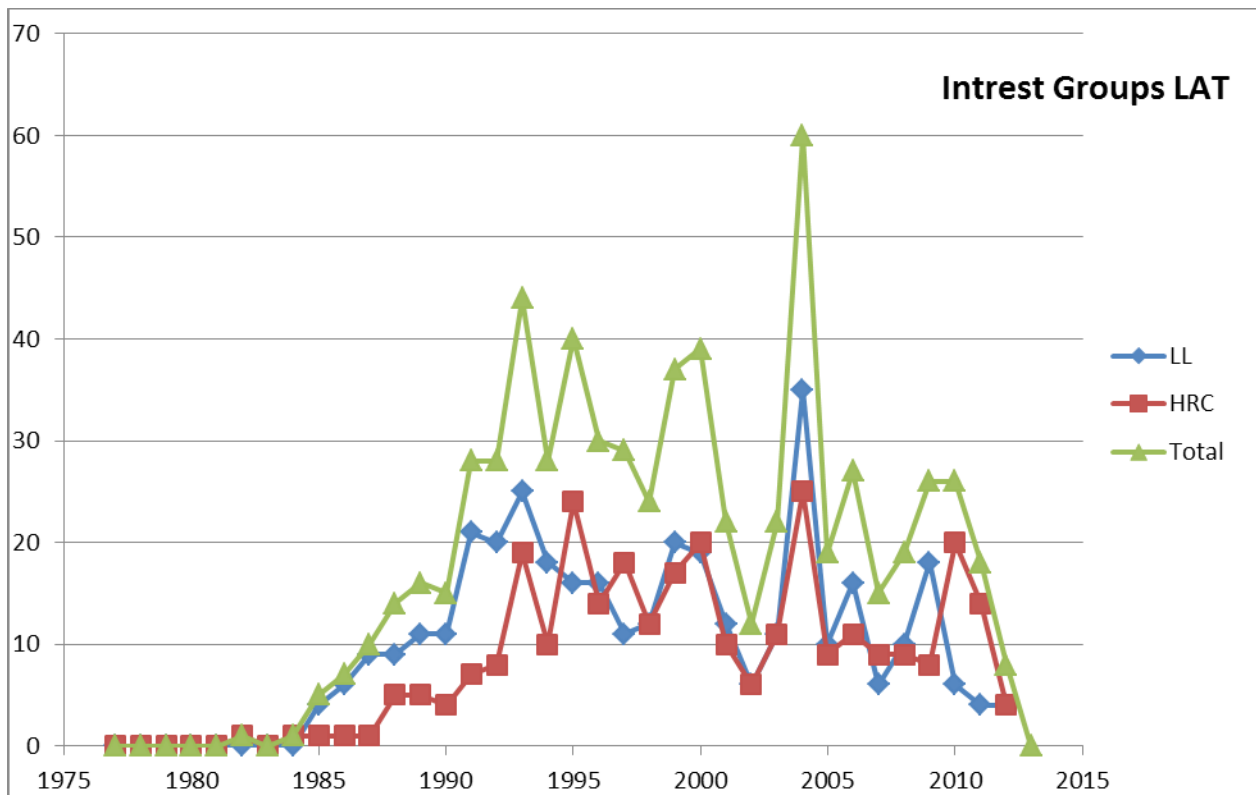
The spending is very important to observe because the groups were actively *outreaching towards the public* with this money. “Statement of Program Service Accomplishments” section was used – which means the groups were actively trying to immerse themselves in the community, in the public. This should get a sense of how actively the groups were outreaching and participating.

It seems that LL and HRC have seen a fairly dramatic spike during the last ten years in terms of spending. It may be associated with their aggressive campaigning for gay rights access everywhere. HRC tops any other organization’s spending patterns, even compared with NAACP, which is one of the nation’s oldest civil rights organizations!

### Interest Groups' Media Attention?

Interest Groups have long been appearing in the media. While interest groups are rather flat in the earlier years, their presence is more noticeable later.





TABLES 4 AND 5: Interest Group mentions NYT and LAT, ProQuest database (2013)

Generally speaking, the interest groups seem to lack a whole lot of appearance from the LA Times and have a much clearer and earlier spotlight from the New York Times. Just looking at the number of articles from LAT compared to NYT is very different – LAT lacks numbers as compared to NYT, at least in the earlier years. This is somehow expected because both the Human Rights Campaign and Lambda Legal started from the east coast and still have their main headquarters in the east coast. Furthermore, it is clear that the interest groups are leading the charge when it comes to keeping up with the issues – their activities seem to be clustered especially in the earlier part of 1990s and in 2000’s, when the matters of gays in the military and gay marriage (respectively) were huge issues in America. This is important for issue-attention cycle because the interest groups in this case are clearly pushing for strong recognition of gay and lesbian issues.

Lambda Legal had much more mention earlier on (this may be true because Lambda Legal was established earlier than HRC; HRC was not established until 1980), but as the years

went on, HRC had similar number of mentions in the papers and showed very similar activity trend line to Lambda Legal (which is strange, considering that HRC spends *much* more in public education).

### *The Media, The data, and the Quest for Attention*

In this section, I explored two data sets – the Nielsen Ratings data from 1977 to the present and the New York Times and The LA Times editorials from 1977 to the present.

### *TV Made America Gay?*

With the data from Nielsen of every single Top 20 shows from the years 1977 to present and Google (with Wikipedia) in my hands (using the key words “gay”, “lesbian”, and “homosexual”), I had the pleasure of taking a glimpse into popular culture throughout the last thirty plus years. It’s very important to note that the “years” are referred from the September of the year stated to the April of the year after. So, for example, 1978’s data would mean that the ratings were taken from September 1978 to the April of 1979.

Before diving straight into all the lists and trends of the shows, one thing that was interesting to note was that *All in the Family*, while not having any main gay cast, had the first openly gay character on TV – in 1971. While that is out of my date range, note that “Roger” (who was a visiting character) was the very first openly gay character on TV and according to Aronstein, “This episode’s groundbreaking and complicated exploration of gay identity is one reason why it should remain on our radar” (2012). In fact, another scholar observes that “Scholars who have studied the evolution of how the media have depicted gay people have pointed to that episode of *All in the Family* as the first instance in which a network television program aired a positive plotline involving a gay issue” (Streitmatter, 2002). *All in the Family* was an important program for subsequent gays and lesbians shown on TV afterwards.

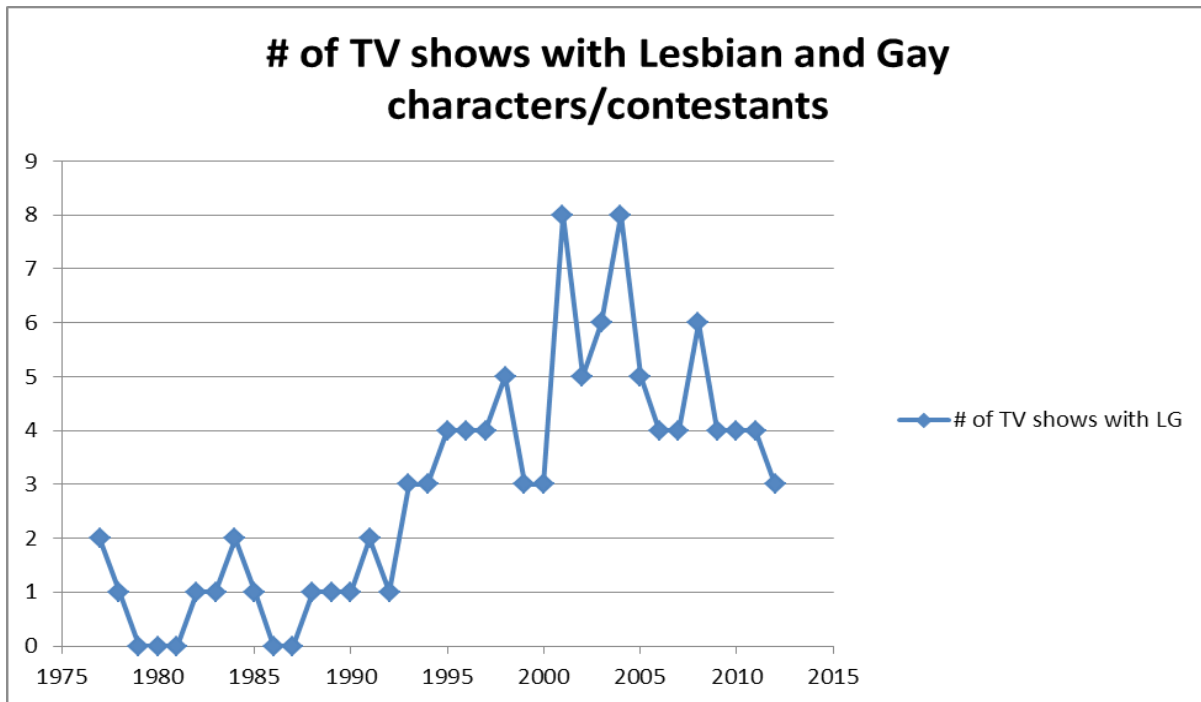


TABLE 6: # of TV Shows with GL characters/contestants, Nielsen Ratings (2013)

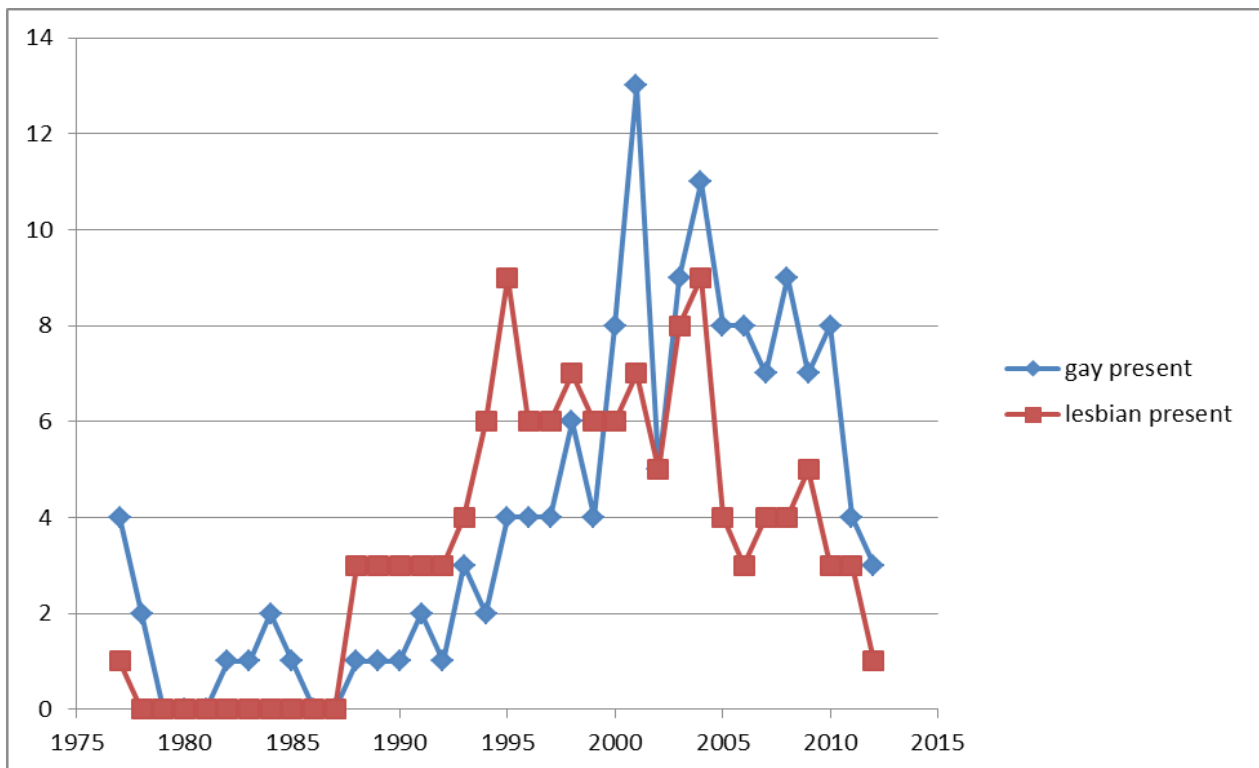


TABLE 7: # of GL in TV Shows, Nielsen Ratings (2013)

The late seventies (of course, after *All in the Family*) also had some burst of gay and lesbian characters through *Soap* and *Barney Miller* – although the characters here were not main

cast, they were still one of the recurring characters and were rather diverse – one was a lesbian roommate (to the gay one in the family), a gay one in the family (both in *Soap*), one was a *police officer* (in *Barney Miller*). Considering that early to middle 80's only offered us Steven Carrington of *Dynasty* (who was, while groundbreaking in the fact that he declared himself gay and was a significant part of the show in the main cast, but still had relationships with females), late seventies offered to us more gay characters than was expected.

Early eighties, by contrast, seemed to be more conservative in showing gays. It wasn't until the late eighties that *Roseanne* and its cavalcade of gay and lesbian characters were introduced again to the top 20 rankings. In terms of portrayal, it is very interesting that most of the characters that are gay and lesbian are also appearing in light-hearted comedy shows. There were also few other shows, but *Roseanne* was the single show with the more “significant” gay characters. *Roseanne* also gave us more gay characters than any other show previously had. I would not, however, say that the gay and lesbian characters in *Roseanne* were *much* more significant than the gay and lesbian characters from the shows in the 1970's.

The Nineties, on the other hand, seemed to be going through some sort of lesbian renaissance – shows like *Roseanne* and *Ellen* were very popular TV shows, with more lesbians appearing (or appearing more prominently) than gays. *Ellen* was also very substantial in the fact that it was the first show to have the show's title character as lesbian. Ellen DeGeneres' coming out on *20/20* in 1997 was also when Ellen's character on the TV show came out in the famous “Puppy Episode”. This created entire social phenomenon that was social, political, and economical: “JCPenney has tapped DeGeneres as its spokeswoman and supported its decision even when One Million Moms, a ‘pro-family advocacy’ group, threatened to boycott the national retail chain for refusing to fire her. In 1996, a Gallup poll showed that the public approval rating for gay marriage was 27 percent. It is more than 50 percent today. And there are now 34 shows featuring gay characters in leading and supporting roles -- not including reality TV -- compared

to only 11 shows in 1997” (Adhikari and Francis, 2012). *Ellen* created a social impact that was unstoppable in the late 90’s, which continues to impact things today. Other gay nineties shows include *Wings* and *Veronica’s Closet* (at least in the later seasons). Our nineties data confirms Becker’s (2006) proposal that gay and lesbian representations increased in the nineties.

It is also important to notice the *race* of all these gay and lesbian characters as well, I think. Up until *Spin City*, there were hardly any gay and lesbian of color in the top 20 shows. Although we had a minor recurring character in *ER* who was Asian and gay, it was not until *Spin City* that a significant (black) gay character was represented. It is also surprising that incredibly popular show like *ER* had a main lesbian doctor character (Dr. Weaver) and shows like *NYPD Blue*, which depict “macho” jobs like police officers depict lesbian and gay characters (albeit as recurring roles, rather than main roles). If the 80’s were silent, the 90’s were truly “the gay 90’s”.

As we shift into the millennium, one major show is clearly noticeable about gay issues. If nineties were the “lesbian renaissance”, the early 2000’s were the gay equivalent to it. While 1999-2000 cycle shows that shows with gays on them dropped a bit, we find that starting in 2001, there are significantly more shows with gay characters that made it up to the top 20 list. *Will and Grace* was the breakthrough in the early 2000’s, in terms of having not one, but two main characters portrayed as gay. However, there are criticisms to the openness of *Will and Grace*’s portrayal of gayness. Salon’s Christopher Kelly states that: “Arguably the even greater sin of *Will & Grace*: It asked gay people to be complicit in their own marginalization, to smilingly accept that straight America is always going to view them as a bit of joke” (2012). Kelly also argued that gays were shown to be too stereotypically “straight”. Furthermore, for a show that targeted “gay characters” to be on the show, this show had a strange lack of lesbians. This is strange, considering that Joe Biden in 2012 cited *Will and Grace* as one of the main factors that “educated” American population about gay marriage. We also see that the later in 2000’s we get and into early 2010’s, the number of lesbians are dwindling. I do not know why

this trend is caused, but it seems the further down the time line we go, the more white, “homonormative” gay characters show up – the most exemplary being the sweet gay couple with adopted Vietnamese child in *Modern Family*. This comes at a cost of less visibility among lesbian characters/contestants. It also is disturbing to see virtually no gays and lesbians of any other race than white, especially in more recent times, although generally, there is more support for gays more recently than not. *If* homonormativity is the answer to this trend, then this may be so because it is the “easier” image for the mainstream media to process and the American public, since the viewer would likely to admit these shallow, simplified versions of gays and lesbians as “acceptable” to broad, general tastes of the public.

I’d also like to note the limits of coding in the thesis as well, as I am explaining the results. There are definitely limits to assessing the importance of a character’s presence on a single TV show. The gay character can be *very significant* either to the plot or the show (i.e., being the main character; like Ellen in *Ellen*), or it could be an occasionally recurring, rather minor characters (like the funny lesbian couple in *Friends*). The chart itself *does not* explain the significance of the gay character in every single show; it just shows the raw numbers of how many shows were with gay and lesbian characters and how many “significant” (main or recurring characters) were present in the show. There are also other limitations.

It is also important to remember that with the expansion of cable TV, there are also limits to the “top 20” TV show rankings, especially going into late 90’s and early 2000’s: Nielsen’s data for the #1 show ratings in 1977 was 31.6%. In 2012 (to early 2013), it is 13.7%. Taken that ratings mean the average audience, “the percent of the universe of households tuned to a TV program during the average minute of the program” (Nielsen), there has been a significant drop in the last 30-odd years with the average audience trend. Less people are tuning in for even the “top rated” Nielsen show. This means that there *can* be more shows with “significant” gay characters with significant number of viewers, but these shows may not be in the top 20 TV



shows by rating. In fact, rating of rank #20 of 2012-2013 broadcasting cycle was 8.4%, which means shows with 8% rating<sup>6</sup>, with its many viewers could still have significant reach while not being in the Top 20. GLADD did also say that 111 scripted LGBT characters are in regular or recurring roles on TV in 2012-2013 broadcasting season, which is a record-high number (Serjeant, 2012). When we take a look at Nielsen’s data and gays on TV, we must have those short comings in mind as well.

*The Tale of Two Cities’ (Papers)*

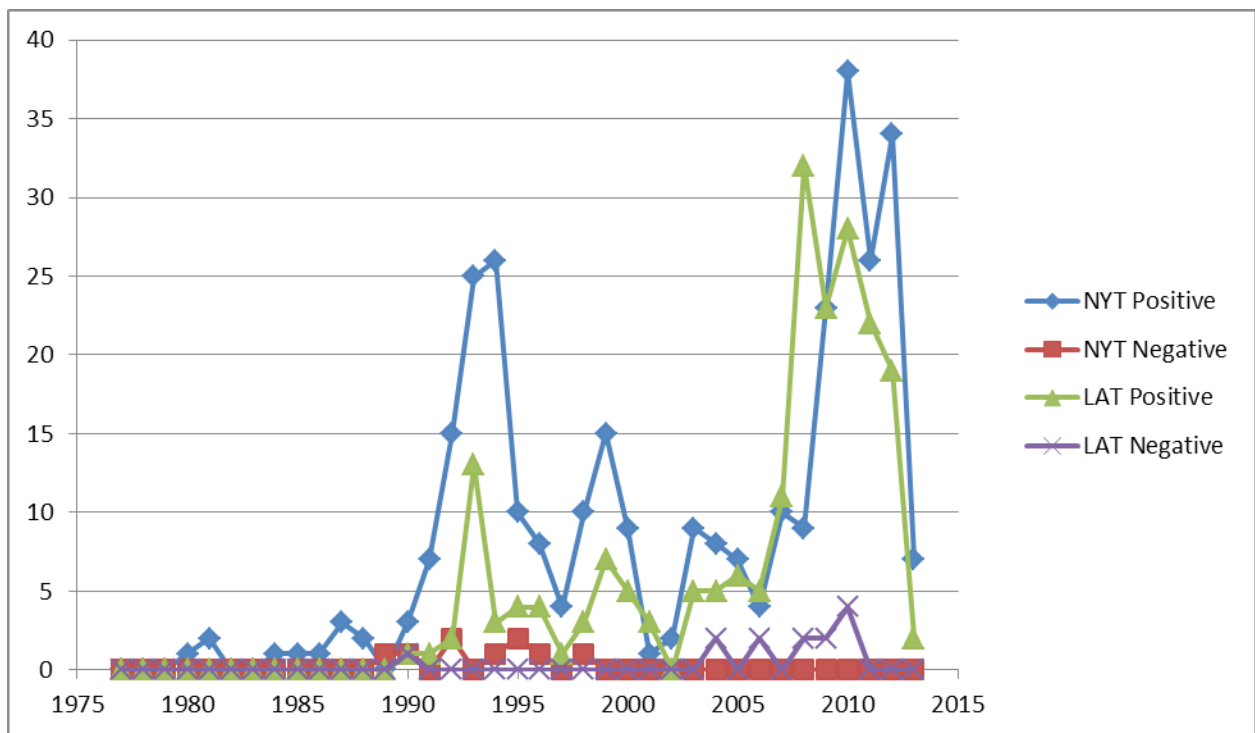


TABLE 8: # of Positive and Negative editorials in LAT and NYT, ProQuest database (2013)

The editorials in both papers are, overall, very favorable of gays; even the ones that I coded as “negative”, were essentially not outright bashing “those gays”, but rather, seemed to take the framing of “supporting the first amendment rights” of those who were taking the anti-gay stance. One thing to note is that NY Times by far had more gay and lesbian articles than the

<sup>6</sup> These data are from the dataset that I received from Nielsen Ratings. Unfortunately, due to the agreement Nielsen Ratings put forth, please note that I am unable to share all the data in full.

LA Times. I do not know if this pattern is true because New York by far has the deeper and historical gay movement, or the Los Angeles is a comparatively more conservative location and thus the readers feel compelled to be less active about the issue of gays and lesbians.

It is true that starting in the nineties, we see a lot more articles than from the eighties and seventies, which are almost completely silent. Although I lacked the time to do this, I wonder how it will contrast with when using the term “homosexual”; it seems like the majority of vocabulary shift is coming at the cusp of the late eighties and early nineties. This seems to be reflecting strategies of interest groups, and this makes sense, because in the eighties and nineties, interest groups also seemed very active, having fairly a high count of editorials mentioning their name (tables 5 and 6).

However, not every single editorial is positive towards gays and lesbians. In times of “big” and “polarizing” events, there are voices of dissent even in the liberal central New York Times. For example, in 1996, when Hawaiian court ruled gay marriage to be legal in Hawaii, Lisa Schriffen, a contributor for NYT commented that “gay marriage is an oxymoron”, something that was completely against American values. Although she says being “tolerant” of gays and lesbians are important, she disagrees about gay marriage.

Another thing to note is that while there are a fewer “negative” editorials about gays and lesbians more recently. Especially in the last 5-6 years there are *no* “negative” editorials for gays and lesbians in either of the newspapers. This maybe a self-selecting effect, as both *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times* tend to be more liberal than the rest of the country. For instance, a letter to the editor by Tom Minnery (2013) from Wall Street Journal states that “Should the court decree gay marriage as federal law, then our politically correct public schools will inculcate the new definition to all children.” This hostile view of gay marriage is possible because Wall Street Journal (WSJ) tends to lean more conservative. In fact, Rauch (2001), who is a gay contributor to WSJ supposed that “Thanks to America's federalist structure and the

existence of the Defense of Marriage Act, the United States is uniquely positioned among all the world's countries to get same-sex marriage right, by neither banning it pre-emptively nor imposing it nationally. Instead, same-sex marriage could be tried in a few places where people feel comfortable with it and believe it would work... Conservatives, of all people, should not be attempting to make it [into a federal issue]. They have been trumpeting the virtues of federalism for years. Here is a particularly compelling opportunity to heed their own wisdom”.

Furthermore, gays and lesbians seem to be a lot more visible in recent years, which can attest to how much national attention they are gathering. Regardless of change in the public opinion itself, one thing for certain is that gays and lesbians are a lot more visible – that by itself can directly affect public opinion. This is part of Downs’ issue-attention cycle. In the seventies, only few people are relatively aware of this issue (presumably only the “experts” or people who are gay themselves) – in fact, it was not until the 1990’s when the issue of gays and lesbians was actively picked up again, making the public “more aware” of the issue. When the issue is more publicized, people can react to it better.

It was only in the early nineties when Clinton brought up the issue of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” (which was a compromise for letting gay and lesbian Americans serving on the military). There were numerous positive discussions surrounding DADT, but there were few discussions about “gay marriage” as well (regarding Hawaiian Supreme Court decisions). Contrary to Downs’ model, though, the issue of DADT, at least, was realized and crystallized into the actual policy of DADT. The second “bump” was in mid to late 2000’s, when the issue of gay marriage came into play – although gay marriage was an issue starting in the early nineties, it came back with vengeance and support of the interest groups (as seen by their incredible amount of spending) and it continues to be in the media’s attention even today.

*The Elites Speak Out*

I observed the country's most powerful elite sources – the Supreme Court Opinions, the State of the Union Addresses, and the two major parties' election year platforms to test out Zaller's theory about elites' influence of public opinion.

### *The Supreme Court's Significance in the Gay Debate*

The reason why I sought out Supreme Court's decisions<sup>7</sup> was based on Rosenberg's hypothesis: can liberal decisions bring about social changes? The answer seems unlikely, based on the review of the cases (and also, Rosenberg's observations, too).

First of all, there are only 6 decisions which specifically relate to "gay rights" and they are all very sporadic until the recent cases.<sup>8</sup> It was hardly one or two per decade. There are only 4 decisions that have been fully heard and decided upon in the time frame 1977 to the present. Supreme Court, by its characteristic, though, does not like to take in similar cases in a relatively short amount of time. This is by its very nature to serve as the ultimate mediator. This means that cases regarding homosexuality may often have been tossed aside, until now. Gay marriages have never come up to the Supreme Court until DOMA case and the California Prop 8 cases.

Although I have operationalized and quantified the data from the Supreme Court decisions, I have to note that it is quite meaningless to do that. Unlike other elite opinions, Supreme Court decisions have heavy policy implications that are real and can largely impact the entire nation; in other words, Obama's support of gay marriages is quite different from Supreme Court's decision of *Lawrence v TX* (2003), because *Lawrence* case actually changed the status of anti-sodomy laws in the US, while Obama's comments did absolutely nothing in terms of public

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<sup>7</sup> For the purposes of this research paper, I took a look at the decisions available on the SCOTUS website.

<sup>8</sup> Bowers v Hardwick (1986), Romer v Evans (1996), Boy Scouts of America v Dale (2000), Lawrence v Texas (2003), and 2 to be determined cases in 2013 (Windsor v United States, Perry v Brown)

policy nor public opinion (according to Gallup poll). I will discuss about presidential influence in detail later.

### *The Supreme Decision*

Although it may seem a bit counterintuitive and useless to graph the Supreme Court's decision for our purposes, the graph is presented to make an illustrative point about the lack of Supreme Court action regarding gays and lesbians. Supreme Court by its very nature does not frequently make decisions on a single issue (i.e. Gay rights issue).

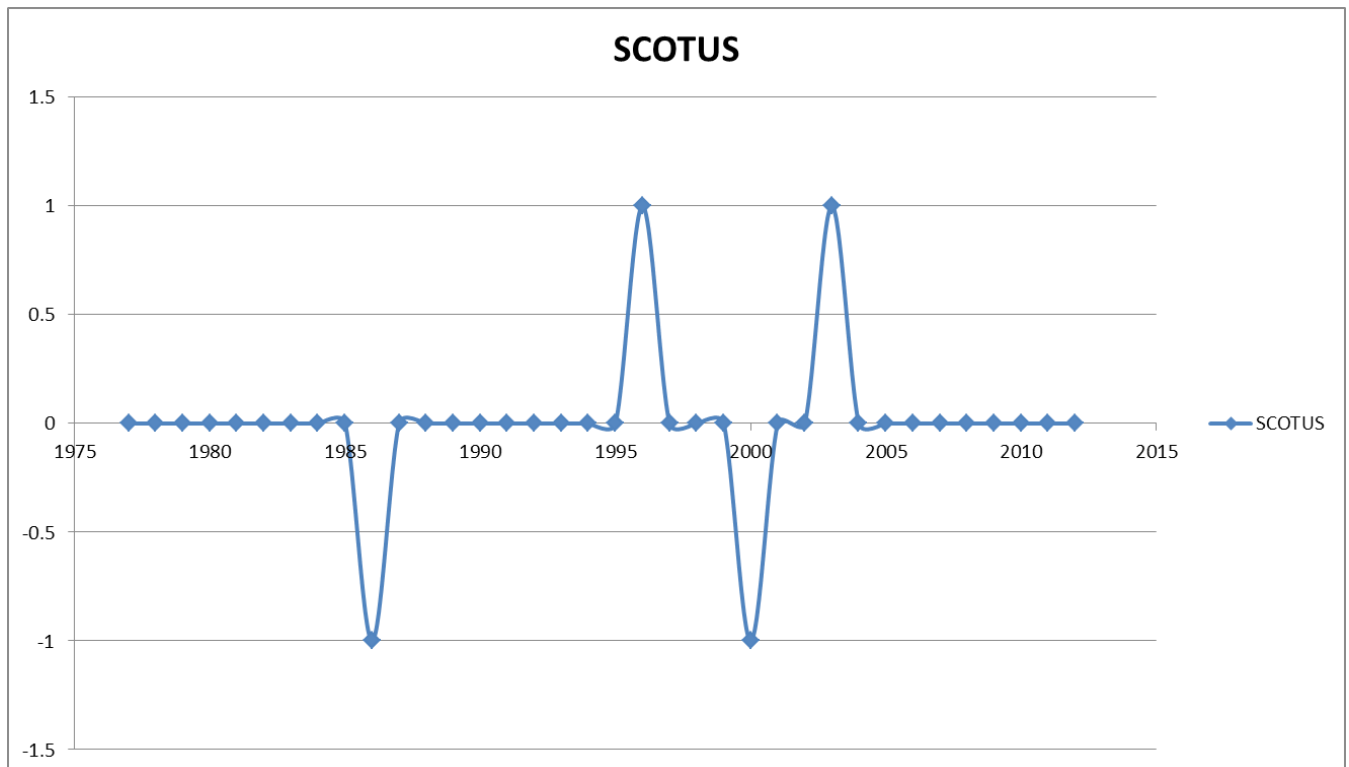


Table 9: SCOTUS decisions

The Supreme Court's decision and impact have been quite debatable. While *Lawrence v Texas* (2003) decision is viewed by some in the LGBT community as "a central actor in society's most fundamental and cultural disputes and has been the final arbiter... on the most contested and divisive issue" (Pedriana, 2009), it is also true that this decision also comes after *Boy Scouts of America v Dale* (2000). The former case legalizes "homosexual sodomy", while the other upholds the Boys Scouts of America's right to forbid gays from participating. Out of the four

cases that has been decided, there are two that are “for gays” and two that are “against gays” – it’s quite the mixed signal, especially considering that the cases on and after the new millennium, the public approval of gays were over the half mark.

The Supreme Court’s decisions, then, one can reasonably assume, did not have *as much* of an impact on the public opinion as Zaller and other queer scholars might have thought previously.

We are still waiting to hear back, with 2 pending cases in SCOTUS at this moment. The recent cases’ decisions would better suggest the impact of verdicts on forming gay-friendly decisions or not. The pattern, in general, seems to hold true, though: because the law is changed to benefit the legality of gay and lesbian identity, there are more people who believe in gay and lesbian identity’s legality, and internal belief is reinforced to cooperate the belief of gay and lesbian normativity, which leads to more changes to benefit gays and lesbians (and the circle starts again).

Although I did not deal with any other lower courts’ decisions, a recent wave of gay rights decisions in this country in the state supreme courts and the federal circuit courts seem to suggest that at least lower courts are very engaged in the idea that gay marriages are Constitutional right. In this way, they may be leading the public opinion – or are they? The answer is, they do not, because Public Opinion shift and Interest Group mobilizations has long been a staple in the American political scape and they seem to affect policy a lot faster than the Supreme Court decisions. In other words, the public opinion shifted (at least to the half-way point) *before* any Supreme Court decisions; this is also true about Interest Group mobilization. Interest Groups were stirred *before* any Supreme Court action. The public opinion may have been impacted by high-profile lower court decisions, though.

Therefore, I agree with Rosenberg’s assessment that courts do not affect the liberal change of policies – it’s something other than just the courts, like public opinion, which may lead to court’s friendlier decisions.

*Ladies and Gentlemen, The President of United States*

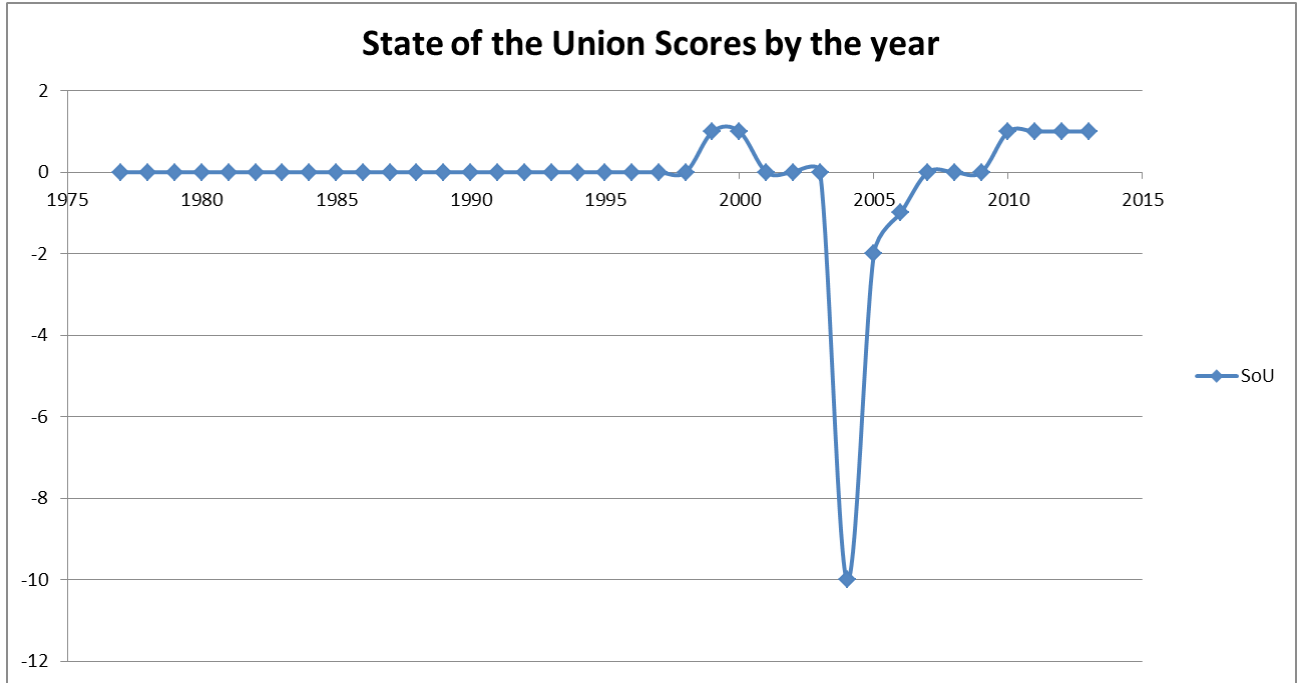


Table 10: State of the Union scores by the Year

The presidential State of the Union addresses speaks volumes about the president’s vision of America and his goals. Generally, these addresses are suited for more appeal to the public, a nationwide audience, which means they’re less likely to harbor “more extremist” views. George W. Bush had a very clear objective, though, to oppose gay marriages and makes it very clear in his speeches (we can see that his comments were by far the most “negative” for gays. However, these speeches largely do not seem to be “leading” any public opinion – rather, they are extremely reactionary to the events that happened in the prior year.

For example, Bush’s 2004 speech about “activist judges” and gay marriage (and having an amendment to ban gay marriage) is clearly a reactionary movement from the 2003 gay marriages in Massachusetts (their courts gave a go on the “m-word” for gays) and Californian

gay marriages. President Obama's pro-gay remarks also came from his promise for Don't Ask, Don't Tell's repeal, which was a large part of his presidential campaign in 2008. However, the presidential state of the Union addresses, even from the Democrats, seem to be rather lukewarm until the most recent State of the Union address, in which Obama made a very powerful remark about the gay civil rights movement.

Although, one should not discredit presidential rhetoric too much: although the president himself may not move the entire country's public opinion by himself, he can bring up a national discourse about the subject he speaks about in his State of the Union speeches. The president can also pursue policy objectives with the speeches as well (for example, Obama actually *did* pursue the end of Don't Ask, Don't Tell), so he *can* have policy leverage, too, and have an impact on the public opinion that way. George Edwards (2006), however, suggests that the President has very little impact on public opinion: "In the process, they make numerous inferences regarding the effect of the president's rhetoric on public opinion. However, scholars of presidential rhetoric virtually never provide evidence for their inferences about the president's effect."

#### *Elites on Campaign Platforms*

Party platforms, in general, have less appeal to the public, but they possess more appeal to the bases; so would expect this to be quite more opinionated than presidential State of the Union addresses; although, depending on which presidency, and what kind of campaign that they have been running (was this for an incumbent or a challenger?), this actually may change.



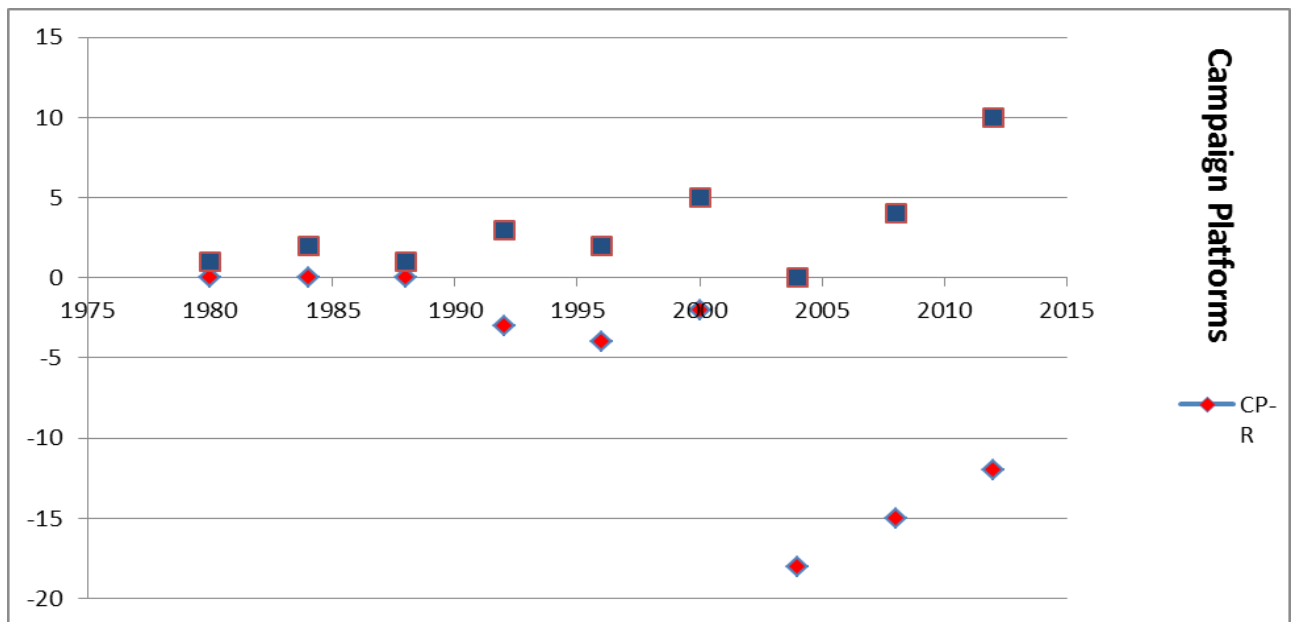


TABLE 11: Campaign Platform Scores by Campaign Year

*Democrats*

Aside from the party color flip, progressively through the years, one may notice their support for gays to be increasing; however, in times of popular public voices against gays and lesbians (or in times of general polarity around the topic) they seem reticent about the issue, quite unwilling to actually speak for or against the topic. This is quite true in 2004, when they were actively against gay marriage. Eight years later, they were singing a different tune, because Obama “evolved” on the issue. However, there are quite lukewarm statements, like the hesitancy towards gay marriage until recent 2012 election. I think they are specifically targeting the fact that there is a warmer climate around the topic of gays in general in recent public opinion polls.

*Republicans*

Republicans seem to generally disapprove of gays, and this has been quite the consistent topic, even from the early 80’s. Strangely enough, they frame the gay question as the one of “sexual preference”, not using the word “sexual orientation”; they do talk about a “choice” in sexuality, which coincidentally, does match up with fluidity and construct of sexuality (which goes against “essentialist” or “born this way” version of sexuality), but I do not think that they

were using the term in such way to express some sort of queer theory and practice. The Republicans in Table 11 clearly shows a great disinterest in gay and lesbian issues even in 1990s, when DADT issues were brought up. Their extreme rhetoric only began in 2004. They reacted very strongly against gay marriage issues in 2003 (California and Massachusetts in 2003 had offered gay marriage in their states or parts of their states) and it can be seen from their highly negative scoring on their platforms in the years which gay marriage has been a controversy (which is every campaign since the 2004 race). Only in 2012 are they slowly becoming a little less negative towards gay and lesbians, as the public opinion rapidly builds up in favor of gay marriage. The Republican elites, than, seem to be *following* the public opinion rather than leading it!

### *Republicrats*

It is very interesting to observe that both Democrats and Republicans follow very similar trajectory (although Republicans go “more negative” than the Democrats) when it comes to issues of gay and lesbians – a trajectory very similar to the rising public opinion. Strangely enough, then, the elites in this case are not leading the public opinion; rather it is another sight of the elite synchronizing with the public opinion, with the public opinion leading the elites, not the other way around. The only difference in this case is that the Republican line is still down in the negatives opinion area and the Democrats have been only ever-so-slightly more positive about gays and lesbians. If the Republicans start warming up to gays and lesbians even more in the future, that could probably mean that the Republicans are simply following the positive public opinion around gays and lesbians that have been gaining more momentum.

### *The case for Elite Opinion Leading the Way?*

Although Zaller had claimed that elites ultimately lead in public opinion, my analysis of these certain data seems to claim something quite different; the public opinion seems to be leading elite opinion. However, my analysis and data only reaches the supreme political elite in

the nation, not accounting for congressional members or local politicians, which do seem to gauge local feelings about the gays more accurately than national political elites do.

Furthermore, my data only analyzes certain presidential rhetoric in State of the Union addresses, and does not account for any other speeches the president may do either on the campaign trail or elsewhere in a special broadcast; there are also shortages when it comes to . With these shortcomings in mind, we must assess if elites do affect national public opinion.

## *Chapter 5: I Now Pronounce You, DV and IV's... Divorced?*

Thus far, we have looked at both the change of attitude towards gay and lesbians in America – regarding the legality of those relationships and marriage of gays and lesbians – and what factors – interest groups, media, and elite opinion – may have contributed to that change. In this chapter, we will look at the relationship between the change in public opinion and the possible factors.<sup>9</sup>

### *Public Opinion and Interest Groups*

When compared with one another, we can see that interest group activity had no direct correlation with the public opinion. In fact, favorable public opinion (Tables 1 and 2) towards gays increased even with lower spending on public awareness/education and lower mentions of the interest groups in the media. There is absolutely no linear relationship between the public opinion and interest group spending or interest group mentions. When the results of interest groups bottomed out from the media, the public opinion did not dip with them. Instead, it kept moving up. Although HRC's spending is quite high, there seems to be no direct correlation with high spending and high exposure to Interest Groups.

### *Public Opinion and Media*

Entertainment media had a boom in the early 2000's with regards to gay and lesbian characters/persons, while the newspaper editorials had a burst in interest to gays and lesbians in the early 90's and late 2000's (corresponding with the current events of the times – Don't Ask Don't Tell and gay marriage, respectively). All the while, the public opinion had been steering closer to more positive outcomes with 2012 opinion on gay marriage hitting as high as 50% and

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<sup>9</sup> To simplify the process of finding the tables, I will list the pages where you can find the tables: Tables 1 and 2 are public opinion tables (pages 20 and 23); Tables 3-5(pages 33 and 34) refer to interest group charts (spending and media mentions); Tables 6 and 7 (pages 36 and 37) are TV shows and gays and lesbian appearances; Table 8 is the number of editorials regarding gays and lesbians in editorials (page 41); Table 9 (page 45) is SCOTUS decisions; Table 10 (page 47) is State of the Union; Table 11 (page 49) is campaign platforms.

going towards higher numbers as we speak, even as the media representations has been going down, at least at the top 20 programs level since their last peak in 2004. As for the editorials, there has been consistent positive pitch since the eighties, but the positive peaks in 1993-1994 and 2010-2012 did not really correspond to a dramatic rise in public opinion. There seems to be no media impact on public opinion.

### *Elite Opinion v Public Opinion*

The factor that correlates *the most* with public opinion is elite opinion. Although the public does not sway quite dramatically as, say, former President Bush's extreme negativity towards the gays and lesbians in 2004, there was a small dip in recognizing gays and lesbians' relationship legality (it went from 48% in July 2003 to 46% in January 2004). Considering that presidential rhetoric mostly reflects current events (or at least, reactions to the top social and political issues of the day), the fact that public opinion is not swayed by the current events (when expressed through editorials) is very surprising.

The Campaign platforms also correspond (party wise) very similarly to presidential rhetoric shown in State of the Union addresses as well. However, the campaign platforms do not seem to be *leading* the public opinion as much as *following* it – for example, the Republican party platforms did not seem very compromising about the gay and lesbian issue up until 2012 elections, where it took a lesser negative dip than in the 2004 election (from closer to being “-20” to closer to “-10”). Since the public opinion is consistently growing since the seventies (with the exception of dip explained by AIDS crisis in the eighties), the Republican sway towards less negative framing of gays and lesbians seem to be reflecting on *following* the public opinion. The same goes for Democrats as well. Although they were initially lukewarm to gays and lesbians in the elections cycles (from the 1980 elections on), it was not until 2012 elections that they looked very favorably towards gays and lesbians (with a score of “10”). Again, both parties seem intent on following public opinion, rather than making it.

The only elite opinion that doesn't quite follow the trend is the Supreme Court of the United States' opinion in 2000, *Dale v Boy Scouts of America*, which was decided against gay population's participation in BSA, even after approval of gay and lesbian relationship was over the half mark.

Another thing to note is that one must be careful not to overstate the presidential impact as much; after all, as Edwards (2006) has said, there is a limit to presidential rhetoric affecting the public opinion and while Bush's rhetoric dip was with the public opinion rhetoric dip, there was not much sway, either way.

### *Conclusions*

Either there is a lagging effect showing up – that is, when the combined effect of interest groups, media, and the elite opinion impacts the public opinion *after* everything has occurred, or there is hardly any impact of the independent variables to the public opinion, as we have explored. Well... this is interesting. We will sum this up in the *real* conclusion.

## Chapter 6: A Gay Farewell

### *So, the Conclusions Have Been Reached*

We started by asking the question, “What can change the public opinion regarding gays and lesbians?” We looked at three factors, interest groups, media, and elite opinion. While I initially thought all three had some sort of effect, when put to the test, none of the data seem to push for that conclusion. Instead, we have seen that perhaps public opinion may have even lead elite opinion on gays and lesbians. Although previous researches have overemphasized the impact of media and interest groups on the making of public opinion, this research has shown something to the contrary – the public opinion does not seem to follow the media nor the interest groups.

The public opinion of gays and lesbians *may be* impacted by all three of the factors (interest groups, media, and elite opinion), or maybe impacted in a minimal way. There *may be* a lagging effect, as well, since the public opinion has slowly seen a general upwards trend, despite the fact that there were spikes in the media (both entertainment and editorials) and interest groups in different place. The trend follows *one year’s* (2004) presidential rhetoric, to some degree, but the public opinion does not do a quite the dramatic sway as, say, the president’s own rhetoric (Bush has strongly anti-gay sentiments, but the public did not droop as dramatically as his anti-gayness was). Similarly, HRC and Lambda Legal spending a lot of money to educate the public about gays and lesbians did not seem to completely sway the public, either.

What remains as a mystery is *why or how* can a single person change his or her opinion on a certain subject. One may never know, unless one has a psychic ability to read other people’s minds, despite the existence of constant streaming of SNS, or is equipped with some grim machine straight out of Orwellian dystopia that manipulates people’s minds. After all, it took Senator Portman (a Republican senator) two years after his son’s coming out to be comfortable with the idea of supporting marriage equality publicly (Bash, 2013). When it comes to gay and

lesbian relationships and gay and lesbian politics, especially, the personal *is* the public. A relationship between private individuals is almost like spectator sports for the American political arena. Public opinion runs wildly about said interpersonal relationships. Personal relationships and experiences of individual make *all* the difference for formulation of personal opinion which gets translated into public opinion.

Consider this: 2009 Gallup poll showed that knowing someone who is gay or lesbian will change a person's point of view on issues of gays and lesbians. 67% of people who personally knew a gay or lesbian person approved the legality of gay and lesbian relationships, while only 40% people who did not know any gay or lesbian approved of gay and lesbian relationships (Morales, 2009).

So, in reality, perhaps because the media and the presidential rhetoric have been warming up for gays and lesbians, there have been more gays and lesbians coming out, which in turn, affect other Americans. The "out" gays and lesbians impact their surroundings, which in turn affect the public opinion. This may not be a one-way causal street – it may be a case for two-way causality for the formulation of public opinion. The fact that the public opinion has been steadily warming up *does* mean that the cultural awareness and *visibility* of gays and lesbians really do matter for public opinion.

#### *Another Plausible Explanation?*

Although I did not talk in great detail about age groups of the correspondents of the public opinion data actively in my analysis, a very real possibility is the age of the respondents that could affect the opinion on gays and lesbians. Fiorina (2012) already explored that the younger the people answering the question about acceptance of gays and lesbians, the more likely that they would be friendlier to the gays and lesbians. *Culture War?* suggests that the younger the respondent, the more likely he or she was likely to answer in favor of gays and lesbians. Fiorina states that "younger Americans are definitely more tolerant of homosexuals and



more accepting of homosexual rights than older Americans” (123). Pew Research center research<sup>10</sup> in 2013 confirms this – 74% of millennials (18-32) accept gays and lesbians, while only 42% of silent generation (68-85) are accepting. This is even more dramatic when it comes to the gay marriage question –70% of the millennials are accepting, while only 31% of the silent generation is. The generational trend seems to be: younger the person, more “liberal” they are likely to be more accepting of gays and lesbians. Thus, as the older generation passes away, the population has been growing more progressive, and younger generations are answering the same questions – therefore, the entire public opinion becomes friendlier towards gays and lesbians.

### *Homonormative Visions v Queer Visions*

My research, from the point of view of queer literature, leaves a lot to be desired (from a regular point of view, it also leaves a lot to be desired, but it will be talked about in the next section). The very question of marriage itself is a very heteronormative institution, complete with biases of a heteronormative cultural assumption. “Heteronormative forms of intimacy are supported... in marriage and family law...” (Berlant and Warner, 1998). Simply applying it to the gays and lesbians does not make this institution queer, because it is simply taking the normative institution to apply it to gays and lesbians. In effect, it’s making gays and lesbians “blend” with society a little better, but are not wholly inclusive of the margins (i.e., transgendered people). The concept of homonormativity is wholly at work in this case. In other words, these movements for marriage equality, among others, the gay and lesbian culture drown in capitalist and heteronormative framework.

But are these homonormative institutions the *only* gay issue, especially at a time when a member of LGBT community can be fired openly for just having that identity in? “There is no federal law that consistently protects LGBT individuals from employment discrimination; it

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<sup>10</sup> You can find both the Pew tables in the appendix section.

remains legal in 29 states to discriminate based on sexual orientation, and in 34 states to do so based on gender identity or expression. As a result, LGBT people face serious discrimination in employment, including being fired, being denied a promotion, and experiencing harassment on the job” (HRC). Although HRC has made it their main mission to achieve federal gay marriage, their voices for federal (and state) job discrimination has been not as well heard. So, marriage is not really the *only* rights issue that HRC can focus on, but yet it is considered one of the main ones. The labor discrimination laws are shocking at a time when even in 2008, the answer for “In general, do you think homosexuals should or should not have equal rights in terms of job opportunities?” was 89% in favor of equal opportunities for all (Gallup).

Although these are not exactly queer ways of approaching things (in fact, I am using homonormative, capitalist conception of labor in framework for my research and definition of “progress” for gay and lesbian rights), it does approach things from generally “broader” population. I am guilty of marginalizing the margins further, but for the sake of this short research, it was a way of conveniently measuring “progress” (which *might* be a queer regression). I would like to see a study which could measure queerness and queer perception of queer rights; it would be an interesting model of political science.

### *Shortcomings*

Although I did everything to best of my capabilities, I had a lot of shortcomings as well, especially within regards to collecting and interpreting the data that I have, due to the lack of time, resources, and my ability. The data I have collected are rather lacking, especially in the interest group department; so, if a future study could focus on expansive fiscal and track the membership growth of the interest group, it would be helpful. Furthermore, if a future study could do a deeper presentation of link between the media and the interest group (perhaps jutting out to television new media), that would also further clarify the issue of the day.

The media portion, unfortunately did not explore the expansive internet, which could have built a stronger case for this thesis. It would be interesting to see an analysis of the internet (since the late 90's) and the TV news media from the 1977's on, about the rhetoric and images of gays and lesbians. It would illuminate a lot more about *why* younger audiences are more receptive to gay and lesbian rights than older audiences are.

The elite opinion section could benefit from analysis of other politicians, as well – congressional members often are very vocal about gay and lesbian issues which could possibly impact their constituents. It would also help to do a broader analysis of presidential rhetoric aside from the State of the Union addresses – Clinton, Bush and Obama said far more other remarks about gays and lesbians than what they mentioned in their State of the Union addresses.

For the analysis part, if there could have been Granger causality to link all the factors, the case could have been stronger in showing a causal relationship among all the independent variables and the dependent variable.

For the collection and analysis of the data, it would also help to have at least few other coders. It was not only a daunting project, but it was also very tiring and could have benefitted from another coder or two. I feel that it would have made my data stronger, because the coding would have been more reliable.

#### *Ideas for Future Look at Gays and Lesbians in America*

If, someone down the road has more time, money, resources, and capabilities, it would be interesting to expand the study to other marginalized populations as well, especially with transgender, bisexual, and queer people of color. It would also be interesting to measure what image of gays/lesbians the public has when they are asked a question about what their perception of gays and lesbians are. Sometimes, image *can* impact a huge part of a person's belief. It also may be possible just to do an analysis of *nothing* but TV programming and the representation of all spectrums of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Asexual, and Allies (LGBTQAA);

that could possibly illuminate a lot about what made media depict LGBT population as it has, and perhaps we can better see *why* the images of gay changed over the years.

#### *Ideas for Application Elsewhere*

I also think it would be interesting to do a political analysis for gays and lesbians (or other minorities) in other countries, applying a similar structure to the study. Especially in conservative Asian countries which tend to be more “sexually conservative”, at least from the western cultural point of view, I think it would also be interesting to see the exposure of gays and lesbians in such countries. For example, South Korea has often very polarized reactions to gays and lesbians on-screen and elsewhere; it is also a wonder what the public opinion is of gays and lesbians (and other sexual/identity minorities) in other countries; it would be an interesting exercise.

#### *Why this All Matters...*

Lastly, even with all the shortcomings, I'd like to remind all about why this research matters. There has been no other research, as far as I am aware, that brought all three variables of interest groups, media, and the elite opinion to find a possible cause of what changes the public opinion. Mine is a rather simple chronology; there is room for improvements, but the idea is the same. It matters because *people* matter; what others think about “the others” *can* impact the marginalized population's lives, often in ways unimaginable to the “majority”. This is not a simple story about American acceptance of gays and lesbians; in effect, it can be the story of anyone, with any condition, at any point in anyone's life that he or she is pushed to the fringe area of the minority.

There are so many other stories that this research can tap into. The potential for that is huge. I can only wait to see what the future holds.



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Wilson at UC: The Smell of Presidential Politics; Back Off, Governor--Gay Benefits are an Administrative Issue. (1997, Nov 21). *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/421321798?accountid=14496>

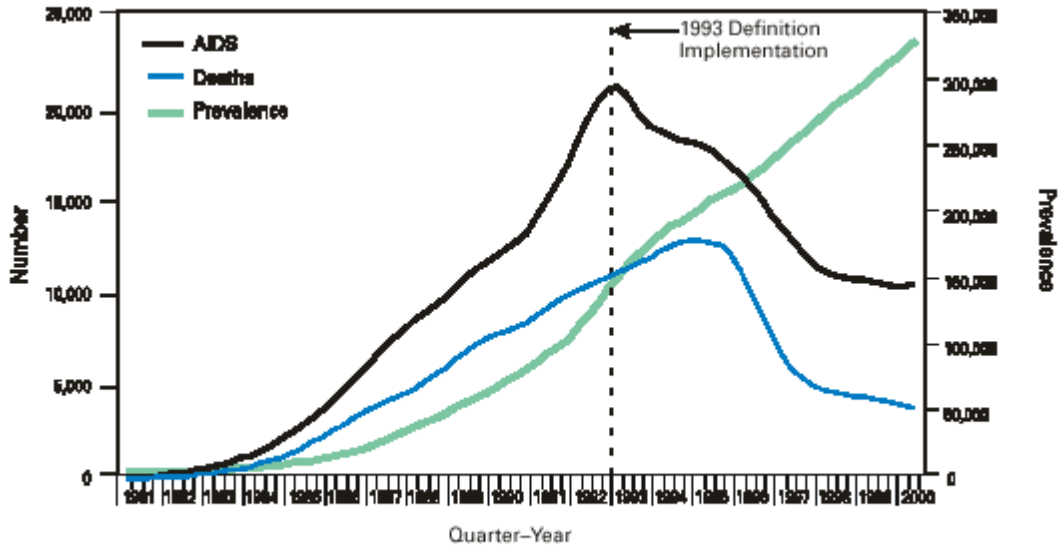
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Appendix

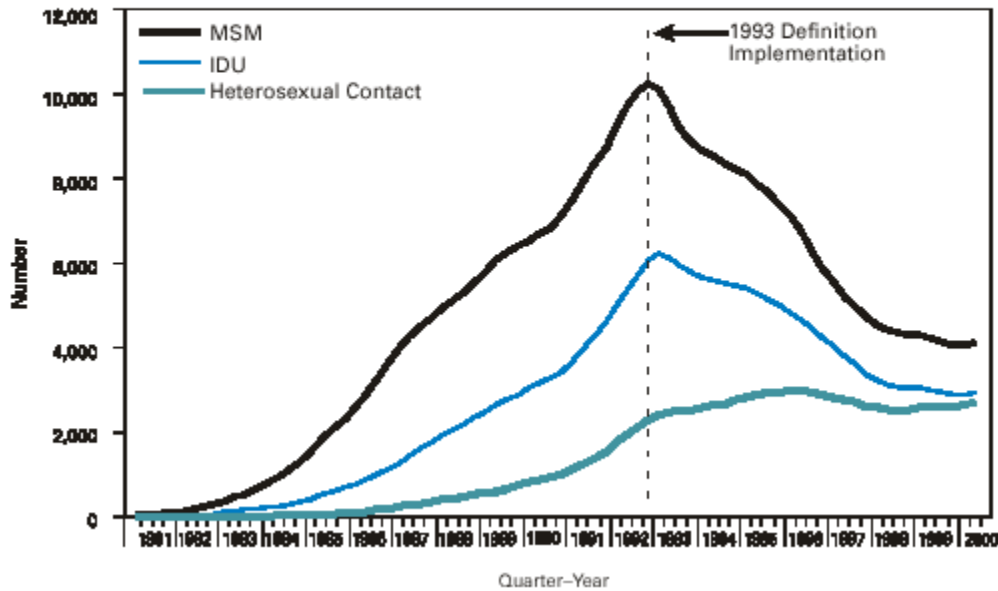
I. The Data for AIDS deaths (courtesy of CDC, 2001)

**FIGURE 1. Estimated AIDS incidence\*, deaths, and prevalence, by quarter-year of diagnosis/death — United States, 1981–2000**



\* Adjusted for reporting delays.

**FIGURE 2. Number of AIDS cases among men who have sex with men (MSM), injection drug users (IDU), and persons exposed through heterosexual contact, by quarter-year of diagnosis — United States, 1981–2000**



II. Editorial Section: *Addendum – Coding Examples for Media (Newspaper)*

Negative coding:

Gay Marriage, an Oxymoron

Lisa Schiffren was a speechwriter for Vice President Dan Quayle.

As study after study and victim after victim testify to the social devastation of the sexual revolution, easy divorce and out-of-wedlock motherhood, marriage is fashionable again. And parenthood has transformed many baby boomers into advocates of bourgeois norms.

Indeed, we have come so far that the surprise issue of the political season is whether homosexual "marriage" should be legalized. The Hawaii courts will likely rule that **gay** marriage is legal, and other states will be required to accept those marriages as valid.

Considering what a momentous change this would be -- a radical redefinition of society's most fundamental institution -- there has been almost no real debate. This is because the premise is unimaginable to many, and the forces of political correctness have descended on the discussion, raising the cost of opposition. But one may feel the same affection for one's homosexual friends and relatives as for any other, and be genuinely pleased for the happiness they derive from relationships, while opposing **gay** marriage for principled reasons.

"Same-sex marriage" is inherently incompatible with our culture's understanding of the institution. Marriage is essentially a lifelong compact between a man and woman committed to sexual exclusivity and the creation and nurture of offspring. For most Americans, the marital union -- as distinguished from other sexual relationships and legal and economic partnerships -- is imbued with an aspect of holiness. Though many of us are uncomfortable using religious language to discuss social and political issues, Judeo-Christian morality informs our view of family life.

Though it is not polite to mention it, what the Judeo-Christian tradition has to say about homosexual unions could not be clearer. In a diverse, open society such as ours, tolerance of homosexuality is a necessity. But for many, its practice depends on a trick of cognitive dissonance that allows people to believe in the Judeo-Christian moral order while accepting, often with genuine regard, the different lives of homosexual acquaintances. That is why, though homosexuals may believe that they are merely seeking a small expansion of the definition of marriage, the majority of Americans perceive this change as a radical deconstruction of the institution.

Some make the conservative argument that making marriage a civil right will bring stability, an end to promiscuity and a sense of fairness to **gay** men and women. But they miss the point. Society cares about stability in heterosexual unions because it is critical for raising healthy children and transmitting the values that are the basis of our culture.

Whether homosexual relationships endure is of little concern to society. That is also true of most childless marriages, harsh as it is to say. Society has wisely chosen not to differentiate between marriages, because it would require meddling into the motives and desires of everyone who applies for a license.

In traditional marriage, the tie that really binds for life is shared responsibility for the children. (A small fraction of **gay** couples may choose to raise children together, but such children are offspring of one partner and an outside contributor.) What will keep **gay** marriages together when individuals tire of each other?

Similarly, the argument that legal marriage will check promiscuity by **gay** males raises the question of how a "piece of paper" will do what the threat of AIDS has not. **Lesbians** seem to have little problem with monogamy, or the rest of what constitutes "domestication," despite the absence of official status.

Finally, there is the so-called fairness argument. The Government gives tax benefits, inheritance rights and employee benefits only to the married. Again, these financial benefits exist to help couples raise children. Tax reform is an effective way to remove distinctions among earners.

If the American people are interested in a radical experiment with same-sex marriages, then subjecting it to the political process is the right route. For a court in Hawaii to assume that it has the power to radically redefine marriage is a stunning abuse of power. To present homosexual marriage as a *fait accompli*, without national debate, is a serious political error. A society struggling to recover from 30 years of weakened norms and broken families is not likely to respond gently to having an institution central to most people's lives altered.

Illustration

Drawing

Illustration

Word count: 711

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**Positive Coding:**

## Equal Protections for All State's own high court says Colorado can't restrict gay rights: [Home Edition]

[Los Angeles Times \(pre-1997 Full text\)](#) [Los Angeles, Calif] 21 July 1993: 6.

Announced, ironically, on the same day as President Clinton's pragmatic but unsatisfying compromise on gays in the military, a ruling by the Colorado Supreme Court stands in affirmation of the full rights that gay Americans should enjoy. The ruling, handed down Monday, is likely to nullify that state's narrow-minded amendment that restricts gay rights.

"Fundamental rights may not be submitted to a vote," the court wrote, upholding a lower court injunction on the measure, known as Amendment 2. That measure, passed by Colorado voters last November, would have rescinded local and state laws prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. It also would have amended the state constitution to bar any additional legal protections. As such, Amendment 2 constituted an open and shameful invitation to deny rights to gay men and lesbians.

For that reason, the Colorado Supreme Court correctly said that the initiative, "to a reasonable probability," violates the U.S. Constitution's 14th Amendment, which prohibits states from denying equal protection under the laws to anyone. Voting 6 to 1, the court held that "no other group's ability to participate in the political process is restricted and encumbered in a like manner. Such a structuring of the political process is contrary to the notion that the concept of 'We the People' visualizes."

While an actual ruling on the amendment's constitutionality will come when a civil lawsuit goes to trial in October, as a practical matter Amendment 2 has sustained what is probably a fatal blow.

We sincerely hope so.

Word count: 251

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## **Wilson at UC: the Smell of Presidential Politics; Back off, governor--gay benefits are an administrative issue: [Home Edition]**

[Los Angeles Times](#) [Los Angeles, Calif] 21 Nov 1997: B, 8:1.

It's unfortunate that the only time Gov. Pete Wilson seems to exhibit much interest in the affairs of the University of California is when it might promote his personal political agenda, specifically his obvious interest in running for president.

Each time Wilson has appeared at a UC regents meeting during his second term, it has concerned an emotional issue that he had arranged to come before the board, of which he is an ex officio member. The last time, it was his controversial and successful move to abolish affirmative action in university admissions, hiring and contracting. Now the question is whether to extend health and housing benefits to domestic partners of gay UC employees.

The governor used the affirmative action issue to launch an abortive campaign to win the Republican presidential nomination. Now it's apparent Wilson is battling the gay benefits proposal in an attempt to appeal to the GOP's conservative wing as he ponders another possible run for the presidency.

Whatever his reason may be, Wilson is wrong on this issue, which is scheduled to go before the regents at a meeting at UCLA today. The system's governing board should reject his proposal and grant the benefits as a matter of equity, as have many other major private and public universities and American corporations.

This is an administrative issue that should have been left to UC President Richard C. Atkinson. Atkinson was prepared to bring same-sex couples into the benefits program. But with the governor's encouragement, Regent John Davies, a longtime Wilson associate, insisted that the matter be decided by the board.

Wilson has two major arguments against extending the benefits: that such a decision would ripple through the rest of state government at tremendous cost and that it would undermine the legal status of marriage and consequently family life. Neither is convincing.

More compelling is the fact that Wilson has been taking pains to appease the Christian Coalition and other segments of the GOP's conservative wing whose support is essential in Republican primaries. They have always been suspicious of Wilson because of his backing of abortion rights and his professed support for gay rights.

There's nothing wrong with Wilson attempting to fill his political sails. But it is definitely inappropriate to use the University of California and its governing body to that end.

Word count: 386

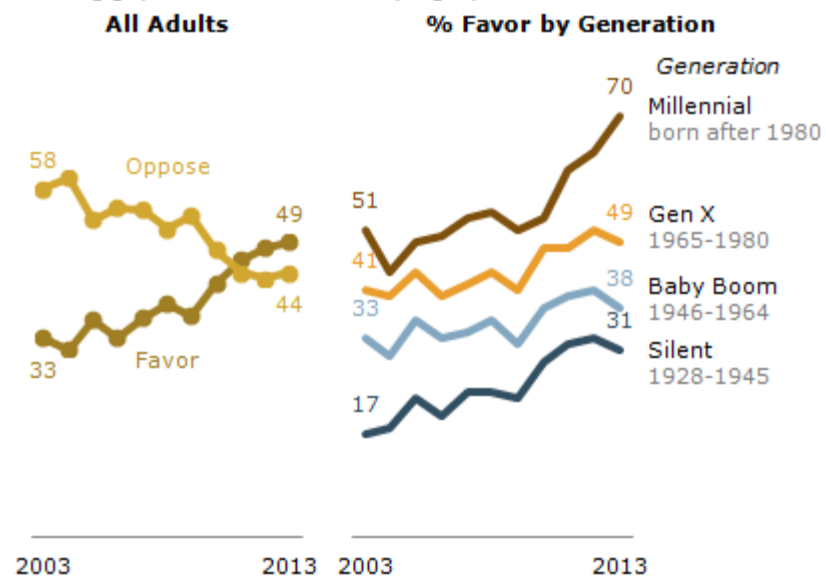
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### **III. Pew Research Data Tables (2013)**

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## Growing Support for Same-Sex Marriage

Allowing gays and lesbians to marry legally



PEW RESEARCH CENTER March 13-17, 2013.  
2003-2012 figures based on all surveys conducted in each year.

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## Growing Percentage Says Homosexuality Should Be Accepted by Society

<i>Homosexuality should be accepted or discouraged by society...</i>	June 2003		March 2013		Change in
	Accepted	Dis-couraged	Accepted	Dis-couraged	
	%	%	%	%	accepted
Total	47	45	57	36	+10
Men	42	51	53	41	+11
Women	52	39	61	31	+9
<b>Generations</b>					
Millennial (18-32)	66	30	74	22	+8
Gen X (33-48)	50	44	62	28	+12
Boomer (49-67)	48	45	46	47	-2
Silent (68-85)	38	51	42	49	+4
College grad+	55	40	66	28	+11
Some college	46	46	61	32	+15
HS or less	44	47	49	43	+5
Republican	37	59	38	54	+1
Conserv Rep	27	67	32	59	+5
Mod/Lib Rep	56	41	53	42	-3
Independent	52	39	65	31	+13
Democrat	56	35	66	28	+10
Cons/Mod Dem	47	45	58	34	+11
Liberal Dem	76	18	82	15	+6
Protestant	36	57	46	46	+10
White evang	22	71	30	61	+8
White mainline	49	43	68	28	+19
Catholic	62	32	61	32	-1
White Catholic	65	28	56	37	-9
Unaffiliated	--	--	83	13	

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Mar. 13-17, 2013. Q15c. Whites and blacks include only those who are not Hispanic; Hispanics are of any race. Generation ages in parentheses are the current ages of those in each generation.

*Thanks to...*

*All my friends, family, and Professor Ansell and Professor Bimes who made this happen.*