

COUPLING

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## Left Out

### "Gay recovering leftist" explores why the dating life of a political minority can be lonely.

By James Kirchick | August 5, 2007

"I can't date someone with a different belief system" is what he told me. I expected this answer from the guy I had been casually seeing. From early on, I suspected that our differing political bents – his liberal, mine more conservative – would ultimately cause a split. Once, we had a heated argument when I said offhandedly that people who could not afford to care for children should not have them (not a policy prescription, just a profession of personal ethics). After that, I tried to avoid political discussions altogether. So his answer did not come as much of a surprise when, a few weeks after we broke up, I asked him for his reasons. His beliefs euphemism didn't render the blow any softer: We're both Jewish.

So much for dating a proud, progressive, and ostensibly tolerant liberal. But with him, as with other liberals I know, tolerance does not always extend to appreciating someone else's differing political views. Now living in Cambridge and having grown up in the suburbs of Boston and gone to school at Yale, I've been surrounded by liberals for nearly all of my life. Most would be astonished to hear that they're the most intolerant people I've ever met. After all, I, the supposedly closed-minded conservative, never considered this guy's liberal politics anathema to the point of wanting to call off our relationship. A Mary Matalin-James Carville pairing (she the Republican adviser to Dick Cheney, he the Democratic strategist who helped Bill Clinton get elected) ours would not be.

As a gay recovering leftist – to my eternal shame, I canvassed for Ralph Nader in high school – I have grown accustomed to having difficulties in the dating world. At Yale, most people knew me as "the gay conservative" for a column I wrote in the school paper, and my notoriety – not the source of sexy fascination that I might have hoped it to be – certainly did not help my dating prospects. My reputation preceded me. Once, at a party, a gay freshman who had only been on campus for a few days was introduced to me and said, "Oh, you're that [expletive] conservative." On [Facebook.com](https://www.facebook.com) – where people of my generation self-importantly advertise themselves to the world – I selected "Libertarian" to describe my "political views." I hate using labels and am hardly a doctrinaire free-marketeer, but I generally believe that government makes a mess of things and that society is better off when the state only does what's absolutely necessary.

Most gay people are liberal, and this is somewhat understandable; the left has embraced gay rights as a part of its political agenda, whereas the right, with some important exceptions, has not. But for many gays, liberalism is just as much a visceral, reactionary tendency as it is a positive affirmation of political belief. Many gays I know – especially those from red states – blame conservatism writ large as the villain that repressed them for so many years. Thus, their homosexuality dictates their political views on everything. For these gays, it is just as much a part of the "coming out" process to be a loud liberal as a proud homosexual.

But there's nothing about my homosexuality that dictates a belief about raising the minimum wage, withdrawing immediately from Iraq, and backing teachers' unions: all liberal causes that I strongly oppose. Yet there's a common, unattractive feature that many conservative gay men share: a serious chip on their shoulder. Being part of a community that is so intolerant of their views, gay conservatives can be embittered, patronizing, and castigatory of their gay brothers. It's not a particularly attractive attitude. Perhaps it's for this reason that I have not started cruising Log Cabin Republican meetings for dates.

Luckily, I am now dating someone who, though more liberal than I, appreciates my political independence. Let's just hope it lasts through this long campaign season.

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