

Sociologist examines attitudes toward LGT individuals in new study

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Meredith Worthen, OU sociologist, examines how measures of social contact and social distancing relate to attitudes toward lesbian, gay and transgender individuals in a new study. Credit: University of Oklahoma

A University of Oklahoma sociologist, Meredith G. F. Worthen, examines how measures of social contact and social distancing relate to attitudes toward lesbian, gay and transgender individuals in a new study. Worthen uses a scale she developed and data from college students in the United States (Oklahoma and Texas), Italy and Spain to offer the first cross-cultural comparisons of attitudes toward transgender people in the United States and European Union. The goal is to develop a more in-depth understanding of global LGT prejudices and to promote future research that better counteracts negative prejudices toward these groups.

"The findings suggest that measures of desired [social contact](#) with LGT people are more strongly related to LGT support than simple measures of knowing LGT people. This is likely because more and more people know LGT people than in the past. But as demonstrated in this study, these patterns differ based on cultural climate and by

stigmatized group (lesbian, gay or [transgender](#))," said Worthen, professor in the Department of Sociology, OU College of Arts and Sciences.

While there is a great deal of variation in attitudes toward LGT people across the globe, the United States and the European Union have been actively working toward more support of LGT people in the past decade. Even so, cultural tensions remain high, and in certain parts of the United States and the European Union, negative attitudes toward and public support of LGT issues persist.

This study shows some locations are especially supportive, while others have yet to adopt widespread policies that support LGT people. Oklahoma is known for its conservative perspectives, while Texas has 'liberal pockets' that support LGT issues. In the European Union, Italy is dominated by traditional cultural attitudes, while Spain was among the first locations in the world to recognize same-sex marriage. In addition, most Americans and Europeans know someone who is gay or lesbian, but a smaller percentage know someone who is transgender.

This study suggests that especially in liberal cultural climates, simply knowing a gay or lesbian person may no longer serve as a correlation of supportive attitudes toward LGT people. Instead, desired social contact may be a more salient measure of understanding attitudes toward gays and lesbians in both conservative and liberal cultural climates. In contrast, because a minority of Americans and Europeans indicate they know a transgender person, actual social contact may still correlate with attitudes toward and desired social contact with transgender people in both conservative and liberal cultural climates.

Provided by University of Oklahoma

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