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OF POLICY STUDIES

**The Friends and Family Plan:  
Assessing the Impact of Knowing Someone Gay on Support for Gay Rights**

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## **The Friends and Family Plan:**

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#### **Abstract**

Objective. I estimate the impact of knowing someone gay on acceptance of homosexuality and support for gay rights. Method. Logit analyses on individual-level data from 27 national surveys control for demographic and political variables that predict both acquaintance with lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals (LGBs) and support for gay rights. Findings. Knowing LGBs affects beliefs on the morality of homosexual relations, employment discrimination, gays in the military, sodomy laws, and same-sex marriage. Conclusion. Coming out remains an important strategy in the battle for gay rights.

## **The Friends and Family Plan:**

### **Assessing the Impact of Knowing Someone Gay on Support for Gay Rights**

Americans who know lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals (LGBs), especially those who have close LGB friends, are more accepting of homosexuality and more likely to support gay rights than Americans who do not. The key explanation of this pattern has been the contact hypothesis, that knowing out-group members diminishes prejudice, a causal link that supports a political strategy of coming out – revealing one’s sexual orientation to others – as a means to increase social and political acceptance of LGBs. An alternative causal link suggests a weaker impact: If LGBs are more likely to come out to heterosexuals they expect to be accepting, support for gay rights may be largely the cause rather than the effect of having LGB friends and acquaintances.

To understand better the impact of knowing LGBs, I re-estimate the link using individual-level data from 27 surveys of nationally representative samples conducted since 1983. Stage One examines which characteristics predict knowing LGBs, especially as friends, and whether they differ from those that predict support for gay rights. The more similar the determinants, the more serious is the need to control for those characteristics in assessing the impact of knowing LGBs on support for gay rights.

Stage Two provides allow multiple estimates of that effect for different issues, relationship types, and respondents. I use logit models that control for demographic, religious, and political variables. Dependent variables include beliefs about the morality of homosexual relations, employment discrimination, gays in the military, sodomy laws, and same-sex marriage.

## **Linking Acquaintance with LGBs to Support for Gay Rights**

Coming out as a political tool fits well with a strong research tradition in psychology showing that intergroup contact reduces prejudice (Allport 1954). Personal interactions tend not only to increase “liking,” but to diminish “intergroup anxiety,” the “feelings of threat and uncertainty that people experience in intergroup contexts” (Pettigrew & Tropp 2006, 767). Contact, especially prolonged contact that develops into friendship, allows “learning about the outgroup, changing behavior, generating affective ties, and ingroup reappraisal,” all key processes in overcoming prejudice (Pettigrew 1998, 80). Allport (1954) argues that contact has its greatest impact when encounters are marked by “equal status ..., common goals, intergroup cooperation, and the support of authorities, law, or custom” (Pettigrew 1998, 66). Meta-analysis of 515 empirical studies confirms that contact with out-groups lowers prejudice, but shows that while Allport’s conditions “enhance the tendency for positive contact outcomes to emerge,” they are not necessary for a positive impact (Pettigrew & Tropp 2006, 766); the positive effect appears to occur whether the contact is voluntary or involuntary, and the most rigorous studies show the strongest effects.

Anti-LGB prejudice may be especially susceptible to intergroup contact, because most LGBs “pass” as heterosexual in many situations and heterosexuals often learn they have been interacting with LGBs only after establishing a relationship. Many of those relationships have ideal attributes for attitude change: equal status, cooperation toward common goals, friendship. Especially in relationships with close friends or relatives, affective ties should push heterosexuals toward intergroup learning (e.g., asking what it means to be gay) and behavioral change (e.g., making fewer anti-gay

jokes or comments), important steps in eliminating prejudice (Pettigrew 1998). Indeed, in their meta-analysis, Pettigrew & Tropp (2006, 763) find that contact with lesbians and gay men typically has stronger effects than contact with racial, ethnic, or other minorities.

The existing empirical analyses have limits in establishing what impact knowing LGBs has on support for gay rights, however. Most studies are based on samples of college students, who are not representative of the population in their characteristics, contact with LGBs, or support for gay rights. Most studies look at attitudes toward homosexuality or LGBs rather than at policy issues. Some analyses of nationally representative samples provide only simple comparisons of those who do and do not know LGBs, or control for only a few of the many variables that could influence both support for gay rights and acquaintance with LGBs (e.g., Schneider & Lewis 1984).

Most studies rely on self-reported, voluntary contact with out-group members, meaning that the apparent impact of contact may be over-estimated because the strongly prejudiced can avoid contact.<sup>1</sup> LGB-heterosexual contact creates special complexities, because most LGBs can pass as straight in most situations. This gives the strongly prejudiced less ability to avoid intergroup contact (because they may not be able to identify LGBs), but the effect of contact may be weaker (if they remain ignorant of the interaction). Because LGBs have more control than most out-groups over whether to reveal their out-group status, they can balance the potential benefits of a

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<sup>1</sup> This criticism applies to most empirical tests of the contact hypothesis, however, and the effects actually seem to be stronger in experimental studies that create involuntary contact (Pettigrew & Tropp 2006, 759), so this concern may be overstated.

deeper knowledge and a more satisfying relationship with the dangers of rejection (Woods 1993). LGBs are more likely to come out if they perceive more rewards from an honest relationship (perhaps because they see real possibilities for friendship) or fewer dangers from coming out (because they perceive little chance of, or cost to, rejection).

Some evidence suggests that the effects of contact vary across relationship types or groups or issues or time. Friends and family are more likely than acquaintances to have the kinds of conversations that produce attitude change (Herek & Capitanio 1995, Pettigrew 1998). Knowing LGB couples may have more impact on support for recognizing same-sex couples than knowing LGB individuals (Barth & Parry 2007). People strongly opposed to homosexuality on religious grounds might not only avoid contact with LGBs, but be impervious to interactions with LGBs when they do occur. Egan and Sherrill (2007) find that LGBs have less impact on their straight friends' support for nondiscrimination laws than for same-sex marriage. As more heterosexuals know LGBs, the impact of contact could grow or shrink.

At a minimum, analysis of the impact of knowing LGBs on support for gay rights requires controlling for individual characteristics that affect both their probability of knowing LGBs and their support for gay rights. In deciding whom to come out to, LGBs may use heterosexuals' attitudes toward homosexuality and gay rights as indicators of the rewards of knowing them better and the dangers of rejection. Research on attitudes toward homosexuality and support for gay rights finds several consistent patterns (see Herek 1988 for a review of the research). Female, younger, more educated, less religious, and more liberal people generally have more gay-positive

attitudes. Jewish and non-religious people tend to be the more supportive than Catholics and mainline Protestants, who are more supportive than evangelical Protestants. Support generally declines with religious intensity. Other patterns are less clear. Blacks are more likely than whites to condemn homosexual behavior as morally wrong but may be more likely to support gay rights laws (Lewis 2003). Although the Democratic and Republican parties take very different positions on gay rights, partisan differences at the grass roots level are weaker.

If acceptance of homosexuality leads to acquaintance with LGBs, we should expect gender, age, education, religion, and ideology, and perhaps race and party identification, to affect one's probability of knowing LGBs. They should have more effect on having LGB friends than family members or acquaintances, because friendship requires choice. If heterosexuals' gender, age, education, religion, and ideology strongly influence their likelihood of knowing LGBs, especially as friends, other characteristics that our survey data do not capture are also likely to have important effects on both their relationships with LGBs and their positions on LGB issues – and our estimates of the impact of knowing LGBs on support for gay rights are likely to be too high.

### **Data and Methods**

Using the iPOLL search engine of the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, I identified 39 polls that asked respondents whether they knew LGBs and then obtained the original data for 27 of them from the Roper Center or the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. This gives me individual-level data on 38,910 respondents, all gathered by professional polling firms using random national samples. I begin by



modeling who knows LGBs. This is complicated because these 27 surveys use 18 very different questions to establish LGB acquaintance, and many of the surveys lack crucial demographic, political, or religious data. I first combine all 27 surveys, ignore question wording, and just calculate the percentages of each group who answered “Yes” to the **Knows LGB** question. I then run 31 logit analyses on those 27 data sets (some have multiple LGB acquaintance questions), with gender, race, education, age, religion, political ideology, party identification, and location as the independent variables, to the extent each is available in each data set. I also combine 15 surveys with fairly consistent measures of gender, race, education, age, religion, and political ideology, and conduct a joint logit analysis that also controls for state and LGB acquaintance question asked. I follow up with separate models for having LGB friends, family members, and co-workers or acquaintances, using surveys that ask multiple questions about LGB acquaintance. Much stronger results for friends than others would provide additional evidence that pre-existing attitudes affect probabilities of knowing LGBs.

Dummy variables distinguish men from women and blacks, Latinos, Asians and other minorities from whites. Education is measured in years. Because the data span two decades, age is represented by a set of dummy variables for the decade in which respondents were born, with the 1950s as the reference group. Dummy variables distinguish respondents who are Catholic, Jewish, members of another religion, or not religious from Protestants. When possible I include dummy variables that distinguish born again or evangelical Protestants from mainline Protestants and add a dummy variable for those who attend religious services at least almost every week or say religion is very important in their lives. In most models, dummy variables also

distinguish liberals and conservatives from moderates, and Democrats and Republicans from independents. Some data sets allow 5- or 7-point scales of conservatism or Republicanism. In combined analyses, I use sets of dummy variables to distinguish residents of the other 49 states and the District of Columbia from Pennsylvanians and to identify the survey question and year, allowing arbitrary differences across questions and over time. In analyses of single surveys, I replace the state dummy variables with the Gates and Ost (2004) Gay and Lesbian Index, an indicator of the concentration of LGBs in the state, and with the Lewis and Oh (2008) estimates of support for same-sex marriage by state, an indicator of the level of social acceptance of homosexuality.

In Stage Two, I run logit analyses with dummy dependent variables coded 1 for survey answers that indicate acceptance of homosexuality or support for gay rights, including all the independent variables from Stage One, plus **Knows LGB**, a dummy variable for those who know someone gay. I run more than 300 logit models estimating the impact of knowing LGBs on support for gay rights. I summarize the full set of findings, then break it down by the policy issue, by whether the respondent has an LGB friend, and by the characteristics of the respondent. To counteract the endogeneity of knowing LGBs, I repeat the logit models for the gay rights questions, controlling, where possible, for beliefs about homosexuality (whether one is born gay, whether homosexuality is an acceptable alternative lifestyle, and whether homosexual relations are morally wrong or a sin). This allows for the possibility that these attitudes influence LGBs' willingness to come out to them and measures the impact of knowing LGBs on support for gay rights by comparing people who have similar attitudes toward homosexuality. As causation probably goes in both directions, the first models

probably overstate the impact of knowing LGBs, while the second models under-estimate it.

## Who Knows LGBs?

*Women are more likely than men to know LGBs.* In the 27 surveys combined, ignoring question wording, 47% of the women and only 40% of the men knew LGBs. In 31 logit analyses on those 27 data sets, controlling for whatever demographics were available, women were significantly more likely than comparable men to know LGBs in 24 and gender was the most important predictor in seven. In the combined analysis of 15 surveys, I translate the highly significant logit coefficient into probability a difference for an “average” person (a moderate, white, female Protestant born in the 1950s who had an average level of education, lived in Pennsylvania, and answered the question, “Do you have a work colleague, close friend, or relative who is gay or lesbian?” in 2004); she is expected to be 11 percentage points more likely than a comparable man to know LGBs (63% versus 52%).

*More educated people are more likely to know LGBs.* In the combined sample, 63% of those with graduate degrees and only 30% of those who did not complete high school knew someone gay. In Table 1, a year of education raised our base person’s probability of knowing someone gay 3.4 percentage points. The education coefficient was positive and significant in 24 of 30 models and had the largest standardized odds-ratio in 9, as well as in the combined analysis (Table 1).

*Cohort effects are substantial for those born before 1940 but not since.* In the full sample, only 14% of those born before 1910 knew someone gay, compared to 45% of those born in the 1940s and 56% of those born in the 1980s. In Table 1, each decade from 1910 to 1940 raised the probability of knowing someone gay by about 12 percentage points, but those born in the 1980s were only a statistically insignificant 6

percentage points more likely than comparable individuals born in the 1940s to know LGBs. In the individual models, year of birth mattered for those born before 1940; its coefficient was positive in 32 of 33 models and statistically significant in 19. For those born since 1940, however, the coefficient on year of birth was only positive half the time and statistically significant only twice.

*Religion has little impact.* Overall, 58% of Jewish and 57% of non-religious respondents knew someone gay, compared to 47% of Catholics and 43% of Protestants, but with other characteristics controlled, Jewish and non-religious people were only 5 to 10 percentage points more likely than comparable Protestants, Catholics, and members of other religions to know LGBs, and the latter groups did not differ statistically among themselves. In a sample two-thirds as large, those who either attended religious services weekly or said religion was very important in their lives were only about 4 percentage points less likely to know someone gay than comparable others. In a sample only half as large, evangelical Protestants did not differ statistically from other Protestants. (Religion has a much stronger impact on support for gay rights; e.g., Jews were 39 percentage points more likely than evangelical Protestants to support same-sex marriage in a model with the same control variables (Lewis & Oh 2008).)

*Liberals are more likely than conservatives to know LGBs.* Overall, 57% of liberals, 44% of moderates, and 41% of conservatives knew someone gay. Party identification mattered less: 46% of Democrats, 47% of independents, and 43% of Republicans knew someone gay. In the combined analysis, party identification did not have a statistically significant effect (and was dropped to increase the sample size) but,

given the base characteristics, liberals were 13 percentage points more likely than conservatives to know LGBs, and strong liberals were 23 percentage points more likely than strong conservatives to do so. In the individual models, conservatism had a significant negative coefficient in 8 models. (In contrast, liberals were 48 percentage points more likely than conservatives, and strong Democrats were 34 percentage points more likely than strong Republicans, to support same-sex marriage in a model with the same set of controls (Lewis & Oh 2008).)

*Race differences are small.* Overall the percentages of whites, blacks, Latinos, and Asians who knew someone gay varied only between 44% and 46%. With the full set of controls, African Americans and other minorities were 4 percentage points less likely than comparable whites to know LGBs. In separate logits, the black coefficient was negative in 21 models and significant 7 times; it was positive 10 times, significant twice.

*Friends versus Family.* Table 2 reports separate logit analyses of who has close LGB friends, LGB family members, and LGB coworkers in seven surveys that asked about them separately and of who knows LGB couples and individuals in two surveys that asked about both. Comparing the models for having LGB friends and family members confirms that we choose our friends more than our families: the McFadden's  $R^2$  was approximately twice as strong in the friends as in the family members models. The clearest differences are for education and age. Better-educated respondents are much more likely to have LGB friends, but not family members. Older respondents are less likely to have both LGB friends and family members, but the age effect is perhaps twice as strong for friends. Blacks are significantly less likely to have LGB friends in

one survey, but significantly more likely to have LGB family members in another. Latinos and Republicans may also have been less likely to have LGB friends but not family. The model also did a better job of explaining knowing LGB individuals than couples, mostly due to the stronger effects of conservatism and age. Blacks were significantly less likely than comparable whites to know LGB couples but not individuals.

*Summary.* Many patterns suggest that people who know LGBs probably already had more accepting attitudes toward homosexuality. Age, education, gender, religion, and ideology are the strongest predictors of attitudes toward homosexuality. Younger, more educated, female, less religious, and more liberal respondents are all more likely to know LGBs. Other patterns suggest less problem with bias. The nonlinear effect of age (those currently 25 were barely more likely to know LGBs than otherwise comparable individuals currently 65) has not been reported for attitude differences and does not show up in the later analysis in this paper. Religion effects are surprisingly small, especially compared to the ideological differences. Evangelical Protestants are only a little less likely than Jewish and non-religious people to know LGBs, even though they are far less likely to support gay rights.

### **The Impact of Knowing LGBs**

Those who know LGBs are substantially more likely than comparable others to accept homosexuality and to support gay rights. Table 2 summarizes results from 299 logit analyses that control for all the demographic variables available in each data set. The first block summarizes the 210 models that do not control for beliefs about homosexuality. The mean estimated difference in acceptance of homosexuality and support for gay rights between those who do and do not know LGBs is 12.7 percentage

points.<sup>2</sup> In the 84 models where the LGB known is clearly a friend, the difference is 13.5 percentage points; in the 126 models where the LGB could be a friend, family member, coworker, or acquaintance, the difference drops slightly to 12.2 percentage points. In the models where we are comparing individuals who are not only demographically similar but have similar beliefs about whether homosexuality is innate, acceptable, and/or morally wrong, the gap drops about 2 percentage points when the relationship with the LGB may not be a friendship, but if the respondent clearly has an LGB friend, controlling for other beliefs about homosexuality does not matter.

Table 3 restricts the analysis to surveys that asked questions about how one knew LGBs and reports models that include separate dummy variables for each type of relationship. In the 1994 Yankelovich poll, for instance, having an LGB “close friend” has a strong significant impact on support for each gay right listed, but having an LGB family member has a clearly significant additional impact only on support for marriage (the effect on morality, legality, and use of civil rights laws is also significant at the .05 level in one-tailed tests). In Harris, having a “close personal friend” has a significant impact on whether LGBs can change their sexual orientation and on marriage and adoption, with or without controlling for beliefs about the innateness and immutability of sexual orientation, but not on support for a gay rights law; having an LGB family

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<sup>2</sup> To translate the logit coefficients into probability differences, I estimated the expected impact of knowing someone gay for each individual in each data set. That is, I calculated each individual’s expected probability of giving the gay-supportive response twice, once assuming the person knew someone gay and once assuming he/she did not. (I used the Stata **predict** command twice, once setting **Knows LGB** to 1 and once setting it to 0.) I then subtracted to get the probability difference for the individual and calculated the mean probability difference for the data set. (For the advantage of this method, see the discussion of the average partial effect in Wooldridge (2009, 583).)



member has no additional impact. Five *Newsweek*/PSRA polls between 1994 and 2000 asked respondents whether they “work with someone you know is gay,” then whether they “have a gay person in your family,” and then whether they “have a friend or acquaintance who is gay.” The friendship does not have to be as close as in the previous two surveys, but it should not just involve a work acquaintance. In this case, all three types of relationships have significant positive impacts on support for gay rights (partly due to the larger sample size). Any type of relationship seems to make a difference, but a friend or acquaintance matters more than a family member or coworker in every case. In contrast, the two CBS News/New York Times polls suggest that it doesn’t matter much whether one knows LGB individuals or couples: each has an independent impact of approximately the same size.

Does the policy issue matter? Although the estimated size of the effect varies somewhat, the basic patterns are the same. In the 12 surveys that ask about innateness, genetics, or choice, the logit coefficient on **Knows LGB** is always statistically significant.<sup>3</sup> Although only one-third or less believe homosexuality is something people are born with, the average expected difference between those who do and don't know LGBs is 8 percentage points (Table 2). Those who know LGBs are about 14 percentage points more likely than others to call homosexuality an acceptable alternative lifestyle and about 11 percentage points more likely to *reject* the claim that homosexual relations are morally wrong or a sin.

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<sup>3</sup>In contrast, in the three surveys that ask whether people can change their sexual orientations (a belief held by almost half the respondents), the difference between those who do and do not know LGBs is always small and never approaches statistical significance.

Those who know LGBs are substantially more likely to support gay rights across the board. In the 90 models that do not include beliefs about homosexuality as control variables, the effect of knowing LGBs is statistically significant in all but five. Those who know LGBs are significantly more likely than comparable others to favor non-discrimination in principle and in law, to support LGBs teaching school and serving openly in the military, to oppose sodomy laws, to favor civil unions and same-sex marriage, and to support adoption and inheritance rights for same-sex couples. There is some variation across issues: in seven surveys that ask about both civil unions and same-sex marriage, the **Knows LGB** coefficient is consistently larger in the civil union model. Still, for each issue included in at least four surveys, the mean logit coefficient varied only between .59 and 1.15 (for supporting gay rights laws and for hiring homosexuals as doctors or high school teachers, respectively) and the mean percentage difference varied between 9.7 and 23.9 percentage points (the difference on the principle of equal rights in terms of job opportunity is so small largely because support for the principle is high even among those who do not know anyone gay).

Does knowing someone gay have more impact on some groups than others? The method in Table 4 differs importantly from the other tables. I combined data for eleven surveys that each asked at least two questions on homosexuality and/or gay rights that could be combined into indexes with Cronbach's alphas of at least .70 (they varied between .72 and .95). I standardized each index to have a mean of 0 and standard deviation of 1. I ran regressions with robust standard errors for all 11,621 respondents with data on education, decade of birth, ideology, party identification, gender, and race/ethnicity. I repeated the analysis on the 7,861 respondents on whom

I have data on their religious affiliation, including whether they consider themselves born again or evangelical. (Adding the religious intensity model lost another 1,889 cases without meaningfully changing the findings.)

In each case, I ran the model three times, once for those who did not know anyone gay, once for those who did, and once on the combined sample with interaction terms between knowing someone gay and all the other independent variables. Table 4 reports the first two regressions side by side. The coefficients on the interaction terms replicate the differences between the coefficients in the first two models. Table 4 only reports coefficients on interaction terms when they are statistically significant.

In general, the effects of the independent variables are quite similar for those who do and do not know LGBs. As in most previous research on public opinion on gay rights, support rises strongly with education and with each new birth cohort. Support is much higher for liberals than conservatives and somewhat higher for Democrats than Republicans (holding ideology constant). Jews, the non-religious, and Catholics are more supportive than mainline Protestants, who are more supportive than evangelical Protestants. Women support gay rights more than men, and whites support them more than blacks, until we control for blacks' higher propensity to be evangelical Protestants.

The highly significant difference between the constants represents the expected impact of knowing someone gay on a white, female, moderate, independent high school graduate born in the 1950s (who is also a mainline Protestant in the second set of equations). Knowing someone gay matters significantly less for better-educated individuals, suggesting perhaps that more education gives people more grounds for taking policy positions on gay rights, and that coming out to less-educated individuals

can have more impact. The more liberal the individual, the more impact knowing someone gay has on support for gay rights. Liberals generally support gay rights more than conservatives, and the additional impact of knowing someone gay just makes the case for gay rights that much more convincing, whereas conservatives may have a stronger resistance to the gay rights case even when they have gay friends. The impact of knowing someone gay does not vary meaningfully with religion, except for born-again or evangelical Protestants, for whom it has much less impact. The strength of the religious condemnation of homosexuality within this faith, perhaps combined with an ability to love the sinner but hate the sin, may overcome the standard effects of friendship. The liberal-conservative difference weakens slightly with religion in the model – the coefficients on the interaction terms are a little smaller and are jointly but not individually significant at the .05 level – suggesting that the evangelical effect may be a contributing factor.

The impact of knowing someone gay seems to be about the same for men and women, and for whites, blacks, Latinos, and Asians. It also seems to be about the same for those born any time before 1980. Knowing someone gay has significantly more impact for those born in the 1980s (less than 5% of the sample). Those of them who know someone gay are substantially more gay-supportive than comparable individuals born in the 1970s, while those who do not are not. The 42% of those born in the 1980s who don't know LGBs may be especially conservative, or the impact of knowing someone gay may be especially strong for young adults.

In sum, knowing someone gay seems to have a substantial impact on acceptance of homosexuality and support for gay rights. The **Knows LGBs** coefficient

is statistically significant in virtually every model. The effect is somewhat stronger if the respondent has an LGB friend than if the relationship is less intimate or less voluntary, but the difference is only about 10-20% stronger when we know the respondent has an LGB friend than when we don't know the nature of the relationship. Knowing someone gay appears to have more impact on hiring and employment discrimination issues than on couple recognition, but on the latter it still seems to be 10-12 percentage points. Knowing someone gay appears to have a major impact on all types of individuals. The effect was strongest for the youngest respondents, for liberals, and for less-educated respondents, but it appeared substantial even for college-educated conservatives. The effect of knowing someone gay is weakened when we control for beliefs about the innateness, acceptability, and morality of homosexuality, but even when we compare individuals with the same beliefs, those who know LGBs are more likely to support gay rights.

### **Conclusion**

As lesbian and gay activists have long argued, coming out to straight friends, family, and colleagues is likely to have a positive political impact. Heterosexuals who know that they know LGBs are more likely than those who do not to support employment and relationship rights for LGBs. Part of the reason is that people who know LGBs tend to be people whose other characteristics would make them more likely to accept homosexuality and support gay rights. LGBs appear more likely to come out to those less likely to reject them. However, even when I control for many factors that might influence both attitudes toward homosexuality and gay rights and the likelihood of knowing LGBs, actually knowing a lesbian or gay man has a noticeable impact on

support for gay rights. This is true even among similar people with the same beliefs about the morality and origins of homosexuality. Personalizing same-sex marriage, for instance, makes a difference, even for people whose political leanings and moral judgments would suggest no problems with the concept.

The impact is not immense. Only a handful of estimates suggest that knowing someone gay could shift the probability of support by 20 percentage points. Conservative estimates, assuming that knowing someone gay will not change one's opinion about the morality or acceptability of homosexuality, suggest that the effect is in the neighborhood of 10 percentage points – coming out to someone who does not know LGBs appears to have a 1 in 10 chance of moving that person to a more positive perspective on gay rights. That effect has not shrunk noticeably over time, nor does it seem to be limited to particular issues. Coming out remains an important tactic in increasing support for gay rights.

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**Table 1. Who Knows LGBs?**

	<u>Logit Coefficient</u>	<u>Robust z-statistic</u>	<u>Percentage Difference</u>
Male	-0.467**	12.54	-11
Education	0.146**	18.04	3.4
Born before 1920	-1.524**	11.99	-36
Born in the 1920s	-0.984**	12.78	-24
Born in the 1930s	-0.569**	8.64	-14
Born in the 1940s	-0.169**	3.00	-4
Born in the 1950s	.	.	.
Born in the 1960s	-0.075	1.39	-2
Born in the 1970s	-0.011	0.17	0
Born in the 1980s	0.069	0.78	2
Black	-0.183**	2.78	-4
Other minority	-0.149*	2.34	-4
Catholic	0.046	0.99	1
Jewish	0.367**	2.60	8
Other religion	-0.041	0.54	-1
No religion	0.240**	3.47	5
Very liberal	0.544**	5.16	12
Liberal	0.332**	6.42	7
Moderate	.	.	.
Conservative	-0.232**	5.35	-6
Very conservative	-0.436**	4.97	-11
McFadden's pseudo-R <sup>2</sup>		.159	
Observations		22,393	

\* significant at 5%; \*\* significant at 1%

Source: Sample combines 15 surveys. The model also includes dummy variables for state, survey question, and year. The third column translates the logit coefficients in the first column into probability changes for the “base” person: a moderate, white, female Protestant born in the 1950s who had an average level of education, lived in Pennsylvania, and answered the question, “Do you have a work colleague, close friend, or relative who is gay or lesbian?” in 2004.

**Table 2. Does Who Knows LGBs Vary by Type of Relationship?**

	<b>Yankelovich 1994</b>		<b>Harris 2000</b>		<b>Newsweek/PSRA 1994-2000</b>			<b>Los Angeles Times 2003-2004</b>	
	<b><u>Friend</u></b>	<b><u>Family</u></b>	<b><u>Friend</u></b>	<b><u>Family</u></b>	<b><u>Friend</u></b>	<b><u>Family</u></b>	<b><u>Coworker</u></b>	<b><u>Couple</u></b>	<b><u>Person</u></b>
Male	-0.623** (2.93)	-0.412 (1.62)	-0.533** (3.13)	-0.204 (1.06)	-0.294** (3.82)	-0.326** (3.36)	-0.101 (1.23)	-0.473** (4.18)	-0.543** (4.68)
African American	0.348 (0.98)	0.131 (0.28)	-0.906** (3.09)	0.407 (1.25)	-0.242 (1.81)	0.374* (2.47)	0.191 (1.38)	-0.498* (2.44)	-0.124 (0.59)
Latino	-1.213* (1.96)	0.678 (1.18)	-0.679 (1.82)	0.617 (1.69)	-0.384 (1.24)	-0.368 (1.03)	-0.082 (0.26)	-0.226 (0.88)	-0.238 (0.89)
Asian	-0.395 (0.66)	-0.566 (0.54)	-	-0.713 (0.62)	-0.745* (2.56)	-0.185 (0.50)	-0.403 (1.18)	-0.883* (2.40)	-0.630 (1.42)
Other minority	-0.247 (0.45)	0.324 (0.68)	0.371 (0.95)	0.235 (0.52)	-0.044 (0.29)	0.391* (2.28)	-0.087 (0.55)	-0.244 (0.89)	0.039 (0.14)
Years of education	0.104 (1.77)	-0.057 (0.97)	0.072* (1.99)	0.027 (0.67)	0.175** (10.01)	-0.011 (0.52)	0.149** (7.81)	0.109** (4.20)	0.116** (4.38)
Age	-0.020** (2.88)	-0.017* (1.97)	-0.032** (6.34)	-0.010 (1.78)	-0.015** (6.56)	-0.008** (3.04)	-0.012** (4.67)	-0.004 (1.17)	-0.018** (5.44)
Democrat	-0.015 (0.05)	-0.099 (0.31)	0.233 (1.16)	0.416 (1.79)	-0.022 (0.24)	0.141 (1.23)	0.050 (0.51)	-0.071 (0.36)	-0.311 (1.51)
Republican	-0.311 (1.04)	-0.365 (1.02)	-0.591** (2.81)	0.357 (1.49)	-0.155 (1.67)	0.286* (2.42)	-0.054 (0.53)	-0.306 (1.50)	-0.344 (1.64)
Conservatism			-0.209 (1.68)	-0.199 (1.40)				-0.089 (1.02)	-0.261** (2.91)
Household income	-0.184* (1.98)	0.121 (1.07)	0.183** (2.70)	-0.038 (0.49)				0.176** (3.66)	0.259** (5.07)
Refused to state income	-1.185* (2.49)	0.558 (1.15)	-0.008 (0.02)	-2.352** (3.52)				-0.135 (0.42)	0.396 (1.24)

Lives in city	0.579* (2.46)	0.517 (1.69)	0.740** (2.98)	0.359 (1.28)					
Lives in suburb	0.283 (1.18)	0.366 (1.17)	0.666** (3.06)	0.137 (0.55)					
Evangelical Protestant	-0.354 (1.28)	-0.074 (0.24)						-0.091 (0.63)	0.109 (0.76)
Catholic	0.327 (1.27)	-0.248 (0.75)						-0.128 (0.88)	0.008 (0.06)
Jewish	0.569 (0.94)	0.543 (0.76)						-0.495 (1.49)	-0.089 (0.21)
Other religion	0.153 (0.53)	-0.101 (0.28)						-0.051 (0.19)	-0.176 (0.73)
No religion	0.208 (0.63)	-0.430 (0.93)						0.236 (1.25)	0.287 (1.49)
Importance of religion	-0.254* (2.52)	-0.111 (0.90)						-0.064 (0.90)	-0.101 (1.43)
Survey year					0.082** (4.32)	0.132** (5.65)	0.094** (4.76)	0.046 (0.42)	0.467** (4.22)
Constant	-0.695 (0.85)	-0.442 (0.52)	-0.043 (0.07)	-1.014 (1.39)	-1.554** (5.69)	-1.449** (4.50)	-2.720** (9.05)	-1.106* (2.34)	-0.520 (1.10)
McFadden's pseudo-R <sup>2</sup>	.096	.047	.116	.051	.058	.022	.038	.048	.085
Observations	792	792	966	979	3629	3629	3629	2252	2252

Robust z statistics in parentheses \* significant at 5%; \*\* significant at 1%

**Table 3. Does the Impact of Knowing LGBs Vary by Issue?**

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Not Controlling for Beliefs About Homosexuality</b>			<b>Controlling for Beliefs About Homosexuality</b>		
	<b>Mean Logit Coefficient</b>	<b>Mean Percent Difference</b>	<b>Number of Logits</b>	<b>Mean Logit Coefficient</b>	<b>Mean Percent Difference</b>	<b>Number of Logits</b>
All	.71	12.7	210	.68	11.3	89
LGB friend	.74	13.5	84	.78	13.4	32
LGB other/unknown	.68	12.2	126	.63	10.1	57
<b>Beliefs about Homosexuality</b>						
Acceptable alternative lifestyle	.80	14.2	5			
Something one is born with	.40	8.0	25			
Not morally wrong	.60	10.8	16			
<b>Employment Discrimination</b>						
Equal rights in job opportunities	.71	9.7	7	.51	5.9	3
Elementary school	1.06	19.5	13	.82	15.2	7
High school	1.14	23.9	4	1.01	18.5	4
Doctors	1.15	19.1	4	1.02	15.5	4
Military	.87	16.7	13	.67	13.0	7
Combined	.96	17.3	41	.80	14.1	25
<b>Recognition for Same-sex Relationships</b>						
Same-sex marriage	.73	11.2	30	.69	8.9	15
Civil unions	.73	13.3	27	.59	9.7	10
Const. amendment	.64	11.6	10	.46	7.1	3
Combined	.73	12.1	64	.63	9.0	28
<b>Other</b>						
Sodomy laws	.84	16.3	11	.76	12.6	9
Gay rights laws	.59	10.7	27	.53	10.0	13

**Table 4. Does How One Knows LGBs Affect Support for Gay Rights?**

**Yankelovich, 1994**

	<b>Morally Wrong</b>	<b>Gay Sex Legal</b>	<b>Marry</b>	<b>Adopt</b>	<b>Elem. Teacher</b>	<b>Military</b>	<b>Emp't Law</b>	<b>Use Civil Rights Law</b>
Close friend	-0.589** (2.74)	1.142** (4.35)	0.713** (3.26)	1.084** (4.56)	0.994** (4.41)	1.016** (4.47)	1.103** (4.44)	0.840** (3.69)
Family member	-0.444 (1.67)	0.521 (1.77)	0.797** (2.71)	0.378 (1.39)	0.050 (0.19)	0.116 (0.43)	0.138 (0.47)	0.507 (1.91)

**Harris, 2000**

	<b>Genetic</b>	<b>Change</b>	<b>Rights Law</b>	<b>Marry</b>	<b>Adopt</b>	<b>Rights Law</b>	<b>Marry</b>	<b>Adopt</b>
Close friend	0.311 (1.75)	-0.347* (1.97)	0.203 (1.16)	0.930** (3.69)	0.599** (2.67)	0.132 (0.74)	0.892** (3.46)	0.606** (2.68)
Family member	0.138 (0.67)	0.055 (0.26)	-0.215 (1.02)	-0.095 (0.33)	0.015 (0.06)	-0.231 (1.08)	-0.098 (0.33)	0.070 (0.26)

**Newsweek/PSRA 1994-2000**

	<b>Marry</b>	<b>Adopt</b>	<b>Inherit</b>	<b>Social Security</b>	<b>Emp't Law</b>	<b>Housing Law</b>	<b>Job Opps.</b>	<b>Sales</b>	<b>Hire Military</b>	<b>Teacher</b>
Friend/ acquaintance	0.679** (7.49)	0.651** (7.43)	0.519** (6.14)	0.452** (5.44)	0.340** (4.10)	0.775** (7.55)	0.785** (7.13)	1.167** (6.32)	0.914** (7.85)	0.969** (8.80)
Family member	0.255* (2.45)	0.281** (2.81)	0.275* (2.53)	0.315** (3.14)	0.182 (1.83)	0.242 (1.75)	0.282 (1.91)	0.631* (2.33)	0.458** (2.96)	0.539** (3.72)
Coworker	0.250** (2.66)	0.455** (5.03)	0.267** (2.81)	0.191* (2.15)	0.337** (3.77)	0.380** (3.08)	0.260* (2.01)	0.600* (2.51)	0.214 (1.60)	0.328** (2.61)

**CBS News/New York Times, 2003-04**

	<b>Choice</b>	<b>Morally Wrong</b>	<b>Gay Sex Legal</b>	<b>Civil Unions</b>	<b>Marry</b>	<b>No Const. Amend.</b>	<b>Civil Unions</b>	<b>Marry</b>
Knows LGB person	-0.294* (2.12)	-0.482* (2.32)	0.637** (3.19)	0.567** (3.92)	0.510** (2.97)	0.629** (3.04)	0.528** (3.56)	0.463** (2.61)
Knows LGB couple	-0.425** (3.18)	-0.667** (3.47)	0.712** (3.68)	0.650** (4.65)	0.779** (4.86)	0.507* (2.51)	0.587** (4.09)	0.719** (4.33)
Homosexuality a choice							-1.100** (7.65)	-1.209** (6.72)

**Table 5. Does Knowing LGBs Affect Gay Rights Support More for Some?**

	<u>Does Not Know LGB</u>	<u>Model 1 Knows LGB</u>	<u>Difference</u>	<u>Does Not Know LGB</u>	<u>Model 2 Knows LGB</u>	<u>Diff.</u>
Constant	-.263** (3.03)	.144* (2.48)	.407** (3.89)	-.229* (2.36)	.213** (3.29)	.442** (3.80)
Years of education	.057** (9.27) (2.91)	.039** (6.17)	-.018*	.051** (2.04)	.021** (6.80)	-.030** (3.07)
Liberal	.268** (5.36)	.399** (9.27)		.131* (1.99)	.232** (3.72)	.365** (8.02)
Conservative	-.282** (7.45)	-.428** (1.82)	-.146**	-.266** (2.66)	-.372** (5.37)	(8.58)
Democrat	.006 (.16)	.101** (2.69)		.046 (.96)	.068 (1.63)	
Republican	-.297** (8.00)	-.258** (6.64)		-.232** (4.95)	-.191** (4.45)	
Evangelical Protestant				-.352** (8.35)	-.487** (11.04)	-.134* (2.20)
Catholic				.186** (3.84)	.186** (4.31)	
Jewish				.602** (3.89)	.479** (8.66)	
Other religion				-.026 (.29)	-.020 (.29)	
No religion				.245** (2.96)	.341** (6.24)	
Born before 1930	-.269** (5.84)	-.271** (4.80)		-.194** (3.17)	-.274** (4.03)	



Born in the 1930s	-.222** (4.81)	-.173** (3.39)		-.224** (3.85)	-.096 (1.74)	
Born in the 1940s	-.096* (2.01)	-.084 (1.90)		-.058 (.97)	.005 (.09)	
Born in the 1950s	.	.	.	.		
Born in the 1960s	.020 (.44)	.087 (1.94)		.030 (.50)	.104* (2.01)	
Born in the 1970s	.269** (4.67)	.244** (5.11)		.293** (3.84)	.251** (4.90)	
Born in the 1980s	.255** (3.08) (2.32)	.513** (6.92)	.258*	.185* (2.33)	.449** (2.14)	.263* (6.08)
Male	-.181** (6.09)	-.154** (5.01)		-.192** (4.98)	-.154** (4.48)	
African American	-.173** (3.23)	-.260** (4.49)		-.029 (.39)	-.066 (.96)	
Latino	-.031 (.38)	-.008 (.11)		.026 (.25)	-.019 (.26)	
Asian	-.005 (.03)	-.032 (.19)		.060 (.30)	.016 (.11)	
Other minority	.003 (.04)	-.107 (1.17)		.019 (.18)	-.166 (1.73)	
Observations	5443	6178		3199	4662	
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.16	.22		.25	.32	

Robust t statistics in parentheses \* significant at 5%; \*\* significant at 1%