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Overcoming Discrimination against LGBT Youth

Article explores social issues surrounding LGBT youth asserting that a broad-based public campaign is the best option to solve the current problem. It first reviews the history of the LGBT legislation movements, shows the evidence for the issue, and then reports the effects of it. Next, it describes several successful examples of campaigns and describes possible variants for this particular solution and its benefits. Finally, it considers and dismisses rival perspectives.

Discrimination against LGBT – lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender—society began a long time ago. As a result of their exclusion from society, such individuals paved their own path for creating a safe environment for themselves, their families, and their friends. Nevertheless, LGBT youth turn out to be more vulnerable when it comes to violence than adults as they have not yet learned how to defend themselves and therefore, need to be protected the most. The reasons for the discrimination are simple: negative stereotypes occur in every culture, and those who do not fit the norm are mistreated. The situation is thought to be taken care of today: there are many new laws which are supposed to protect and support victims. However, it is still not enough to solve the problem completely. Unfortunately, these regulations are mostly aimed at the whole LGBT society, but few specifically focus on teenagers, who suffer the most. In other words, LGBT youth face discrimination because society has a negative stereotype of homosexuality and a failure to accept people who do not fit the norm. However, this problem can be solved by a broad-based public campaign. Considering the effectiveness and success of several examples of public campaigns, such a strategy is likely to change the minds of people who oppose LGBT rights and make the lives of LGBT teenagers safer.

Although the history of LGBT discrimination is long, the very first organization to support such individuals was founded only in 1924. Its purpose was to gain gay rights

and publish the earliest homosexual newspaper. Despite the fact that the existence of “The Society for Human Rights” lasted only for a few months, it is still considered to be the first step to the LGBT legislation the world knows now. The next major event happened in 1952 and, unfortunately, it was a step backwards - the American Psychiatric Association stated that homosexuality is a sociopathic disease. This event enormously affected the lives of sexual minorities, as since they were considered mentally ill, they were not getting jobs (“LGBT Rights,” 2018). Additionally, homosexuality themes were banned from the television and only presented, if at all, in a bad light. For instance, gay characters were usually the ones who committed suicide in movies (“Gay Rights,” 1989). The following breaking point was the Stonewall Riots in 1969, when LGBT New-Yorkers resisted a police raid causing a six-day long protest with violent battles against law-enforcement agencies to change society’s attitude towards LGBT Americans. For the next 45 years, the LGBT community was facing changes for the better and even set the stage for the legalization of same-sex marriages, which first took place in Massachusetts in 2004. Unfortunately, these days discrimination still occurs. Although people have been fighting against it for the last century, 31 out of the 50 states of the US are discriminatory. Only New Hampshire so far is on its way to fully protecting victims, yet another 30 states are strictly against the LGBT society. But regardless of the place sexual minorities live in, they experience hard times becoming politicians, and recently transgender people are started being disqualified from joining the military services in the US (“LGBT Rights”, 2018). In other words, despite all the efforts LGBT individuals have made in order to gain equality with straight people, their history does not always increase but, in fact, has its own ups and downs, and, unfortunately, such people are still being mistreated in 2018.

To solve any kind of problem successfully, its roots need to be identified first. There are two main causes of LGBT discrimination: a negative stereotype and failure to accept people who do not fit the norm. In fact, the latter can be interpreted as a consequence of the first. Specifically, the negative stereotype of LGBT people results

from certain gender schemas, a society's knowledge structure of what is considered masculine and feminine (Bem, 1981). People start forming the idea of what is normal since childhood, and this schema formation occurs in three stages. First, a child takes a look at other people. In this case, they can see that LGBT people are not welcomed by, for example, their own family. Second, a child imitates those around them. Since their family does not accept such individuals, neither does the child. Third, a child sees positive and negative consequences, which makes them continue or stop the action. They do not get any punishment for their nonacceptance because their family is against LGBT, and, as a result, the child is likely to also discriminate against such people. In other words, discrimination is being reproduced, and so some other actions need to be taken in order to break this cycle of never-ending prejudice.

Undoubtedly, the reasons for the discrimination mentioned above lead to several effects of the problem, such as bullying, rejection of family, and the impact on mental health. The biggest part of a childhood is attendance at school. In order to actually study and gain knowledge, students need to have a safe environment where they feel themselves more or less secure. However, according to Kosciw, Greytak, Giga, Villenas & Danischewski, 57.6% and 43.3% of teenagers do not feel safe in school due to their sexual orientation and gender identity, respectively. Moreover, 31.8% of students skipped an entire school day for the same reason (2016). Bullying significantly affects a student's academic performance, and, for this reason, some further changes need to be made to resolve this issue. The next problem youth may face is the rejection of parents after coming out – a metaphor which means finally revealing sexual orientation or gender identity (APA, n.d.). This rejection makes children feel lonely and left out, as if they do not matter to the world anymore. Besides, in some severe cases it may lead to homelessness, and as many as 40% of all 2 million homeless teenagers in the US identify themselves as LGBT (SAMHSA, 2017). Undoubtedly, 80,000 children living on streets is a huge number. Particularly, it happens because the atmosphere at home

was not welcoming or parents threw a child out after coming out, not wanting to accept them the way they are.

The problems mentioned above have an immense impact on mental health and may cause mental illnesses, drug abuse, and suicidal tendency. In fact, there are “higher rates of major depression, generalized anxiety disorder and substance use or dependence in lesbian and gay youth” (DeAngelis, n.d.). Additionally, based on a 2015 survey conducted by the National Institute on Drug Abuse, 39.1% of LGBT youth had used drugs in the past year, almost twice as much as straight respondents (NIDA, 2017). The figure below, based on data gathered in a 2015 nationally representative survey of 15,624 US high-school students and published in *The Journal of the American Medical Association* (Caputi, Smith, & Ayers, 2017) shows suicide rates among sexuality/gender identity groups of adolescents in the United States. As can be seen in the table 1, heterosexuals show the lowest numbers – 11.90% of these teenagers planned suicide and 6.30% attempted. However, the percentage increases rapidly when it comes to sexual minorities – for all sexual minorities, the number of planned suicides nearly triples, and attempts quadruple.

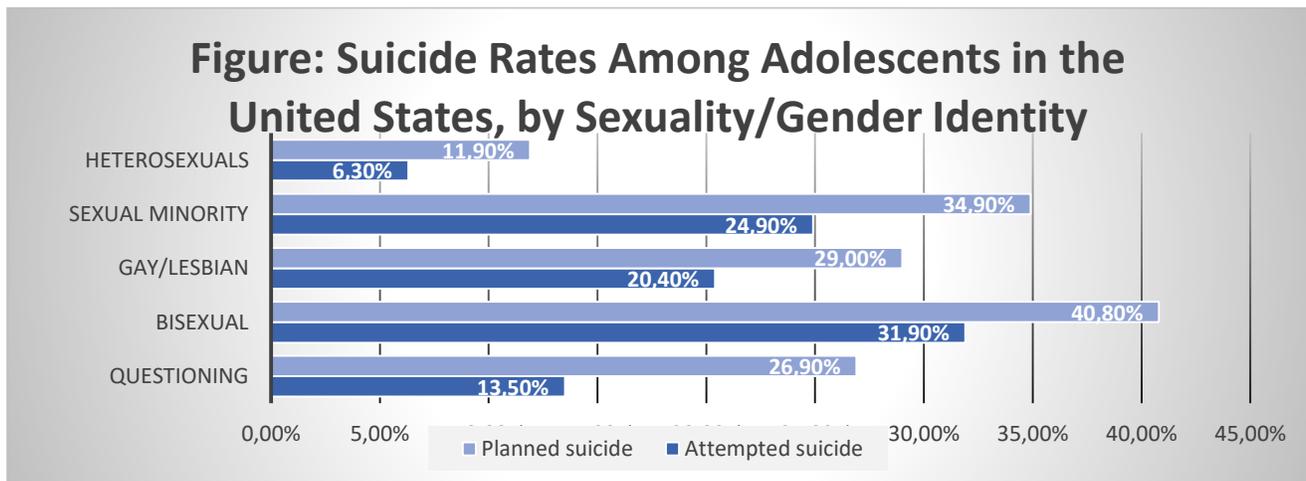


Table 1. Suicide rate among Adolescents in the USA by Sexuality/Gender Identity

Specifically, among gays and lesbians, the rates are 29% and 20.4%, respectively. The numbers for bisexual teenagers’ skyrocket, rising to almost 41% for planned and as

much as 32% for attempted suicide. Adolescents who identified as “questioning” on this survey show results similar to those for all sexual minorities, yet lower by almost 10%. Clearly, these data indicate the correlation between sexual orientation or gender identity and mental health.

Despite the paved path to gay legislation and all the new rules and laws, the LGBT community still suffer today. Most importantly, such youth are greatly impacted by negative stereotypes, and so the minds of people who oppose homosexuality and gender fluidity need to be changed to protect vulnerable teenagers. Although all possible solutions to this problem are psychological as they involve altering thoughts and may be considered difficult to achieve, a broad-based public campaign is extremely likely to eventually stop the discrimination against LGBT youth and protect victims in the future.

A broad-based public campaign is likely to be effective after looking at examples of several successful campaigns. For example, one of the oldest campaigns which changed the world for better was *Keep America Beautiful*. It was created in 1953 with the idea to raise awareness to littering problem and solve it. It became famous when 12 years later, in 1965, Lady Bird Johnson, the First Lady of the United States, joined the company with the statement about restoring the beauty of the land, called beautification. She made a big contribution to the litter prevention by making the campaign well-known. Although today not everyone knows about this advertising, the general attitude towards littering has changed drastically and remains the same 50 years later (“Keep America Beautiful,” n.d.). The success of this campaign lies in psychology. Specifically, as explained in the National Survey about littering behavior in the United States, attitude towards littering was changing after initiating the change of social norms: “for example, seeing a person litter, seeing a pile of swept litter, or seeing a person or group pick up litter, can all activate norms and mobilize behavior.” As explained further, individuals’ beliefs are activated, and people start thinking about whether they should continue performing particular behaviors or alter them. It happens because feelings of shame and guilt are developed by violating what is thought to be normal in culture causing the

motivation to change. (“Littering Behavior in America,” 2009). In brief, society’s view on littering changed after being exposed to advertising and causing the formation of the necessary attitude.

Another great example of an effective campaign is *Tips From Former Smokers* (*Tips*) anti-smoking campaign from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. It aired in 2012 and 2014 with different kinds of ads and duration of being promoted, but the main idea was to show the real cost of smoking and all the effects. Despite having dissimilar content, both campaigns were truly successful as “from 2012-2015, CDC estimates that over 9 million Americans have tried to quit smoking cigarettes because of the campaign, and over half a million have quit for good.” The advertisement showed real stories and videos of people with various diseases caused by smoking cigarettes. They explained what it is like to live with such health problems and their regret of former smoking. Before this campaign, most of the smokers heard but did not actually see the consequences of tobacco and nicotine use. Seeing these effects was persuading them to at least try to `change their lives to save themselves and their families (“Tips Impact,” n.d.). In other words, when people are aware of the real impact of the problem, they are likely to think of it and attempt changing their behavior.

Taking into account past campaigns and their mistakes and successes, this public campaign needs to combine all spheres of today’s advertising and not focus on a particular one. Since the purpose of it is to change the minds of as many people as possible, making a series of ads is likely to affect different sectors of the population and largely fix the problem. For this reason, the campaign should include billboards, television, radio, and social media advertisements. Specifically, billboards and other outdoor ads, such as posters in buses and subway, are effective because bright, eye-catching graphics only need a few seconds for a person to look through and if there are many of them around the city, they might form a lasting impression. For instance, WCRS used billboard campaign “Woman’s Aid” in order to prevent domestic violence. It was minimalistic and interactive, changing when people were looking at it. It was so

successful that it was presented 20 countries and influenced more than 325,000 people winning many awards (“Woman’s Aid,” n.d.). Television is also likely to be effective. People watch it not only at their homes but also while waiting in queues in hospitals, beauty salons, etc. Moreover, advertising while live programs, popular shows, and sports events attract a loyal, attentive audience. Radio is similar to television advertisement as again, it can be heard in various food and clothing stores, cars, and other places. However, it is much more beneficial in some ways as unlike television and visual ads, people do not need to focus on a page or screen and can listen to the announcement while performing other tasks.

One of the most effective forms of reaching the audience today is social media. It does not only have many different platforms for all types of advertisements but also various formats to create a specific ad in order to reach the intended audience, called targeting. Consequently, it is advantageous to the campaign as both youth and adults can be addressed. According to Pew Research Center, 88% of people from 18 to 29 are using social media in 2018, with 78% of those being from 30 to 49, 64% from 50 to 64, and 37% from 65. Pew also provides graphs showing the percentage of users by race, gender, income, level of education, and community type (2018). In other words, people with different backgrounds use social networks and therefore, if the advertisement is created successfully, it might reach a rather diverse audience. In addition, social media advertising is considered to be cheapest in comparison to other methods. In fact, cost per thousand impressions (CPM)—“an advertising metric that measures how many advertising dollars you must spend to reach 1,000 people”—reaches \$57 for direct mail. Obviously, it is extremely high if there is no warranty that the audience will pay attention to the ad. However, the prices drop to \$28 for television, \$10 for radio, \$5 for billboards, and as low as 2.50\$ per CPM for social media advertisement (“Traditional Media,” n.d.). The cost decreases by almost 23 times, meaning that 23,000 of people can be reached using the same amount of money as for direct mail. Considering the effectiveness of targeting and cost, social media becomes the best advertising approach

to reach as many people as possible and at the same time do not spend great amounts of money. Whatever form the campaign will take, its purpose is to gradually change the norm. Possible ideas with the analysis can be seen in the accompanying document.

Aiming to create an effective campaign, its purpose needs to be known. The main idea of the campaign is to change society's mindset from fixed to growth. A fixed mindset means that people believe their qualities, traits and simply general intelligence cannot be changed through their lifetime; and this idea, unfortunately, is one of the origins of gender problems, as it creates a certain mental schema about LGBT society. Thus, in order to greatly reduce the whole discrimination issue, people need to seek a growth mindset. Such a mindset will create flexibility in the way people think, and they are likely to accept behaviors and actions outside the norm, including LGBT individuals. In addition, this mindset is usually inherited by children, so it might change the whole LGBT situation in the long run ("What Is Mindset," n.d.).

The likelihood of achieving a growth mindset increases when people are unconsciously exposed to the information they need to accept. It is called subliminal perception— "when peoples' thoughts, feelings and actions are influenced by stimuli without awareness"—and this term is widely used in both psychology and the marketing world ("Subliminal Perception," n.d.). By way of explanation, when people are exposed to a product without actually realizing it, they tend to feel that they want to buy the product and that it is fully their idea. This concept of introducing idea subliminally is beneficial to the campaign, as an unconscious raising of awareness might cause a subtle change of the mindset. For instance, seeing advertisements about discrimination and its causes might form an impression and the next time a person faces prejudice, they are likely to try to prevent it, feeling that it is wrong. They might not necessarily think that something caused their change of attitude, but that they came to such opinion by themselves. Moreover, corresponding gentle encouragement to change behavior is advantageous because it does not motivate backlash. When people face rather intense suggestions that they are wrong, and their behavior needs to be modified, they are

usually showing resistance. It may be especially strong if a person feels oneself belonging to a particular group rather than being a unique individual, as explained by Social Identity Theory—“a person’s sense of who they are based on their group membership(s)” (McLeod, 2008). In such cases, they see a threat to the whole group and strongly oppose any kind of change. The campaign omits this theory by making connections with other parts of their identity. The opposition gets almost impossible since advertisements delicately revise the norm (see accompanying document). Finally, the campaign can be beneficial because it is easy to spread and adapt it. In case it is not effective, new approaches can be used after analyzing the causes of the failure. Similarly, due to all types of advertisements and their ability of targeting, the campaign might be relatively easy to spread, as again, after analyzing first outcomes of the advertisement, the tactics can be changed to reach the intended audience. To put it briefly, relying on all facts stated above, a broad-based public campaign is likely to be effective to reduce the discrimination against LGBT youth by gently altering people’s mindset.

Unfortunately, despite all the benefits of the advertisement, some religious groups will be against the campaign because homosexuality is considered immoral in their religion.

Specifically, among 11 most practiced religious groups Evangelical Protestantism (i.e. Christianity) is one of the most opposed religions to the LGBT society reaching 55% of people who think that such individuals need to be discouraged after the highest 76% of Jehovah’s witnesses and 57% of Mormons (“Views about homosexuality,” n.d.). In fact, the percentage of people practicing Christianity in the US is 70.6%, and half of this population does not accept LGBT homosexuality (“Religions,” n.d.). The main source of this idea is Bible, as Christians refer to it when it comes to making decisions. For example, they refer to Genesis 1 and 2— the central idea of which is that God created a male and a female, Adam and Eve— but people may say that it is “Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve” (“Is it really ok to be gay?”, n.d.). Another idea they might mention is

Leviticus 18:22, meaning the male cannot lie in bed the same way he does with a female as it is an abomination. Both ideas are widely used when discussing LGBT acceptance and many people find them right because they are written in Bible and it is considered reliable due to its long existence. In addition, Westboro Baptist Church is one of the most opposed to homosexuality and quote Bible to support their words: “to protest the increasing acceptance of homosexuality in America, the Westboro Baptist Church picketed the funerals of gay men who died of aids and of soldiers killed in Iraq and Afghanistan.” The members of the church were carrying signs like “God hates fags” and “thank God for dead soldiers.” The church originally had less than 100 members, but due to its actions turned “into a global symbol of hatred” (Chen, 2015). In brief, more than a half of the Christian population in the United States are opposed to homosexuality as Bible contradicts with this idea.

However, the focus of Christianity is caring about other people. When citing any kind of a resource, it is important not to pull words out of the context so that the main idea does not contradict with what a person says. In Christianity, it is called proof texting – “the method by which a person appeals to a biblical text to prove or justify a theological position without regard for the context of the passage they are citing” (“Is it really ok to be gay,” n.d.). Based on Maneker, “the ‘clobber passages’ in Leviticus... [are] related to idolatry and cult prostitution that were engaged in by the Canaanites” (n.d.). Therefore, people are using the information wrong. He also says “all of the Commandments are fulfilled by loving God and loving others. We are never to judge others. (Matthew 7:1; Romans 2:1) Read Romans 1 in detail and then Romans 2:1.” It is another proof that there are no words in Bible that LGBT is immoral or abominable. Also, the Bible has been translated many times and therefore, may lose its original meaning.

Moreover, Christian churches have recently started accepting LGBT people and performing gay marriages. Fourteen years ago, in 2004, the first legal same-sex marriage was performed in Massachusetts (“LGBT Rights”, 2018). It was a great victory

for LGBT community, yet in 2015 Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriage. By June 2017, more than one million of LGBT people got married. Obviously, 550,000 gay couples in the United States is a considerable large number, as in 2013 it was twice smaller reaching 230,000 (Romero, 2017). These unions were mostly performed by Christian churches and this list shows where LGBT people can be married in each state (“Gaychurch.org,” n.d. a). Furthermore, it is explained what kind of churches can be classified in the list “in order to be listed in our directory, we [gaychurch.org] require that churches self-identify as *solely* Christian” (“Gaychurch.org,” n.d. b). In other words, recently half of a million LGBT couple got married in the Christian church successfully, what only proves that the rates of the discrimination based on the religion are gradually decreasing.

In today’s world, people face many types of discrimination and governments strive to solve these issues by ratifying new laws. However, they neglect the most vulnerable segment of society – teenagers. To be even more specific, LGBT youth appear to be the most sensitive, as they experience the most problems of all teenagers, and those problems are also extremely serious. For instance, such adolescents may be rejected by their own family and face homelessness; based on the data presented above, around 80,000 LGBT teenagers live on their own (SAMHSA, 2017). Another big problem is bullying, which in the long run leads to skipping some classes or an entire day in school. Both of these issues may cause anxiety, depression, the use of drugs, and in some severe cases suicide attempts. This discrimination occurs because society has a negative stereotype of the LGBT community and fails to accept anyone who is different from them. In order to overcome this social crisis, we need to seek a growth mindset, which can be achieved with the help of a broad-based public campaign. It is likely to be successful as it is a gentle encouragement aimed at all Americans and not any specific person or group, meaning it will not offend anyone or motivate a backlash. The campaign will consist of several advertisement options, such as billboards, television and radio ads, and finally social media. The latter will play the biggest role as it is an

efficient low-cost way to reach any kind of audience. Although some religious groups might be against the public campaign, recently there has been a big change in Christian attitudes towards LGBT individuals and, therefore, it should not stimulate resistance. Combining effective advertisement chains and creating a flawless broad-based campaign will in large part mitigate discrimination against LGBT youth and give rise to a safer environment for future generations.

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