Discussions in the media about gender and sexual identity reveal conflicting attitudes about the humanities.

Unsurprisingly, discourse surrounding gender/sexual identity in the media reflects a contentious cultural climate. However, we find that these discussions also seem, by proxy, to argue opinions about the humanities in general.

Topics with keywords such as gender, women, men, gay, queer, or trans in a topic model (250 topics) of our Collection 1 (82,324 articles in U.S news media mentioning "humanities") contain rhetorically disparate articles¹ indicating the polarized nature of such debates. Top words in topic 183, for example, include gay, gender, people, disability, lesbian, transgender, sex, and *identity*. Some of the documents most associated with this topic illustrate a dialogue around advocacy for LGBTQ+ groups. For example, "Pansexuality: A Hidden Gender Binary Buster," "Gendergueer community at SF State breaks gender labels" and several others all represent efforts to recognize and validate queer identities within public spaces.

But alongside these are articles reacting to the perceived threat of "liberal identity politics" in higher education. For example, a piece in an online news and opinion website titled "<u>The 9 Most Preposterous Parts Of</u> <u>Melissa Click's Absurd Résumé</u>" criticizes Click for having a certificate in "advanced feminist studies." Similar anxiety about the influence of liberal academics on the minds of college students is evident in another piece on the same site titled "<u>Fancypants</u> <u>College Professors Favor Democrats Over</u> <u>Republicans</u>," which discusses a study it says shows that social-science faculty and historians are overwhelmingly politically liberal, and that historians and female social scientists in particular are especially liberal.

Articles connected to this topic thus reflect competing narratives. On the one hand, they tacitly view the humanities as a source of authority and a natural site for discussion of these issues (see KF 3-1). On the other hand, they use the humanities' association with such issues to accuse them of harmful and absurd "identity politics." Such attitudes reflect a fear that by exploring the cultural construction of identity, the humanities encourage people to challenge and resist traditional gender roles.



Topic #183 viewed in TopicBubbles.

Document collection studied: <u>C-1</u>: U.S. News Media, c. 1989-2019 (WE1S core collection of articles mentioning "humanities")

Topic model of this collection: <u>C-1.250</u> (250 topics) Interesting sample topics in the model: <u>#183</u>, <u>#207</u>, <u>#21</u>

Representative articles: <u>a</u>, <u>b</u>, <u>c</u>, <u>d</u>, <u>e</u>, <u>f</u>. Evidentiary documentation: <u>WE1S report</u>