

# Attitudes Toward Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Persons Among Heterosexual Liberal Arts College Students

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**ABSTRACT.** This research focuses on attitudes toward homosexuals and homosexuality among 692 heterosexual students at six liberal arts colleges. Attitudes, assessed in a variety of ways, are examined in relation to students' Greek affiliation, sex role attitudes, religion and religiosity, and contact with and knowledge of gays, lesbians, and bisexuals. Results suggest that attributes predicting acceptance of gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons are female sex, liberal sex-role attitudes, lower religiosity as measured both by beliefs and by attendance, membership in more liberal Protestant denominations, attendance at colleges that do not have

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Greek letter social organizations, and having positive contacts with gay, lesbian, and/or bisexual persons. [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <getinfo@haworthpressinc.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2002 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

**KEYWORDS.** Attitude, bisexual, homosexual, homosexuality, gay, lesbian, gender role, college student, fraternity, sorority, Greek member, Greek system

Understanding the attitudes of college students toward gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons as well as toward their lifestyle, is critical to effecting a more positive environment for gays, lesbians, and bisexuals on the campuses of our colleges and universities. Published research on these attitudes has historically focused on students attending large universities. These studies have generally been of two types. The first type is the campus climate study, where a university officer completes the research in an attempt to document the extent of intolerance on campus. Some of the campuses studied in this manner include the University of California, Davis (Amos, 1993); Pennsylvania State University (D'Augelli, 1989a, b, 1992); Yale (Herek, 1993); UCLA (Jacobi & Shepard, 1990); the University of California, Davis, (Low, 1988, 1991); the University of California at Santa Cruz, (Nelson & Baker, 1990); The San Francisco State University, (Shively & De Cecco, 1978); California State University, Chico (Welton, 1993). One notable exception to the administrative studies of large universities is the study by Norris (1992) at Oberlin College. Norris documents what he calls the paradox of "extensive attitudinal support and widespread victimization" on the Oberlin campus (1992: 81). Another example is a senior honors thesis by Tragakis (1994) at Gettysburg College.

The second type includes research that goes beyond this to examine correlates of intolerance toward gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons and research that attempts to develop intolerance scales to assess attitudes. See, for example, Hansen (1982); Herek (1984, 1988); Kite & Deaux (1986); Kurdek (1988); Larsen, Reed, & Hoffman (1980); and Millham, San Miguel, & Kellogg (1976).

This research project combines these two types of research and extends it to the liberal arts college. The major thrust of the research was to assess the climate for gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons on six liberal arts college campuses. The senior author carried out a multi-method de-

sign, including interviews with key college administrators; interviews with and a survey of gay, lesbian, and bisexual students; interviews with gay, lesbian, and bisexual faculty; participant observations of meetings of gay, lesbian, and bisexual organizations and support groups; and examination of the extent of gay, lesbian, and bisexual resources in the college bookstore and library. In addition, attitudes of the general student population were assessed by means of a survey of students living on campus. This paper will focus on the survey design and results in order to explore some of the correlates of attitudes toward gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons on six liberal arts college campuses.

Studies have generally found that females have more tolerant attitudes toward gays, lesbians, and bisexuals than do males (Hansen, 1982; Hayes, 1995; Herek, 1984, 1988; Kurdek, 1988; Pratt, 1993; Seltzer, 1992; Tragakis, 1994; Young & Whertvine, 1982). Some studies, however, contradict these findings (Louderback & Whitley, 1997; Nyberg & Alston, 1977). Kite (1984) found that males did have more negative attitudes toward homosexuals, but that differences were less likely to be found in larger samples.

Studies also show that heterosexual males express more negative attitudes toward gay men than toward lesbians while female heterosexuals express more negative attitudes toward lesbians than toward gay men (Cuenot & Fugita, 1982; Herek, 1988; Louderback & Whitley, 1992). Other studies report that there is a positive relationship between traditional sex role attitudes and negative attitudes toward homosexuality (Herek, 1988; Kerns & Fine, 1994; Kurdek, 1988; Lieblich & Friedman, 1985; Whitney, 1987).

Research projects further suggest that those who are more religious or belong to religious organizations that have more conservative ideologies have more negative attitudes toward homosexuality (Cameron & Ross, 1981; Hansen, 1982; Herek, 1988; Larsen, Cate, & Reed, 1983; Larsen, Reed & Hoffman, 1980). Seltzer (1992) found that religiosity had no effect for black respondents. Lottes and Kuriloff (1992) found that religion was related to a significant effect on negative attitudes and that Jews reported the most tolerant attitudes. Among Protestants, Episcopalians were found to be the most tolerant followed by Presbyterians, Lutherans, Methodists, and Baptists (Dejowski, 1992; Irwin & Thompson, 1977; Smith, 1997). Using the 1994 General Social Survey and constructing a religiosity index, Smith (1997) found that respondents from some Protestant denominations who are more religious are more likely to have negative attitudes toward homosexuality. This held true for Catholics, Episcopalians, and Baptists but not for Lutherans and Presbyterians.

Positive personal contacts with gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons also mediate against negative attitudes (Hansen, 1982; Herek, 1988; Lance, 1987; Millham, San Miguel, & Kellogg, 1976). In addition, having gay and lesbian friends, not just contacts, is positively related to accepting attitudes (Herek, 1988). These findings relative to friendship are not surprising and can in part be informed by social bonding theory (Hirschi, 1993; Akers, 1994). The theory states that the more we are attached to people (close affectional ties, admiration of them, identification with them), the more we care about their expectations (Akers, 1994:116). However, Rawlins' (1992) analysis in *Friendship Matters* helps us understand how difficult this may be because of the various "dialectical tensions" involved such as the tension of "judgement and acceptance."

The question of whether or not membership in Greek letter social organizations is associated with negative attitudes toward homosexuality is also important since many college campuses are dominated by such organizations. An ethnographic study by Rhoads (1994) linked negative attitudes toward gays, lesbians, and bisexuals to membership in Greek letter social organizations. Scott (1965) wrote that these attitudes are reinforced through socialization into the brotherhood. However, a study by Lottes and Kuriloff (1994) did not find that members of Greek organizations were more intolerant than those who were not members.

This research replicates aspects of many of the previous studies by examining relationships between each of these independent variables—sex, sex role attitudes, religiosity, contacts with gays, lesbians, and bisexuals, and Greek membership—with attitude toward homosexuals and homosexuality.

In addition, this research replicates measures used in several of the research projects noted above (Herek, 1988; Kite and Deaux, 1986; Nelson and Baker, 1990; Norris, 1990, 1992), to facilitate comparison with their results. It expands the study of college students' attitudes by looking at liberal arts colleges, not large universities. More specifically, the study contrasts attitudes of students at colleges with and without Greek letter organizations in order to examine the different climates such campuses might have and their effects.

## METHOD

### Procedures

During the spring semester of 1995, the climate for gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons was assessed on six liberal arts college campuses, in-

cluding Gettysburg College. The colleges were located in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and New England and ranged in size from 1,100 students to 2,000 students. The institutions were selected because of similar size and academic quality, and because they varied in whether there were Greek organizations on campus.

The major quantitative part of the research was an anonymous seven page, ninety-eight-item survey mailed to systematic samples of 400 students on each campus. The survey items measured standard demographic data, religiosity, and sex role attitudes, as well as contact with, knowledge of, and attitudes toward gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons. Questions for the survey were drawn from campus reports of studies completed at a variety of universities cited above, the study conducted at Oberlin College by Norris (1990, 1992), a study by Tragakis (1994), The Cooperative Institutional Research Program's Freshman Survey, and The Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Student's Guide to Colleges, Universities, and Graduate Schools (Sherrill & Hardesty, 1994), as well as from the General Social Survey.

The survey was mailed to students at their campus mail boxes when the researcher arrived on campus. The day he left the campus, a reminder was sent. Surveys were returned anonymously to the campus post office. Of the 2,400 surveys mailed, only 2,288 were actually delivered since some students were not studying on campus at the time. Of these, 835 were returned for a response rate of 36.5%. The response rates for the various campuses ranged from a low of 23.4% to a high of 42.9%.

### Participants

The 692 students who form the data set for this paper includes only the 83% of the original sample who identified themselves as heterosexual by choosing "people of the opposite sex" in their response to the following survey item: "I am primarily, romantically or sexually attracted to. . ." (people of my own sex [n = 96], both sexes [n = 29], opposite sex [n = 692], not sexually attracted to other people [n = 2], uncertain [n = 14]). Of these, 61% are female and 38% are male. Twenty-six percent were first year students, 26% were sophomores, 20% were juniors, and 28% were seniors.

Almost 87% of the respondents identified themselves as white American, .6% as black American, 2.7% as Latino American, 2.7% as Asian/Pacific American, .3% as Native American, and 5% as non-U.S. citizens. Concerning religious affiliation, 32.9% said they were Catho-

lic, 46.2% said Protestant, 6.7% said Jewish, and 12.9% said that were not affiliated. Of the Protestants, 8.0% belonged to fundamentalist denominations, 46.2% to moderate denominations, and 45.8% to liberal denominations (coded according to Smith, 1986). Concerning socioeconomic status, 89.1% reported that their fathers had occupations such as managerial, technical, professional, or sales.

On the four campuses that have Greek letter social organizations, 39.5% of the males reported that they were pledging or belonged to a fraternity and 34.6% of the females reported that they were pledging or belonged to a sorority.

## Measures

### Dependent Variables

Attitudes toward gay, lesbian and bisexual persons. Attitudes were assessed using five measures, described below. Correlations between each pair of attitudinal measures ranged in absolute value from .47 to .87 ( $p = .000$ ), indicating moderate to strong relationships among the measures. This level of agreement among the measures was confirmed by the bivariate analyses, in which the independent variables generally had similar relationships with each measure. The intercorrelations and the consistency of the bivariate results point to strong validity of the measures.

1. The mean of a twenty-one item "Homosexuality Attitude Scale" developed by Kite and Deaux (1986) including items such as "I would not mind having homosexual friends," "Homosexuality is a mental illness," and "I see the gay movement as a positive thing" (p 141). Response categories were on a five-point scale, ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. After recoding reversed items, 1 indicated an intolerant, negative attitude, and 5 indicated an accepting, positive attitude.

2. The means of each of two ten item indices, "Attitudes toward Lesbians and Gay Men Scale" (ATLG) are taken from Herek (1988). Ten of the items test attitudes toward gay men, and the other 10 test attitudes toward lesbians. Examples of items are: "If a man has homosexual feelings, he should do everything he can to overcome them" and "Female homosexuality is a threat to many of our basic social institutions" (p. 477). Again, response categories ranged from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. After adjustments for reversals, 1 represented an intolerant, negative attitude, and 5 a tolerant, positive attitude.

3. The mean of a nine-item campus tolerance index measuring attitudes toward lesbian and gay issues on campus. Six of these questions came from Norris' (1990, 1992) survey. Examples of items are: "The presence of lesbian and gay students on this campus enriches the college community" and "Lesbians and gays on this campus push their demands too forcefully." The remaining three questions, which assess whether the respondent ". . . would feel uncomfortable knowing that" his/her female professor, male professor, or roommate was gay, lesbian, or bisexual, were adapted from Nelson and Baker (1990). As above, there were five response categories ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree, with values of 1 indicating a negative attitude, and of 5 indicating a supportive attitude.

4. A variation of the Bogardus (1933) Social Distance Scale, in which participants indicated the extent to which they would associate with a member of each of eight social categories, including homosexuals, lesbians, and bisexuals. The seven response categories ranged from "1: would marry or accept as a close relative," through "4: would have as neighbors on my street," to "7: would have live outside my country." Note that the direction of the Bogardus measures is reversed from the other measures, such that a high score indicates LESS acceptance.

5. Each respondent's general attitude was assessed by asking, "Which of the following best sums up your general attitude toward homosexuality? accept as an alternative lifestyle, do not accept as an alternative lifestyle, or not sure." These analyses treat the variable as a dichotomy: 1 = accept, 0 = do not accept or not sure, in order to focus on explicitly stated acceptance. (If the 12% who answered "not sure" were excluded as missing, the percent accepting would appear higher than the 79% who actually said they "accept as an alternative lifestyle.")

### Independent Variables

The independent variables include sex, age, year in school, whether the college had Greek letter social organizations, and, if so, respondents' membership status, housing (fraternity, sorority, residence hall, etc.), and additional variables described below:

**Sex Role Attitudes.** Sex role attitudes were measured with four General Social Survey items concerning women's roles in the family and workplace (FECHLD, FEHELP, FEPRESCH, FEFAM) (Davis and Smith, 1994: 229-30), and one additional item, "the activities of married women are best confined to the home and family." Each item was measured on a scale of 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). After



reversals required to score all items in the same direction, the mean was calculated, with a higher mean indicating non-traditional attitudes supporting women in the workplace.

**Religion and Religiosity.** Respondents indicated the religion in which they were raised, and the fundamentalism of Protestant denominations was coded according to Smith (1986). Students' religiosity was further assessed by frequency of attendance at religious services (nine response categories, ranging from "never" to "several times a week") and by a Religiosity Index published by Putney and Middleton (1961: 286) on which respondents rated agreement with 6 religious beliefs, such as "I believe there is a supernatural being, the Devil, who continually tries to lead men into sin." The index indicates the number (0-6) of these religious values that each respondent agreed with.

**Knowledge of and contact with gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons.** Respondents answered how much they knew about lesbian and gay history, concerns, and culture: (0) nothing, (1) a little or some, and (2) a great deal. They also stated whether lesbian and gay issues were discussed in their classes ([1] positively, [-1] negatively, [0] not at all) (adapted from Norris, 1990, 1992). They indicated to what extent they knew any gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons: responses of those who didn't know any were coded 0, and any level of knowledge was combined in a code of 1; whether these persons were on or off campus; quality of relationship: ([1] positive, [0] none, [-1] negative) respondents had with these persons; whether their past contacts had been positive or negative; and whether their attitudes were similar to those of their friends.

## RESULTS

### Analyses by Sex, College, and Greek Affiliation

Analyses indicate the following generalizations relative to the attitudes of heterosexual males and females toward gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons and homosexuality in general. Overall, the means for each rating tended toward acceptance. Nonetheless, there were significant differences when acceptance was compared to many of the independent variables. Though the differences are not great, females are significantly more likely than males to express positive attitudes toward gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons and associated issues. This holds for every measure, even when controlling for Greek membership and for presence of a Greek system. Furthermore, attitudes vary across cam-



pushes by sex, so that females at one college may be more anti-gay than females at other colleges. The same holds true for males. Though members of Greek letter social organizations tend to be less tolerant than non-members, when considering only campuses with Greek organizations, Greek members are not significantly less tolerant than non-members. Both males and females at campuses without Greek organizations are significantly more tolerant than their counterparts at campuses with these organizations. This leads to the suggestion that college type, considering both the atmosphere as well as the type of students different types of colleges attract, rather than membership, leads to the difference. Tables 1 and 2 provide an overview of these results.

On Kite and Deaux's (1986) Homosexuality Attitude Scale (measure 1) (1 = not accepting and 5 = very accepting) there were statistically significant differences across colleges and between males and females within colleges ( $p \leq .00$ ). Scores at the six colleges ranged from 3.9 to 4.6. The mean score for the male subsample was 3.9, ranging across colleges from 3.6 to 4.5. Females were more tolerant at each college, with the

TABLE 1. Attitudes Toward Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Persons by Sex, Greek Membership, and College

MEASURE	Range Across Colleges			p	Grk. Mbr?		p	Grk. Syst?		p	
	Male	Female	p		No	Yes		No	Yes		
1. Homosexuality Attitude Scale	3.9	4.3	**	3.8 - 4.6	**	4.2	3.9	**	4.5	4.0	**
2. ATLG:											**
lesbians	4.2	4.4	**	4.1 - 4.7	**	4.4	4.3	ns	4.6	4.2	**
gay men	3.6	4.1	**	3.6 - 4.5	**	4.0	3.7	**	4.4	3.7	**
3. Campus Tolerance Index	3.6	4.0	**	3.6 - 4.3	**	3.9	3.6	**	4.1	3.7	**
4. Bogardus Social Distance:											
homosexuals (male)	2.7	1.8	**	1.6 - 2.4	**	2.1	2.3	ns	1.8	2.3	**
lesbians	2.4	2.0	**	1.6 - 2.5	**	2.1	2.3	ns	1.8	2.3	**
bisexuals	2.5	2.1	**	1.7 - 2.6	**	2.2	2.5	**	1.9	2.5	**
5. General Attitude: % accept as lifestyle	69%	85%	**	71% - 93%	**	81%	73%	*	89%	73%	**

\*\* $p \leq .00$ , \* $p \leq .05$

A higher score = greater acceptance, except for Bogardus scores.  
The least tolerant score for each comparison is bold faced.

TABLE 2. Attitudes Toward Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Persons by Sex, Controlling for Greek Membership and Presence of Greek Organizations on Campus

MEASURE	College Type: No Greek System		Greek System			
	Greek Membership: Nonmember		Nonmember		Member	
	M	F	M	F	M	F
1. Homosexuality Attitude Scale	4.29	4.63	3.64	4.14	3.56	4.17
2. ATLG:						
lesbians	4.55	4.71	3.95	4.27	4.19	4.36
gay men	4.18	4.56	3.25	3.93	3.19	3.97
3. Campus Tolerance Index	3.99	4.34	3.37	3.86	3.39	3.77
4. Bogardus Social Distance:						
homosexuals (male)	2.14	1.54	3.01	2.01	2.90	1.92
lesbians	1.97	1.63	2.67	2.14	2.55	2.04
bisexuals	2.04	1.74	2.84	2.28	2.79	2.34
5. General Attitude: % accept as lifestyle	86%	93%	63%	79%	52%	86%

A higher score = greater acceptance, except for Bogardus scores.  
The least tolerant score for each comparison is bold faced.

mean female score equaling 4.3, and scores across colleges ranging from 3.9 to 4.6. All the differences for males and females are statistically significant ( $p \leq .05$ ) except for the college which is the most open and hospitable campus for gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons.

For the same attitude scale, the Greek/non-Greek difference is similar to the male / female difference, with Greeks significantly less accepting than non-Greeks. However, when considering only the four campuses that have Greek letter organizations, the difference between Greeks and non-Greeks disappears. It is apparent that the significant difference in acceptance by members and non-members, found for the entire sample, is due to the influence of the far greater acceptance by students on the two campuses that lack these organizations. On campuses without Greek organizations, the mean score for the Homosexuality Attitude Scale is 4.5, and, on campus with such organizations, it is 4.0 ( $p = .000$ ). Hence, attitudes are significantly more positive overall on campuses that do not have traditional Greek organizations. On cam-

pus with these organizations, there is no difference in acceptance by members and non-members.

Attitudes of males and females toward gays and lesbians were assessed using Herek's (1988) ATLG (measure 2), scored 1-5 with higher scores indicating greater acceptance. The data (see Tables 1 and 2) show that males express less tolerance toward both gays and lesbians than do females, but that both sexes are less tolerant of gay men than of lesbians. For example, the mean tolerance score of males toward gay men is 3.6 while it is 4.2 toward lesbians. The mean tolerance score of females toward gay men is 4.1 and toward lesbians, 4.4. The differences between males and females are statistically significant at  $p \leq .00$ . Once again, the lower acceptance of lesbians and gays by Greek members than by non-members was less apparent when considering only colleges with Greek organizations, suggesting that college type is a stronger component of attitudes than is membership.

On the campus tolerance measure (3) assessing specific attitudes about the presence of gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons on campus, including encountering a gay, lesbian, and bisexual faculty member as one of the respondent's professors, the differences between males (mean = 3.6) and females (mean = 4.0) across the six colleges were statistically significant ( $p \leq .05$ ). The males' campus means ranged from 3.2 to 4.2, while the females' campus means ranged from 3.6 to 4.4. Again, overall and at each college, female students were more tolerant, on average, than male students. Similarly, students at colleges without Greek organizations were more accepting of gays, lesbians, and bisexuals than students at colleges without these organizations. When considering only colleges with greek organizations, members of Greek letter social organizations were only slightly, and not significantly, less accepting of gays, lesbians, and bisexuals on campus than non-members.

Sex and college differences are again evident in the analysis of attitudes toward gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons using the Bogardus Social Distance Scale (4), which ranged from 1-7 with 1 being the closest and hence most tolerant relationship. As shown in Table 1, male students placed greater social distance between themselves and gays, lesbians, and bisexuals than did female students. In addition, males were less accepting of male homosexuals than of lesbians, while the opposite pattern prevailed for female students. Once again, the survey data suggests considerable differences across colleges in acceptance of gays, lesbians, and bisexuals. The amount of social distance Greek members placed between themselves and lesbians or gays was only slightly, and not significantly, more than that for non-Greeks when considering all

six campuses; the difference was slight, though significant, for bisexuals. However, again, the difference in expressed social distance practically disappeared when considering only the four campuses with Greek organizations, lending still more support for the stronger effect of campus type than of membership itself.

Finally, sex, college, and Greek differences are also apparent in students' expression of acceptance of homosexuality as an alternative lifestyle. As shown in Table 1, 85% of females, compared to 69% of males, responded that they accept the lifestyle. The percent of female students accepting the lifestyle ranged from 74% to 95% across campuses, compared to the across-college range of 56% to 91% percent of male students. The percent of students accepting ranged across colleges from 71% to 93%; colleges without Greek letter organizations had the highest percent accepting. The percent accepting ranged from 89% of students at colleges without Greek organizations (92% of females and 86% of males), to 73% of students at colleges with these organizations (82% of females and 59% of males). Though acceptance by Greek members was lower overall than acceptance by non-members, this difference lessened considerably when considering only colleges with Greek organizations. Hence it is again apparent that college type, more than membership, influences attitudes.

### Correlation and Regression Analyses

Correlation analyses (with independent variables dichotomized or converted so as to approximate interval-level measurement when necessary) suggest that the strongest correlates of anti-gay attitudes are sex-role attitudes and existence and quality of interactions with lesbians and gays (Table 3).

College students with more liberal sex-role attitudes tend to be more accepting of gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons. The correlations of sex-role attitudes with the dependent measures of acceptance of homosexuals and homosexuality, ranging in absolute value from .29 to .45, were moderate but consistent across measures as well as statistically significant. When correlation analyses were separated by respondents' sex, gender-role attitudes correlated with the dependent variables more strongly for male students than for female students.

Correlations between quality of interactions with lesbians and gays and the dependent variables ranged, in absolute value, from .27 to .45, suggesting in each case that those with positive interactions tended to be more accepting. In addition, each measure of gay, lesbian, and bisexual

TABLE 3. Correlations of Attitudes Toward Gays, Lesbians, and Bisexuals with Major Independent Variables

MEASURE	Gen. Role Atts	Cntct w/Les	Cntct w/Gay	Sex	Relig. Attend	Relig. Fund	Relig. Agree	Greek	Coll. Type
1. Homosexuality Attitude Scale	.43**	.38**	.45**	.26**	-.15**	-.15*	-.24**	-.13**	-.29**
2. ATLG:									
lesbians	.41**	.40**	.41**	.11**	-.25**	-.17**	-.32**	ns	-.24**
gay men	.45**	.38**	.44**	.25**	-.17**	-.12*	-.27**	-.13**	-.29**
3. Campus Tolerance Index	.39**	.37**	.44**	.23**	-.08*	ns	-.20**	-.15**	-.27**
4. Bogardus Social Distance:									
homosexuals (male)	-.36**	-.30**	-.44**	-.30**	ns	.11*	.13**	ns	.18**
lesbians	-.31**	-.36**	-.40**	-.16**	.12**	.13*	.17**	ns	.18**
bisexuals	-.29**	-.33**	-.40**	-.14**	.10*	ns	.18**	.10*	.20**
5. General Attitude: accept (1), no or not sure (0)	.40**	.27**	.39**	.19**	-.16**	-.14**	-.26**	ns	-.19**

\*\*p ≤ .00, \*p ≤ .05

A higher score = greater acceptance, except for Bogardus scores.

acceptance correlates weakly (.11 to .30), though significantly, with sex, with the direction in each case indicating that females (1) tend to be more accepting than males (0).

The correlations between the dependent measures and measures of religiosity (attendance, fundamentalism of Protestant denominations, and agreement with traditional religious values), are all weak, suggesting at most minimal correlation between lower religiosity and higher acceptance. However, when controlling for sex, agreement with traditional religious values correlated with the dependent measures more strongly for women than for men.

Respondents' membership in Greek letter organizations had very low correlations with the dependent measures, lending only weak support to the supposition of Greeks being less accepting. Correlations with type of college, that is, whether the college has (1) or does not have (0) Greek letter social organizations, all confirm a weak though significant relationship between existence of such organizations and acceptance.

Students at colleges with such organizations tend, overall, to be less accepting of gays, lesbians, and bisexuals than students at colleges without these organizations. Although the correlations with college type are weak, ranging from .18 to .29, for each dependent measure these correlations are about double or triple those with Greek membership.

Table 4 shows standardized coefficients for variables that contributed significantly to an increase in  $R^2$  in step-wise regression. (Blanks indicate that the independent variable contributed no or only an insignificant increase in  $R^2$ .) For each dependent measure, the independent variables included in the equation explained approximately 40% to 50% of the variance in attitudes.

These analyses confirm that the strongest independent predictor of anti-gay attitude, for every dependent measure, was sex role attitudes. (When considering men and women separately, gender role attitudes was the strongest predictor for most of the dependent variables, but in a few cases, most notably the Kite and Deaux measure, it was not.) It may seem somewhat tautological that those with liberal attitudes toward one type of personal expression, that is, sex roles, would also tend to have liberal attitudes toward another type of personal expression, that is, sexual orientation. However, the behaviors being assessed in these two sets of attitudes are different in that sex roles are far less controversial, and less likely to evoke moral and religious arguments, than sexual orientation. Nonetheless, these correlations are undoubtedly to some extent spurious when considering some global measure of liberal social attitudes.

The second and third strongest predictors of attitudes toward gays, lesbians, and bisexuals were positive interactions with lesbian or gay persons. These results can not specify whether attitudes change due to contact with these individuals, or whether those with more accepting attitudes are more likely to establish or accept contact with lesbian and gay persons. It is likely that this is a reciprocal relationship, with each factor influencing the other.

Sex also had a significant, though weak, independent influence on the dependent variables. In each case, the regression coefficients clarify that female students tend to be more accepting of homosexuals and homosexuality than male students. It is likely that the intercorrelation of sex with sex role attitudes influences the stereotype that females are more liberal concerning gays, lesbians, and bisexuals. This research clarifies that, when the independent effects of the variables are examined, it is sex-role attitudes, rather than sex, which provide, by far, the greatest explanatory contribution toward homosexuality attitudes.

None of the three measures of religiosity had a strong or consistent impact on the dependent variables. In several cases shown below the regression coefficients did indicate weak negative influences, such that higher religiosity has a minor part in predicting less acceptance. Students at the campuses studied did not tend to be high on the religiosity measures; it is expected that religiosity would have a greater impact on attitudes toward gays, lesbians, and bisexuals in samples from the general population, where religiosity has greater variance.

It is interesting to note that Greek membership did not have a significant independent impact in explaining any of the dependent measures, as evidenced by the lack of any significant standardized regression coefficients. It is likely that the intercorrelations of Greek membership with such variables as sex and gender role attitudes lead to the presumption that Greeks are less tolerant. However, in a multivariate procedure such as stepwise regression, when each variable's influence is examined while others are simultaneously held constant, Greek membership is shown to have no independent impact.

In fact, college type, that is, whether or not the college had Greek organizations, was a better independent predictor of attitudes than membership in such organizations. However, the regression coefficients for college type are weak, hence no conclusions can be drawn from these coefficients alone; they must be considered along with other evidence presented in this paper.

Table 3 also shows weak independent impact of whether gay, lesbian, and bisexual issues were discussed in class and knowledge of gay, lesbian, and bisexual issues on the Bogardus Social Distance measures, but not on the other measures. It is unclear why these results are inconsistent.

Overall, regression analyses underscore the strong impact of liberal sex-role attitudes and of positive contact with lesbian and gay persons on positive attitudes toward gays, lesbians, and bisexuals. The influence of religiosity, college type, sex, and other variables is inconsistent and weak, and there is no direct influence of Greek membership. What is particularly interesting about the regression analyses is that relatively few variables, primarily sex-role attitudes and contact, are shown to explain approximately 40 to 50% of the variance in each of the measures of attitudes toward gays, lesbians, and bisexuals. (The multiple correlations ranged from .64 to .73.) The relatively high multiple correlations emphasize the explanatory strength of the major independent variables.



TABLE 4. Stepwise Regression of Attitudes Toward Gays, Lesbians, and Bisexuals on Major Independent Variables

Independent Variables (Standardized Regression Coefficients):

Dependent Variables:	R <sup>2</sup>	Sex	Gen. Role Atts	Relig. Attend	Relig. Fund	Relig. Agree	Relig. w/Les	Cntct. w/Gay	Cntct. w/Les	Greek	College Type	Gay Hstry. Aware	Gay Dscns. in Class	Age	*Other
1. Homosexuality Attitude Scale	.52	.14	.33		-.19		.14	.21			-.21		.13		
2. ATLG:								.16							
lesbians	.50		.40	-.17			.28								.15
gay men	.43		.42			-.15		.28			-.29				
3. Campus Tolerance Index	.45		.33				.19	.29			.26				
4. Bogardus Social Distance:															
homosexuals (male)	.53	-.20	-.30					-.29			.16	.16	-.19	-.18	
lesbians	.44		-.33					-.30			.19	.19	-.14	-.20	
bisexuals	.45		-.36					-.26			.20	.18	-.22		-.15
5. General Attitude: (1) accept, (0) no or not sure	.41	.22	.35					.17							

All coefficients are significant at  $p \leq .000$

A higher score = greater acceptance, except for Bogardus scores.

\*Other variables: ATLG lesbians (with social class Beta = .15); Bogardus bisexuals (with class year Beta = -.15)

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of this paper is to explore the correlates of college students' attitudes toward gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons by extending previous research done at major universities to the small liberal arts college. As noted earlier, the vast majority of the research on this topic has been carried out at large universities nationwide. Indeed, even research that has been done to develop measures to assess attitudes toward lesbian and gay persons has been done in similar settings.

An important aspect of this paper thus lies in the effort to assess attitudes toward gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons by heterosexual students attending small liberal arts colleges. The question here is, are the correlates of attitudes toward gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons the same for students attending small colleges as they are for students attending large universities? This question is important for several reasons. First, the student bodies of most small liberal arts colleges are much more homogeneous than those of large universities and one might think that attitudes, therefore, are more homogenous. Second, attitudes may reflect the prevailing attitude of the college since most liberal arts colleges are relatively small communities. The similarity of the results of this study to those of the earlier studies demonstrates that correlates of student attitudes on liberal arts campuses are similar to those of university students.

The research reported in this paper replicates previous studies by using questions and measures reported in the published results of these studies. This includes the use of Herek's (1988) Attitudes toward Lesbians and Gay Men Scale (ATLG), Kite and Deaux's (1986) Homosexuality Attitude Scale, questions used by Norris (1990, 1992) in his study at Oberlin College, questions used by Nelson and Baker (1990) in their study at the University of California-Santa Cruz, questions from the General Social Survey (Davis & Smith, 1994), and a Religiosity Scale used by Putney and Middleton (1961). The results of the current study are similar to the results of those projects, demonstrating that the measures are not campus specific. Furthermore, the measures had consistently moderate to strong intercorrelations, underscoring their validity.

A unique addition to the literature on this topic is the use of Bogardus's (1933) Social Distance Scale where respondents indicate their social distance toward various categories of "deviance" instead of toward categories of people based on race and ethnicity. Revised categories on the scale include such people as ex-convicts, marijuana users, persons with AIDS, lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and prostitutes. The

idea for using the scale this way was taken from Simmons (1969), and it has been used by the senior author for 25 years in a campus survey conducted as part of his Deviance, Diversity, and Difference course. This project found the Bogardus measure consistent with other measures of attitudes toward gays, lesbians, and bisexuals both in terms of intercorrelations and when regressed and correlated with independent variables. It is clear that the Bogardus Social Distance Scale remains useful well beyond its original creation over 60 years ago.

This research project was particularly interested in assessing which correlates are most important in predicting negative attitudes toward gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons. Factors that previous researchers found to correlate were sex-role attitudes; contacts with gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons; sex, religiosity, and, in some research, Greek membership. In general, these data support the findings in previous studies of attitudes at large universities.

Data herein confirm the findings of Herek (1988), Kerns and Fine (1994), Kurdek (1988), Liebach and Friedman (1985), and Whitney (1987) that those with more traditional sex role attitudes have more negative attitudes toward homosexuality than those with less traditional attitudes. This variable was found to be the most important determinant of attitudes toward gays, lesbians, and bisexuals, more so than sex, religiosity, and membership in Greek letter organizations. As previously noted, both of these attitudes are part of the broader construct of liberal social attitudes, and hence they would be expected to correlate strongly.

The results of this research also are in keeping with the research of Hansen (1982); Herek (1988); Lance (1987); and Millham, San Miguel, and Kellogg (1976) that positive personal contacts with gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons and having gay, lesbian, and bisexual friends are associated with more positive attitudes toward gays, lesbians, and bisexuals. Positive contacts were shown by this research to consistently influence positive attitudes, even when other variables, including sex role attitudes, were simultaneously considered.

These findings lend support to social bond theory as conceptualized by Hirschi (1993). Hirschi discusses the bond of the individual to society as consisting of interrelated components: attachment, commitment, involvement, belief. Attachment to parents, adults, and peers is a significant factor in producing conforming behavior. Akers (1994:116) writes that the greater the attachment as seen in close affectional ties, admiration, and identity, the more we care about the expectations of others. Thus, attachment in the form of friendship should produce the positive attitudes evident in this study.

The fact that having gay, lesbian, and bisexual friends makes one more tolerant and accepting is on the surface not surprising. However, in light of the “dialectical tensions” in friendships discussed by Rawlins (1991), this fact is even more interesting. It means that the young men and women in this study have resolved issues in the dialectic described by Rawlins (1992:20) as “judgement and acceptance.” Sullivan (Rawlins, 1992:20) notes that interaction with friends has the “potential to validate one’s self-concept and enhance one’s self-esteem.” The issue of sexuality, however, has the potential of heightening “judgement” and adversely affecting acceptance. It is also possible, however, that the dialectic of “expressiveness and protectiveness” (Rawlins, 1992:22) helps resolve the former tension. Further analysis of how these tensions are resolved in the area of sexuality would be useful.

On every dependent variable and practically every question, females expressed less hostile attitudes toward gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons than males. This supports the findings of Hansen (1982), Hayes (1995), Herek (1994, 1988), Kurdek (1988), Pratt (1993), Seltzer (1992), Tragakis (1994), Young and Whertvine (1992). The data also show that males have more negative attitudes toward gay men than toward lesbians, which supports the findings of Cuenot and Fugita (1982), Herek (1988), Louderback and Whitney (1992).

Findings on the influence of religion on attitudes toward gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons lend some support to the results of Cameron and Ross (1981), Hansen (1982), Herek (1988), Larsen, Cate, and Reed (1983), Larsen, Reed and Hoffman (1980), Lottes and Kuriloff (1992). The findings in this paper indicate that those who belong to more fundamentalist religious groups, who have a higher level of traditional religious beliefs, and/or who attend religious services more frequently have more negative attitudes toward gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons than those with lower religiosity measured in these ways. However, the independent impact of religiosity measures were weak or disappeared when stronger correlates, such as sex role attitudes, were simultaneously considered.

An important dimension of the research is the use as independent variables both of membership in Greek letter social organizations and of whether or not the college has such organizations. There is relatively little research that addresses these questions, and the research projects reviewed herein (Lottes & Kuriloff, 1994; Rhoads, 1994) have had inconsistent results concerning membership. The data in this project expand on their findings to shed some light on the question of the role that fraternity and sorority membership and the presence of fraternities and

sororities on the campus play in attitudes toward gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons.

The results of this project suggest that Greek membership has only weak correlations with attitudes toward homosexuality, and that whether or not a campus has such organizations may be a better predictor. Indeed, the qualitative research done as part of this project corroborates the findings herein, as the campus climate was more favorable to gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons on the campuses that lacked these organizations. It must be noted that the students who apply to and are accepted by such colleges are likely different in social attitudes from students who are attracted to colleges with Greek organizations. Hence, it is not possible to conclude whether it is the lack of Greek organizations, or the attitudes and social outlook students brought to college, as well as the influence of recruitment and admissions policies on the applicant pool and student population, that leads to these differences. It is likely that the observed correlation would be shown at least in part spurious by a measure of attitudes prior to entering college. This is, however, not within the constraints of the current research.

A couple of interesting findings not explored in this paper are worthy of note. First, attitudes do vary across the six colleges included in this study. While the demographic differences on each campus are consistent, the extent of negative attitudes toward gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons varies from one campus to the next. The campus differences even on individual questions are often statistically significant. There are undoubtedly differences in the types of students attracted to and admitted to particular colleges. Another conclusion that can be drawn from this is that the values espoused and leadership at a college do help determine the extent of negative attitudes. Other factors, such as a strong Division I sports program, or majors that attract males with traditional sex-role attitudes (e.g., engineering), are also important determinants. One indicator of campus climate differences is that the highest response rate to the survey occurred on the campus that had by far the most open and hospitable environment for gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons. Conversely, the lowest response rate occurred on the campus with the most hostile environment.

Second, while there were many statistically significant differences in attitudes in bivariate analyses with the independent variables, on some questions, while the differences were in the same direction, they were not statistically significant. Also, the same question often yielded different results on different campuses. Thus, individual questions are not

as good a measure of attitudes in many cases as is an index that combines many questions.

Several shortcomings of the present research need to be noted. First, colleges included in this research were not selected at random. They had to meet certain criteria as stated earlier. Further, because of the costs of travel and the time limitations and the author's orientation to the east and northeast, only colleges within fairly easy driving of Gettysburg College were included. Therefore, colleges in the south, midwest, and west were automatically excluded. Second, the response rates to the survey were fairly low. The overall response rate was 36.5%, with a low return rate of 23.4% and a high of 42.9%.

This project contributes to the literature of attitudes toward homosexuals and homosexuality by replicating measures used in other research and introducing the Bogardus Social Distance Scale as an additional measure. It expands the scope of prior research by examining liberal arts colleges as opposed to universities. It further clarifies prior research results by replicating a number of prior results, but with a different population. It uses stepwise, multiple regression analyses to examine independent contributions of intercorrelated effects. It clarifies the relationship of Greek membership with attitudes toward gays, lesbians, and bisexuals by suggesting that whether colleges have such organizations is a more important determinant than membership in them. Finally, it confirms prior research in demonstrating the strong impact of sex-role attitudes, especially for male students, and positive contacts with gays, lesbians, and bisexuals on attitudes toward homosexuals and homosexuality.

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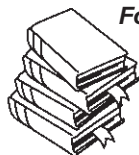
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