There exists a dichotomous relationship in public opinion of LGBT individuals. With small legal and institutional improvement in the recognition of LGBT rights and equal protection of civil liberties has come slightly more progressive policies and environments. However these generally exist in pockets across the nation and within specific spheres. Overall progress has been slow.

A more comprehensive survey, done in 1999, displays gender gaps in heterosexual individuals attitudes towards persons of non-heterosexual orientation. Generally, heterosexual women were shown to be more supportive than their male counterparts with regards to employment protection and civil rights protection for gay people. Moreover, heterosexual women were more likely to be in favor of extending employee benefits to same-sex couples. On the other hand, heterosexual men generally continue to house negative reactions and stereotypes of gay people.
With regards to atmospheres and academic environments intersection with LGBT groups, recent research has shown marked improvement in the environmental attitudes on private campuses, but, again, show old attitudes remain on public campuses in particular. In an article published in a 2002 issue of the Journal of Homosexuality, researcher James T. Sears reports “openly lesbian, gay or bisexual faculty on college campuses [as representing] a small but growing presence” with overall positive attitudes encountered in the faculty and campuses of private universities. Sears notes, particularly that in private institutions a total 88% of individuals surveyed reported “gay affirmative” or “gay tolerant” faculty experience. However, only 12% of public institutions rated faculty as “gay affirmative” and only 41% “gay tolerant” (Sears) with an additional 29% reporting intolerance and 1% reporting hostility.

Additionally, research reports more instructors as integrating LGBT issues into their curriculums. Unsurprisingly, organizations like the National Education Association and the Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) report larger, more liberal school districts like Los Angeles and Chapel Hill, along with several states like Massachusetts and Wisconsin as “adopting...policies relating to sexual minority students and teachers.” For example, NCATE’s revised standards for institutions seeking accreditation include “framework that reflects multicultural perspectives” procedure that “recruits, admits and retains” a

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4 Sears
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culturally diverse student body and faculty, and explicitly defines these forms of diversity with reference to sexual orientation.

Other research cites increases in positive public feedback for LGBT groups as being linked to “shifts in aggregate levels of egalitarianism [and] [general] ideology” along with “shifts in the underlying structure of opinion (ie. how citizens used these predispositions to think)—produced changes in support for gay rights”\(^6\). While reports show public opinion has trended towards the expansion of civil liberties, this progress has been tentative and prone to contractions, as exhibited in California’s ballot initiative Proposition 8, which sharply contracted civil liberties for same sex couples by failing to recognize the legitimacy of homosexual marriage (2008).

Another area in which progress has been slow is public conceptions and the stigma of AIDS.\(^7\) This trend indicates that while the public may be leaning towards legal equality and

\(^6\) Brewer
\(^7\) Brewer
equal opportunity in civil rights, these advances generally do not extend to group perceptions with regards to stereotypes to the same extent. Although the Supreme Court has laid the legal groundwork for the protection from sexual-orientation based harassment under Titles VII and IX in their rulings in *Price Waterhouse v. Hopkins* and *Oracle v. Sundowner Inc.* neither explicitly covers sexual orientation.  

The general conclusions of this issue brief are that heterosexual groups’ perceptions of LGBT groups have made slow, small advances. They have been limited by geographic location and display dichotomous trends with regard to gender breakdowns. The general assumption to be made is that public opinion has progressed, however it has been at a relatively slow rate affected by halts and regressions in pockets of the nation.

Lastly, this issue brief only deals with the scope of Public Opinion as it pertains to the “mainstream’s” (ie. heterosexual oriented population’s) perspective of LGBT groups and individuals, it does not address potential shifts in the perceptions of LGBT persons towards general public opinion (ie. Do LGBT people view public opinion as advancing or regressing overall), though this would be an enlightening topic of inquiry, it has yet to attract comprehensive scholastic study.

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8 Wiener
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Amnesty International: www.amnestyusa.org

Human Rights Campaign: www.hrc.org


LGBT Community Center: www.GayCenter.org

Books:

Different Politics: Success and Failure in the Struggles over Gay Rights Author: Mucciaroni, Gary

Articles:

"The Shifting Foundations for Public Opinion about Gay Rights." Author: Brewer, Paul R.

"Gender Gaps in Public Opinion about Lesbians and Gay Men” Author: Herek, Gregory M.

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