

Guidelines for Talking to the Moveable Middle About LGBT Issues

LGBT Movement Communications Toolkit



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Terminology note: Gay and transgender

This section gives recommendations for how to talk to moveable middle Americans about LGBT issues. Since the moveable middle understands and relates better to the terms “gay” or “gay and transgender” than to “LGBT,” we’ve used these simpler, easier-to-understand phrases throughout. For more information see, “*Promote Inclusion, But Not Alphabet Soup*” in *Overall Messaging Guidelines*.

Overall Messaging Guidelines

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We highly recommend *Mindset of the Moveable Middle* as pre-reading for this section.

Overall Messaging for LGBT Issues—What’s This About?

In *The Art and Science of Framing an Issue*, we describe how effective social advocacy communications “frame” what an issue is “about” in a way that connects to the core values and beliefs of the target audience. Messages then fall out of the way an issue is framed. For example, legislation that restricts firearms purchases might be about “gun safety” (not “gun regulation”)—and messages would tie to this idea. So what are gay issues “about?”

It would be easy to say they’re about “equality” or “equal rights” or even “ending discrimination,” but, as we’ll discuss later, this way of framing gay issues doesn’t resonate with the moveable middle. So what’s an example of how we could frame what gay and transgender issues are about—while tying as strongly as possible to moveable middle values?

OVERALL MESSAGING FRAME FOR GAY ISSUES

“This is about everyday Americans who want the same chance as everyone else to earn a living, be safe in their communities¹, serve their country, and take care of the ones they love.”

Note that this messaging frame also incorporates the two communications approaches that help moveable middle audiences overcome negative beliefs about gay people—and become more supportive. These two approaches, outlined in *Mindset of the Moveable Middle* are:

- Emphasize common ground
- Illustrate concrete harms

How does the messaging frame incorporate these approaches?

To “emphasize common ground,” the messaging frame focuses on the frequently overlooked fact that the struggle for equality isn’t about politics or policy. It’s about *people*. And it’s about finding and declaring the common ground between the moveable middle and gay people.

Focus on what gay and straight people have in common, as opposed to the ways we’re different.



You’ve probably noticed that the words “gay” and “transgender” don’t appear anywhere in the messaging frame. That’s because the messaging frame applies to everyone. This isn’t about gay and transgender people. It’s not about straight people. It’s about all of us.

When conversations with the moveable middle stay firmly rooted in the common ground we share, it’s difficult to dismiss gay and transgender people as political abstractions. When we emphasize that both gay and straight people share many of the same values, and have many of the same hopes and dreams for our lives, it’s difficult to see gay people as “other,” “different,” and “not like me.” This doesn’t mean that we should claim that “we’re all the same.” That message simply doesn’t ring true for most people—gay or straight. It means focusing on the specific things all people have in common, as opposed to the ways we’re different.

The second (implied) part of the messaging frame illustrates the harms and injustices that gay people face. In America right now, gay people aren’t given the same chance to earn a living, be safe in their communities, serve their country, or take care of the ones they love. The fact that we’re talking about this at all indicates that gay Americans don’t have the same chances in life as straight Americans.

¹ This includes emotional and physical safety outside our homes, in schools, in places of worship, etc.

Applying the Two Communications Approaches

If our messages only help straight Americans accept gay and transgender people, society will become more tolerant but the laws won't change. If our messages only help straight people understand the inequalities that gay and transgender people face, the laws might change, but society as a whole will still be intolerant. That's why we need to emphasize common ground *as well as* illustrate concrete harms.

Emphasizing common ground helps Americans *accept* gay people, while illustrating concrete harms shows Americans there's a *need* for equality. Together, these two approaches provide the foundation for both our overall messaging and for many of the issue-specific messaging guidelines in the chapters that follow.

Now, let's talk about how to put these approaches into action.

1. Emphasize Common Ground

One of the most significant challenges that gay and transgender people face is the myth that we're "other"—that our values and "lifestyle" run counter

to those of straight Americans. While gay people and straight people aren't exactly the same (and we shouldn't claim they are), we do share a lot of common ground. We need to help straight Americans understand that gay Americans actually want many of the same things (e.g., the chance to earn a living, the ability to be safe in our communities, the ability to serve our country, and the ability to take care of our loved ones).

Despite media stereotypes that depict gay people as either affluent socialites or comic sidekicks, gay people and couples live ordinary lives. We work, we pay taxes, we do the laundry, and we scoop out the litter box or clean up after our dogs. We shop for groceries, celebrate birthdays, and take out the trash. We're neighbors, friends, and coworkers. We believe in responsibility and taking care of our families. We live lives that most straight people would readily identify with as similar to their own.

Here are three ways we can increase public support of gay and transgender issues by emphasizing what we all have in common:

Messaging to Increase Support for Gay Issues

Approaches for Increasing Support

Messaging Theme: "It's about everyday Americans who want the same chance as everyone else to earn a living, be safe in their communities, serve their country, and take care of the ones they love."

1. Emphasize common ground

- Use the language of common values, beliefs, hopes, and dreams
- Make it about people and their stories, not policies
- Focus on changing how people feel about gay people
- Talk about gay people as neighbors, coworkers, and friends who also walk the dog, mow the lawn, etc.

2. Illustrate concrete harms

- Avoid abstract "rights" language
- Make it clear that existing laws don't protect gay people
- Focus on a few meaningful injustices
- Illustrate injustices with personal stories



When we depict gay people working, celebrating birthdays, doing laundry, and grocery shopping, we help connect gay people with the moveable middle.

Use the language of common values, beliefs, hopes, and dreams. Appeal to those common values. Family. Hard work. Responsibility. Commitment. Sacrifice. Duty. These are a few of the values gay people share with the vast majority of Americans. Yet the gay community often talks about things like “rights,” “benefits,” and “what we deserve”—all me-centered ideas that can alienate potential allies.

Use the language of values to show that we understand, and prioritize, our obligations to others—our loved ones, our friends, our community, and our neighbors. When our discussions focus on “straight people’s obligation to gay people,” we put the moveable middle on the defensive. When we focus on “our joint responsibility to others” and “our responsibility to take care of each other,” we take the discussion out of the realm of “what we’re owed” and move it—along with our audience—to the common ground we all share.

Make your communications about people and storytelling, not policies. Very few Americans are policy wonks, so don’t use abstract or technical language. People don’t understand (or care about) the myriad ways tax laws apply differently to married couples. They understand marriage as it relates to the person they love or to their dream wedding. Complicated legal concepts and headache-inducing policy distinctions make people tune out or retreat into

their existing way of thinking. The solution: Whenever possible, talk about people. And note that we didn’t say, “Talk about *gay* people.”

Tell stories that transcend gay/straight orientation. For example, ask gay spokespeople to focus on the elements of their lives that everyone can relate to (e.g., their jobs, their volunteer work, paying taxes). Tell stories that draw attention to committed couples who’ve taken care of each other in sickness and in health, and show gay and transgender employees providing for their families and loved ones. Remember: Stories like those of couples denied medical decision-making ability almost always generate sympathy. Finally, make your stories stick by giving details that create an emotional connection. Provide a window into gay people’s lives.

Also, consider using straight allies as messengers to help share these stories. When Let California Ring tested a commercial featuring a charismatic straight uncle showing support for his gay niece, it positively improved straight people’s attitudes toward gay people. Having straight friends, colleagues, and family members model their support for gay people and their loving, committed relationships offers moveable middle audiences a roadmap (and possibly even a script) for navigating their own journeys toward acceptance.

Focus on changing how the moveable middle feels about gay people. It may seem like you’re straying off topic by drawing attention to the ordinary lives of gay and transgender people. However, when we depict gay people working, celebrating birthdays, doing laundry, and grocery shopping, we help connect gay people with the moveable middle. It shows we all have common experiences. This kind of identification is a “feeling” process, not a “thinking” one. This is important because messages that work on an emotional level work better than those that focus on facts, figures, and policies.

Think of it this way: We’re trying to shift the moveable middle from thinking of gay people as “other” to thinking about gay people as the kind of people they’d ask and trust to feed their dog and check their mail when they go on vacation. We need to make people feel comfortable, familiar, and at ease with gay people. And we make this happen when we focus on what we have in common, rather than on what makes us different.

Don't assume the public understands the issues. It's very likely they don't.

2. Illustrate Concrete Harms

Along with emphasizing what we have in common, we also need to help average Americans understand the real hardship that gay and transgender people face because we're not treated equally under the law.

Avoid abstract "rights" language. Over the past 20 years, generic messages about "equality" and "rights" do seem to have moved public opinion on gay people and equality. But "rights" language, used across a variety of progressive issues, has become overused. Where it once elicited positive reactions, it now creates hostility or defensiveness. In fact, such language enables our opponents to portray us as pushy, demanding, and a threat to other people's "rights."

Make it clear when and how existing laws don't cover gay people. Most people have no idea that in 30 states, employers can legally fire people for being gay, and that in 37 states, they can fire people for being transgender. They also don't know that in these states, landlords can legally deny housing to gay and transgender people. Straight people may know that gay people can't marry, but they usually don't realize that this means committed gay couples can't pass their social security benefits on to each other in old age.



These details—the ambulance, the waiting room, the vending machine coffee—all help to make a story real and personal for those who hear it.

Don't assume the public understands the issues; it's very likely they don't. If facing a hostile ballot initiative or piece of legislation, talk actively about what the measure will "take away" from gay people, or "prevent" them from doing. Remember, the moveable middle wants to do the right thing. While they're not sure they want to support gay people, they don't actively want to hurt gay people either. Show the moveable middle that being a passive bystander isn't being neutral—it actually hurts gay people. A negative vote, or decision not to act, means they are "standing in the way of," "denying," "taking away," "preventing," or "shutting gay people out of" some of the very things they know are critically important in their own lives and families.

Focus on a few meaningful injustices. Tell specific stories about concrete injustices that all Americans can relate to and empathize with. For example, rather than talking generically about employment protections, help people understand what it's like to live with the daily fear of being fired because you're gay. Rather than talking about the "right" to serve in the military, talk about what it's like to be told that you're not able to serve, protect and defend your country in a time of war—or being dishonorably discharged after having already done so.

Illustrate injustices with personal stories. Once you've identified the two or three concrete injustices you want to illustrate for your specific issue, reinforce them consistently using personal stories. Allow the audience to vicariously experience the harms that gay people and couples face—either by allowing them to walk a mile in a gay person's shoes, or, better yet, by helping them place those harms in the context of their own lives.

It's good to talk about how Jay wasn't able to visit his partner in the hospital; but it's better yet to paint a picture. Explain that when Jay's partner unexpectedly collapsed at the breakfast table and had to be rushed to the hospital, Jay wasn't allowed in the ambulance and had to make his way to the hospital in his own car. Then, when Jay got to the hospital, the nurses never let him past the doors of the waiting room. Jay sat there for 13-1/2 hours drinking coffee out of vending machines while he waited for Tony's sister to fly in from Wisconsin. This whole time, the doctors wouldn't even tell him whether Tony was dead or alive. Only when Tony's sister arrived did Jay find out that his partner of eight years had suffered a heart attack and almost died, but was now in critical but stable condition.



These details—the ambulance, the waiting room, the vending machine coffee—all help to make the story real and personal for those who hear it. Repeat this storytelling process again and again and again, always using the same basic language, until the audience understands the issues.

Effective Communications Principles

Overall Communications Principles

It's one thing to have an idea of the types of things you want to say. It's another to know *how* to say them. The following principles provide some guidelines for implementing the two communications approaches discussed earlier.

Make it about straight people. This is probably going to feel like one of the more jarring and counter-intuitive recommendations in this toolkit. However, this toolkit isn't about reaching out to or persuading LGBT people or the base. It's about reaching out to and persuading the moveable middle—which is nearly 100% made-up of straight people.

Many movement communications follow a predictable script: They focus on how an issue affects gay people ("This terrible thing happens to gay people"), then ask the target audience to put themselves in the shoes of the gay person/couple ("Wouldn't you feel terrible if you were gay and had this happen to you?").

Here's the problem: When we start communications by talking about gay people, moveable middle audiences often tune out.

The solution? Start by talking about straight people. For example, instead of running an ad where a gay couple is prevented from visiting each other in the hospital, consider showing a straight couple having the same problem. Get the emotional buy-in from the target audience first ("Yes, I'd feel terrible if this happened to me"), and only *then* create the connection ("If you'd feel terrible, you can understand why gay people would feel terrible").

Note that the sample scenario above doesn't ask the audience to imagine themselves gay. Rather, it asks them to imagine the injustices that gay people experience—but from the viewpoint of a straight person. "What if this happened to you? Imagine your hurt and anger. Imagine how you'd feel. This is how it feels for gay people."

Is this approach really more effective? Unfortunately, yes. Research consistently indicates that straight Americans just can't relate to being gay. When they're asked to put themselves in the shoes of a gay person, moveable middle Americans seize up because they simply don't want to—or can't—think of themselves as gay. It can be a disheartening experience to watch as straight focus group participants are asked to think about gay people—and see them make a face like they've been asked to touch a slug. It's not encouraging, but that doesn't make it any less real.

When an ad focuses on the perspective of gay people, the moveable middle's reaction can be: "Well, I'm not gay and I don't want to think about this uncomfortable issue, so I'm tuning out." When an ad asks the moveable middle to step in a gay person's shoes, it can even more strongly evoke an "ick" response, losing the audience entirely.

If the LGBT movement had hundreds of millions of dollars for a long-term public education campaign, we could likely reduce this discomfort by repeatedly showing the same ads over and over again until people got used to images of gay people and couples. However, most campaigns in the movement are short-term and poorly funded, and in these campaigns, ads that lead with the perspective of gay people are likely to be less effective than ads that lead with the perspective of the target audience.

No matter how outrageous or ugly our opponents' claims, we're not here to debate them—we're here to persuade the moveable middle.

The Arizona Together campaign very effectively made it about the perspective of the moveable middle when it highlighted how the SuperDOMA would impact straight couples. Because audiences didn't tune out, the ads also elicited empathy for gay people in similar situations, and as a bonus, support for gay marriage increased. Similarly, the Let California Ring campaign tested multiple ads, but the one that tested best featured a straight couple getting married, not a gay couple.

Don't debate; relate. There's an old saying: "Never mud wrestle with a pig. You both get dirty. But the pig likes it."

Today's media love conflict, so it's not uncommon for gay and transgender advocates to find themselves in debate settings, squaring off against someone whose sole focus is disagreement, counterargument, and attack. These media routines give the advantage to our opponents because their messages are designed to create fear and distrust, and to position gay people as a threat. To them, the truth is irrelevant. What matters is getting the moveable middle to fear gay people and equality. It helps the opposition when we play into these media frames of conflict and fear—and our opponents know that.

It may seem counterintuitive, but the key to overcoming our opponents' media advantage is to never directly engage an opponent in the media. Now you're probably saying: "Wait a minute: If I don't engage them, there won't be a counter-voice up there on-screen to challenge what they say." But refusing to engage our opponents doesn't mean refusing to appear on TV with them. It means that when we're on TV, we direct our messages to our target audience. Remember: No matter what our opponents say, no matter how outrageous or ugly their claims, we're not here to debate them—we're here to persuade the moveable middle.

Focus on your audience, not on opponents. Even outside of debate settings, it's very easy to get our buttons pushed by the antics of hostile opponents. We feel that surge of adrenaline, that desire to push back and call them what they are: bigots, fearmongers, homophobes who trade in prejudice and hate.

Of course, this is exactly what they want us to do. Not only does it reinforce the idea that we're threatening, but it also allows them to claim the high ground. They're not calling us names; they're simply "standing up for the family." We, on the other hand, are "attacking" them (and proving their point).

The persuasive language that moves our target audience is fundamentally different than the kind of strident, confrontational language that relieves our (understandable) anger. The former helps the moveable middle identify with what we have in common. The latter creates separation. Normal people don't shout at each other in public in everyday life. It's harder to get moveable middle support if we appear unapproachable or "out of control."

Meet people where they're at. One of the first rules of marketing is to meet your target audience where they're at. As a movement, we have a habit of assessing how people feel about policy issues like marriage, judging those feelings (e.g., support for only domestic partnerships) as inadequate and discriminatory, and then demanding that they change. This can work against us. It makes the distance the moveable middle must travel seem impossibly long and perhaps simply impossible.

It may be helpful to look at how our opponents do this effectively. Campus Crusade for Christ, for example, "meets people where they are." The group isn't confrontational and it doesn't make people feel bad about themselves. In fact, Campus Crusade does

Showing respect for another person's journey encourages them to continue further down that road with us.



everything in its power to point out its similarities with its target audience. The message is clear: “You can relate to us; we’re accessible, approachable, and non-judgmental.” And before Campus Crusade asks its audience to do anything, it finds the common ground.

If you stand at the end-goal of equality and tell people they have to come to you, some people will—but many won’t. It’s possible, and even likely, that people who respond positively to that approach have already done so. But if we take responsibility for closing the distance between us and the moveable middle, we encourage dialogue and also encourage the moveable middle to keep moving forward.

Acknowledge the journey people took to get to where they are—and don’t push them too quickly to the next level. All too often we’re in such a hurry to get people to embrace equality on our terms that we forget that most people have already traveled a great distance toward accepting gay people. Unfortunately, we tend to invalidate all the work people have done when we start out by demanding more.

The first step toward finding common ground can be acknowledging the progress already made. Do this in a sympathetic and relationship-building way (as opposed to congratulating them that they’re not quite the bigot they used to be!). If possible, affirm the views you have in common. Respecting the distance a person has traveled doesn’t mean affirming their old attitudes or even those they hold currently. It simply means acknowledging their progress toward acceptance—even if that progress is small. Showing respect for another person’s journey encourages them to continue further down that road with us.

Use messengers that the moveable middle view as credible. Most news stories center on some type of conflict. As a result, the media tend to rely on partisan “experts”—think-tank types, association presidents, or professional spokespeople whose credibility is a function of their title and organization.

However, as discussed in *The Art and Science of Framing an Issue* and *Communications Campaign Best Practices: Spokespeople*, the most effective messengers are those considered *credible* and *impartial*. Try not to use experts that play into the conflict frames we’re striving to avoid. And realize that organizational spokespeople aren’t typically the best messengers. Why? Because they’re not considered impartial.

ACKNOWLEDGE THE DISCOMFORT, NOT THE ATTITUDES

Be aware of an important distinction! Acknowledging a person’s discomfort is important, but inadvertently validating anti-gay attitudes is dangerous. Saying, “I understand how talking about these issues can be stressful,” is different from, “I hear you when you say that gay marriage is hurtful to kids.” The former lets someone know that you understand how difficult these discussions can be. The latter can be interpreted as affirming the person’s harmful attitudes.

Choose messengers based on your target audience, not based on who *you* think is credible. A 40-something working mom in small-town America would likely look to doctors, nurses, teachers, clergy, and friends for leadership and expertise. Cultivate these people (straight and gay) as spokespeople. Ask everyday gay and transgender citizens, rather than gay advocates, to talk about their experiences. For example, the Arizona Together campaign carefully chose two gay spokespeople to talk about how the Super DOMA ballot measure would affect them. These spokespeople were respected locals with inherently conservative, non-stereotypical jobs: a gay firefighter and a lesbian prosecutor. They had jobs people admire—professional, heroic, public service jobs. The key is to pick articulate and compelling individuals whose lives demonstrate values and lifestyles that resonate with the moveable middle.

Don’t consciously (or unconsciously) invalidate audience feelings. Research shows that many people experience discomfort when thinking about issues that affect gay people. They may say something like, “I don’t think homosexuals should be discriminated against, but they need to stop attacking marriage!”

This person’s argument may be wrong-headed and their terminology may need work, but their discomfort is real and authentic. A good way to alienate this person is to tell them, “You shouldn’t feel that way.”

Acknowledging how a person feels (e.g., “I understand how issues like this can be difficult to talk about”) creates a bridge and helps gain their trust.

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The habitual use of acronyms pulls moveable middle audiences out of an emotional relationship with our message.

From there, it's possible to address some of their underlying assumptions (e.g., "However, even if you're not sure how you feel about this issue, you'd probably agree that it's a good thing when people have the legal protections they need to take care of each other.") We may need to repeat this process until our audience stops leading with their discomfort. But the key is to acknowledge their discomfort and build trust before moving further into the conversation.

Promote inclusion, but not alphabet soup. This recommendation does NOT argue against inclusive communications. Nor are we suggesting that inclusive descriptions and acronyms don't play a vital role in communications to our community. We're simply pointing out an obvious and yet sometimes uncomfortable truth about lengthy and confusing descriptions and acronyms in public communications directed at moveable middle audiences.

Imagine you're watching a talking-heads show on television and an anti-gay pastor says that BLEMPNACs ("blemp-nacks") almost unanimously oppose gay equality. After referring to BLEMPNACs multiple times, he finally takes a deep breath and uses 10 seconds of a 15-second soundbite to explain himself: "Many Bleep-nacks, that is Baptist, Lutheran, Episcopal, Methodist, Pentecostal, Non-Denominational, Adventist, and Catholic Christians, really feel that gay people are a threat to the institution of marriage."

When we enumerate "lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning people" in public communications to the moveable middle, or shorten this group to LGBTQ ("el-gee-bee-tee-kew"), we have the same effect on listeners.

The habitual use of "lesbian-gay-bisexual-and-transgender"—and especially the numerous and inconsistent acronyms that accompany it (e.g., LGBT, GLBT, GLBTQ, LGBTQI)—pull moveable middle audiences out of an emotional relationship with our messages. Instead of creating a connection, this alphabet soup creates an instant distance, particularly when an audience starts to feel that they don't speak the same language as those who support gay equality.

Recently we saw a high-profile example of this kind of confusion. The *New York Times* reported:

William Sleator, 16, asked [Sen. John] McCain what he planned to do about "LGBT rights." When Mr. McCain looked puzzled, the student explained that the initials stand for "lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender."

"I had not heard that phrase before," Mr. McCain said.

While particularly awkward for a presidential candidate, this kind of confusion isn't uncommon. Even some of our strongest allies still stumble over acronyms that typically take insiders weeks to master. Some media outlets refuse to use them altogether. And the most frequently used phrase—gay-lesbian-bisexual-and-transgender—can trip up even the most experienced spokesperson.

You've likely noticed by now that, for the purposes of this toolkit, we're modeling a consistent use of the terms "gay people" or "gay and transgender people" as umbrella terms to describe lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning people. We do this because we believe that communications aimed at the moveable middle should be clear and non-distracting. In addition, according to 2005 UC Davis polling, the term "gay people" tested better than of the terms gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender used on a stand-alone basis.

Again, this does NOT mean that we should start leaving people behind. Actually, just the opposite. However, reciting a lengthy list of identities (or relying on convoluted acronyms) isn't, nor has it ever been, the key to inclusive visibility. If, for example, transgender people aren't visible—if transgender stories and experiences aren't told as part of our messaging—true equality will always be out of reach. Offer up the diverse stories and voices of those—lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender—who can connect the moveable middle to the common ground we share,

the concrete harms we experience, and the importance of supporting our pursuit of equality. So, when talking about employment protections, tell stories of the challenges transgender people face at work. Feature both lesbian and gay couples when talking about marriage. Talk about the impact of hate-motivated violence on bisexual people.

However, in public communications, think about using inclusive terminology on first mention, followed by “gay people,” or “gay and transgender people”² thereafter. Most moveable middle audiences will be lost if you use acronyms.

Avoid sweeping claims about what Americans believe. Research has shown that for certain types of statements, it’s better to use a spokesperson talking in the first person than to make sweeping generalizations about society. For example, lofty statements like “America is about fairness,” or “We all believe in treating each other fairly,” are widely considered unbelievable, since many people feel that there’s much in America and American behavior that isn’t fair. These statements are fine for internal communications, but external communications test better when they feature a credible spokesperson talking about their own beliefs (e.g., “I believe in treating others fairly” or “I believe in fairness”). The spokesperson expresses a belief that resonates with the beliefs of most target audience members, but without naively suggesting that everyone, everywhere, shares or exemplifies those beliefs.

If you need to use opponents’ terms, try preceding them with a “so-called” qualifier. As we mentioned in *The Art and Science of Framing an Issue*, repeating what our opponents’ say tends to embed the negative language in the minds of our target audience. Even repeating proper nouns like the “American Family Association” or the “Defense of Marriage Act” validates how the opposition has framed the issue (e.g., this law is about families defending marriage).

One effective way around parroting our opponents is to preface their terms with “so-called.” This qualifier allows us to cast doubt on our opponents’ language. When we refer to the “so-called Defense of Marriage

Act” or the “so-called American Family Association,” we make it clear that the term being discussed is inherently deceptive. While this can become tiresome if used too often, using it selectively can make a real difference. After you initially establish the inherent deception in our opponents’ language, you can refer to their terms more loosely (e.g., “DOMA” for “Defense of Marriage Act” or “that group” for “American Family Association”). The point is to effectively undermine our opponents’ clever but deceptive labeling.

Another way to parry our opponents’ frames is to subtly play with their wording. For example, referring to DOMA as “the Denial of Marriage Act” when discussing it publicly. Be careful when attempting this, however. Don’t use language that’s known to be harmful or ineffective. “Denial of Marriage Act” is likely effective, but “Demonic Opposition to Marriage for All” isn’t.

Effective Vocabulary

When talking about gay people and issues, use language that’s accessible and easy to understand, and that supports your efforts to emphasize common ground and illustrate concrete harms. Focus on language that makes equality a win/win for everyone—including the moveable middle.

See the chart on the following page for a list of effective vocabulary.



² Note that usage can vary by issue. For example, the policy language of Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell only applies to a service member’s sexual orientation, so it’s accurate to say it bans openly “gay people” but saying it bans “gay and transgender people” is actually inaccurate. Conversely, employment protection legislation and hate crimes legislation are examples of issues where it’s very important to talk about “gay and transgender people.”

Common Ground Vocabulary

Vocabulary/Language	Things To Keep In Mind
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Care/Caring • Commitment • Responsibility • Duty, Sacrifice, Patriotic • Security • Loyalty, Trust • Family • Friendship • Community, Neighbor • Together • Hard working 	<p>Avoid unnecessary references to sex. Research shows that framing gay equality, relationships, or people in sexual terms can evoke the “ick factor” in the moveable middle. Whenever possible, ensure that messages don’t use forms of the word sex (e.g., “homosexual,” “same-sex,” “bisexual,” “sexual orientation”) when an alternative construction (see below) can keep your audience focused on the issues, and on identifying common ground with gay people.</p>

Talking About LGBT People and Issues

Vocabulary/Language	Things To Keep In Mind
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gay • Transgender • Gay and transgender 	<p>Not “homosexual,” “LGBT,” “queer,” or “same-sex.” Use “lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender” if necessary on first reference only. Gay and transgender should be used as adjectives only (e.g., “gay man,” “transgender people,” “gay and transgender equality,” but never as nouns (e.g., “gays,” “transgenders”). Use “transgender,” rather than “transsexual,” when referring to the broader community. Also, avoid the grammatically inaccurate “transgendered.”</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gay people • Gay and transgender people 	<p>Not “gays” or “transgenders;” again, the words gay and transgender should be used as adjectives only.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gay couples 	<p>Not “same-sex couples.”</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equality for everyone, gay equality, gay and transgender equality 	<p>Not “gay rights” or “LGBT equality.”</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marriage; marriage for gay couples 	<p>Use “marriage” as a noun, without modifiers; never “gay marriage” or “same-sex marriage.”</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocates for gay equality; advocates for gay and transgender equality 	<p>Not “activists,” “gay activists,” or “gay rights advocates.”</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orientation 	<p>Use “sexual orientation” on first reference if necessary for clarification purposes; thereafter simply “orientation.” Never use “gay sexuality” or “sexual preference.”</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bi 	<p>There is a critical need to determine effective language for talking about bi people and the bi community in a communications campaign context. We know that in focus groups, the term “bisexual” fixates moveable middle audiences on sex (just as “homosexual” does), and specifically evokes the idea of having sex with more than one person.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender identity and/or expression 	<p>Not “sexual identity.”</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lesbian(s) • Lesbian couples 	<p>Not “lesbian women” or “lesbianism.”</p>

Harmful and Ineffective Approaches

Unfortunately, there are ways to talk about gay and transgender people that can *decrease* moveable middle support. To prevent this from happening, avoid reinforcing the three most common negative beliefs held by the moveable middle: 1) Gay people are not like me, 2) Gay people are a threat, and 3) Gay people don't need more rights. See also *Mindset of the Moveable Middle*.

Avoid Reinforcing Belief 1: “Gay People Aren’t Like Me”

Emphasize common ground, but don’t say, “We’re the same as you.” Gay people and straight people have many things in common. We live similar lives, we share many of the same beliefs, and we want many of the same things. However, straight Americans don't see—and don't want to see—themselves as the same as gay and transgender Americans (and vice versa). Therefore, emphasize common values, beliefs, aspirations, and elements of our daily lives—but don't use language that claims or suggests that gay people are exactly the same as straight people. For example, avoid phrases like, “We’re just like you,” “We’re no different than you,” “We’re the same as you,” and “Our relationships are just like yours.” When emphasizing common ground, talk about *specific* values, emotions, aspirations, and actions (e.g., “We all just want a fair chance to earn a living”).

Be careful to not emphasize values, actions, or images that run counter to moveable middle values or evoke the “ick response.” Overcoming the belief that “Gay people are not like me” requires that we emphasize those things we have in common. However, some gay people believe that equality requires confronting

Both conservatives and progressives should be able to agree that it’s good to value responsibility and courage.

the moveable middle with practices and values that run contrary to moveable middle values (e.g., public exhibitionism, polyamorous relationships). Make no mistake: Public displays of practices and ideas that run contrary to the values of the moveable middle will absolutely offend and alienate a large portion of the target audience. While some may interpret this reaction as anti-gay prejudice, it's more often simply an aversion to open displays of (or explicit discussions about) sexuality of any sort. In other words, if sexually liberated straight people simulated sex in public, they'd also generate a significant backlash from the moveable middle (Janet Jackson at the Super Bowl is a case in point). Rather than focus on differences, focus on the common ground we all share.

Be careful to not inadvertently insult the core beliefs of the moveable middle. For change to occur, Americans need to *want* to support equality for gay and transgender people. However, we won't get their support by inadvertently insulting their core beliefs. Many in the moveable middle have views that are more “conservative” than those of the typical advocate for gay and transgender equality. Refraining from insulting these beliefs doesn't mean we need to embrace them. And we don't need to set aside our convictions. However, to move public opinion on our issues, it makes sense to talk about the moveable middle's beliefs wisely and deliberately.

By all means, correct factual inaccuracies in a straightforward and logical way, and stand your ground firmly and politely (as opposed to shrill or angry outbursts). Just remember: Directly confronting or challenging the core beliefs of the moveable middle can increase their resistance to gay issues.

Similarly, avoid pointing out perceived flaws in the moveable middle (e.g., attacking straight marriages by pointing out high divorce rates only makes people want to defend traditional marriage). Focus on finding common ground. Both conservatives and progressives should be able to agree that it's good to value responsibility and courage. Both should agree that it's good to earn a living and provide for our families. Both should agree that it's good for loving, committed couples to take care of each other. Find the common ground, and keep the discussion centered there.



Don't create conflict around religion; you can't win (even if the "facts" are on your side). A lot of gay and transgender people have a chip on their shoulder about religion—which isn't surprising, given how it's been used against us by our opponents. While many faith traditions fully welcome gay people, the majority still oppose, or actively work against, gay and transgender equality.

Because religion is a fundamental part of a person's identity, arguments for gay equality that challenge a person's faith can seem extremely threatening. Not only do "assaults" on scripture or religion trigger defensiveness, but some evangelical Christians believe that if they're being attacked for their beliefs, it's evidence that their beliefs are right. Standing firm amid attacks and threats can be seen as a high form of faithfulness, and can lead to even greater rigidity.

Remember: Trying to tear down a belief system isn't the same as giving someone a reason to support equality. Research indicates that many religious people who change their minds on gay issues do so after forming an *emotional* connection with a gay person (or an ally). This connection causes them to be willing to look at their faith a little differently.

Highlight gay people in the life of the church, mosque, or synagogue. Show that gay people value their spiritual traditions. Also, use spokespeople who are people of faith and who can evoke common ground. For instance, a Christian spokesperson can talk in general terms about the ideas embodied by Jesus (e.g., caring, commitment, charity, compassion, love, and not judging others). Effective religious spokespeople can use their faith tradition to affirm gay people (focus on common values), rather than attack those elements of a faith tradition perceived to condemn gay people (focusing on differences). They can also illustrate how



non-acceptance can result in real harm—and are a visible reminder that gay people have many allies in faith communities. See *Talking to Religious Audiences About LGBT Issues* for more information.

Don't compare—directly or indirectly—the experiences of gay and transgender people with those of African Americans. Regardless of whether such analogies seem appropriate, research clearly shows that racial comparisons alienate African Americans and should be avoided. In fact, comparisons between race and orientation can turn allies into vocal critics and alienate those sensitive to inapt racial comparisons. Finally, such comparisons play into the hands of white anti-gay activists, allowing them to publicly condemn and denounce such analogies "on behalf of" African Americans. In summary, many people strongly resist comparisons between race and orientation, and such analogies allow our opponents to cultivate anti-gay views among moveable middle African Americans. See *Talking to African American Audiences About LGBT Issues* for more information.

Don't reinforce stereotypes. Stereotypes of gay people as largely white, male, privileged, and affluent often prevent the moveable middle from understanding the concrete harms that gay and transgender people face. Instead, use your communications to show the diversity of gay people across racial and ethnic lines. Gay people are young—and old. They live in San Francisco—and rural Tennessee. Gay people are single, or in committed relationships; many are raising children. They work as attorneys and police officers and fork lift operators. And contrary to popular belief, gay people have lower household incomes than straight people.

Demographics aren't the only stereotypes to avoid. Images that suggest sex (e.g., the shirtless, suggestively posed models on the covers of many gay publications) can send a message that gay people are hyper-sexualized and "not like me." The moveable middle often considers these types of images disrespectful of mainstream values. In other words, avoid imagery that reinforces the myth that gay people are promiscuous, threatening, and style-obsessed, and instead, use images that demonstrate the gay community's diversity across racial, geographic, age, and economic lines.

Avoid Reinforcing Belief 2: “Gay People Are a Threat”

If saying something relieves your anger, you probably shouldn't say it (the “No Name-Calling Rule”).

One of the occupational hazards of working to advance gay and transgender equality is that we're constantly exposed to the ugly rhetoric, attitudes, and behaviors of our opponents. We wouldn't be human if our opponents didn't make us angry. However, those of us professionally committed to eliminating hurtful attacks on gay people (and changing the policies and laws that reinforce them) face an added challenge. We need to handle these attacks without alienating the moveable middle.

One reason that talk radio and blog formats succeed is that they provide an outlet for people's feelings. Both on air and online, people can vent and express their anger. However, good entertainment isn't the same as effective messaging. Yes, people watch Jerry Springer, but that doesn't mean they like or respect his guests—or even Springer himself.

Considering what our far-right opponents say about gay and transgender people, it can be very difficult not to let our anger show. But to our audience, when we cross the line from firm to shrill, we start to sound like a guest on the *Jerry Springer Show*—and we reinforce the stereotype of the “angry gay activist.”

Calling people names is the least effective way to win their support. Words like “bigotry,” “bigot,” “prejudice,” “hate,” “hatred,” “hateful,” “lies,” “war,” “battle,” “hypocrites,” and “hatemongers,” among others, may feel good in the moment. They may even be objectively true. But they validate a moveable middle perception that gay people are strident, angry, and unsympathetic. Calling someone names can leave a lot of damage in its wake. It's one thing to criticize Ann Coulter for using the “f” word. It's another to imply that all conservative Americans are bigots. The former takes a specific individual to task for a specific action. The latter comes across as Jerry Springer furniture-throwing—and will likely offend a much broader group of people than intended. This kind of name-calling also validates (in the eyes of the moveable middle) our opponents' “victim status,” making our opponents appear more sympathetic and gay people seem more threatening.

Find constructive ways to relieve your anger with supportive friends or coworkers, but avoid expressing it in your press releases, interviews, or speeches. We can let anger power our work, but remember: There's

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a difference between standing our ground and getting drawn into an exchange of insults. The best way to beat our opponents is to keep our cool. Be reasonable and sympathetic while *they* appear shrill and hysterical.

Don't repeat or acknowledge opponents' messages.

One of the basic rules of effective media interviews is to never repeat the phrasing of a negative question or message. If an opponent says, “Gay marriage is a threat to the sacred institution of marriage,” we don't want to respond by saying, “That's ridiculous! Gay people aren't a threat to marriage.” Doing so repeats our opponent's language and solidifies the idea that “gay” and “threat” are related concepts. Rather, skip their framing and move on to your own: “*Actually, gay couples want to marry because they're deeply committed to taking care of each other. And it's difficult to understand why someone would want to prevent them from doing that.*” See “**Interviewing like a Pro**” in ***Communications Campaign Best Practices*** for more tips on how to stay on message regardless of what our opponents, or negative interviewers, throw our way.

Don't use the language of politics. Americans are cynical about politics. They mistrust politicians and they're wary of messages that reinforce predictable partisan and political scripts. Whenever possible, don't talk about gay people or equality in the context of politics. Don't talk about “power,” “wins,” “losses,” “victories,” “defeats,” “struggles,” “advantages” or “disadvantages,” “agendas,” etc. We don't want to activate Americans' political cynicism when we raise the issue of gay equality.

Don't do interviews if there's nothing to be gained except verbal abuse for the entertainment of an extreme audience.

If you need to discuss the statements of political candidates or the impact of a proposed anti-gay initiative, reframe the discussion on your terms. Identify what gay people and your target audience have in common, and talk about the real harms that gay people face. Be careful to avoid conflict and political frames; instead, try to create emotional identification and establish common ground.

Don't get dragged into conflict and controversy.

Not every interview is a good idea. Media thrive on conflict; it's what sells newspapers. But engaging in high-conflict interviews goes back to the idea of mud-wrestling pigs. It's not a question of whether we'll get muddy. It's a question of how much will stick. Why volunteer to be a target?

For example, imagine that Ann Coulter had her own radio show. Coulter's "schtick" is to be shrill and outrageous. The more shrill she is, the greater the adoration of her supportive callers. It's a no-win proposition for gay advocates to appear on this show. Not only would the spokesperson be bait for the host (who has no intention of having a discussion in the first place), but there's no hope to reach our moveable middle target audience. Coulter may not care about the middle, but we do. And while the exchange may energize strong supporters on both ends of the spectrum, it won't move the moveable middle. Don't do interviews if there's nothing to be gained except verbal abuse for the entertainment of an extreme audience.

This doesn't mean, however, that we should avoid all "conservative" media. Many in the moveable middle listen to certain conservative-leaning programs on local radio stations. If you do elect to appear on such a show—whether on ABC News, Fox News Channel, or conservative talk radio—remember that you're not obligated to "debate" the host(s). Your reason for appearing on any media platform is to communicate with your audience. Stick to your core messages and don't say things that are likely to alienate your audience (e.g., broadsides against Republicans, people of faith, conservatives, the religious right). Incidentally, avoid taped segments or sound-bite interviews (as opposed to live discussions) with opposition media. These can be edited in ways that

dilute your message and play to the host's strengths. See "*Interviewing Like a Pro*" in *Communications Campaign Best Practices* for more interviewing tips.

Avoid Reinforcing Belief 3: "Gay People Don't Need More Rights"

Avoid broad "equal rights" language. We need to use vivid, compelling language to tell the stories of the harms that gay people face—not broad and unconvincing language about "equal rights."

Research indicates that talking broadly about "equal rights for gay people" doesn't effectively persuade the moveable middle. As discussed in *Mindset of the Moveable Middle*, the majority of Americans believe gay people are already equal and don't need more "rights" (there's that word again!).

To understand why broad rights language doesn't work, imagine walking by a protest group of well-dressed, clean-cut, healthy-looking white men holding placards denouncing their oppression. Without any further information, you'd probably wonder, "What oppression?" and keep on walking. However, if they explained that they were university professors from a foreign regime that was systematically imprisoning all academics, you might empathize with their cause.

People don't empathize with abstract appeals for "equal rights." They empathize with specific injustices shown to hurt real people. Get your point across by giving specific examples of concrete harms that gay people face. If a short-hand phrase is needed, think about using "equality" or "equality for everybody." Or, if you need even more clarification, "equality for gay people," or "equality for gay and transgender people," but not "equal rights."

Avoid references to the Civil Rights Movement.

Research shows that, in addition to being troubled by comparisons between race and orientation, African Americans (and their allies) are deeply troubled by comparisons between the Civil Rights Movement and the movement for gay and transgender equality. For most Americans, the term "civil rights" has a specific cultural and historical meaning. It refers to reversing the historical discrimination against African Americans

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in terms of voting rights, the ending of segregation, and the Civil Rights Act of 1964. It evokes images of Martin Luther King, Jr., the March on Washington, and police attacks on peaceful demonstrators.

Using explicit civil rights language and historic civil rights references when talking about gay and transgender equality tends to alienate even supportive African Americans. Among less supportive African Americans, it can give rise to an angry indignation. It can also risk alienating socially conscious non-African American allies sensitive to misappropriation of another community's history and struggle. To better understand the sensitivities around civil rights comparisons, see *Talking to African American Audiences About LGBT Issues*.

Avoid perpetuating the myth of gay affluence. We talked earlier about reinforcing general stereotypes of gay people as white, male, urban, and highly sexualized. Here we talk more specifically about not reinforcing the mistaken belief that gay people are more prosperous than other Americans (a belief that directly leads to the idea that "Gay people don't need more rights"). Contrary to the myth of gay affluence, gay people suffer from economic disparities. Gay people actually earn less than straight people and gay families have lower rates of home ownership. Many gay and transgender people are simply struggling to make ends meet, while others are on welfare, unemployed, or homeless.

The myth of gay affluence (perpetuated by the "DINK" or Dual Income, No Kids stereotype) is one of the most formidable obstacles to achieving equality. As anti-gay advocates are fond of repeating: If gay people are better off than the average American, why do they need more rights?

This effect of this stereotype is similar to "The Cosby Effect," observed by the Frameworks Institute after assessing media images of African Americans. When *The Cosby Show* became one of America's most beloved television programs in the 1980s, it was rightly recognized as a watershed moment in the cultural representation of African Americans. But it had an unintended consequence as well: Its depiction of an affluent family in which both parents were highly educated professionals sent a message that African Americans could "make it" as long as they applied themselves. This unintended message was at odds with the systemic social and economic inequalities

Show gay people as more than just high-end consumers interested in "Architectural Digest."



that many in the African American community faced, and continue to face, to this day. For gay people, this might be called the "Will & Grace Effect."

The key to overcoming the myth of gay affluence is to reflect the economic diversity of gay and transgender people. Show gay people as more than just high-end consumers interested in *Architectural Digest*. Gay people purchase dish soap and aluminum foil and other mundane household items. They shop at the supermarket and local Target store. They are working class as well as white collar. This doesn't mean that gay people aren't an important consumer market—it just means we form a market that extends beyond luxury goods and into everyday items and brands.



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Harmful and Ineffective Vocabulary

When trying to persuade the moveable middle, we should avoid the following language and terminology.

Avoid Vocabulary that Reinforces Conflict Frames	
Avoid the Following	Things To Keep In Mind
AVOID <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bigotry • Bigot • Prejudice • Hate • Hatred 	Instead, "hurtful attitudes"
AVOID <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discrimination • Discriminatory 	Instead, "hurtful"
AVOID <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • War • Fight • Struggle • Battle 	Instead, "advocating for"
AVOID <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lies • Liar 	Don't name-call in response to an opponent's misrepresentations; instead, reframe around our own key messages
AVOID <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extremists • Right-wing extremists 	Instead, "opponents"
AVOID <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agenda • Christian agenda • Right-wing agenda • Conservative agenda 	This language sounds partisan and reinforces the conflict frame

Avoid Positioning Gay People as Self-Centered/"Me-Focused"	
Avoid the Following	Things To Keep In Mind
AVOID <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rights • Equal rights 	Because of overuse, the term "equal rights" invokes a negative frame of "special rights;" it does nothing to show that gay people are not already equal
AVOID <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benefits 	Benefits are interpreted as being above and beyond a baseline equality; seems more self-centered, as in "I want these perks"
AVOID <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deserves • Entitled 	This language can sound very demanding and doesn't help increase moveable middle support

Avoid Labels or Terminology that Send Confusing Messages About Gay and Transgender People and Equality	
Avoid the Following	Things To Keep In Mind
AVOID <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homosexual 	Instead, "gay"; never use the term "homosexual" in any context
AVOID <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same-sex 	Instead, "gay"
AVOID <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sexual relationship • Gay relationship 	Instead, "loving, committed relationship"
AVOID <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Queer • Gender-queer 	Instead, "gay" and/or "transgender"
AVOID <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gay activist • Gay rights activist • Gay rights advocate 	Instead, "advocate for gay equality" or "advocate for gay and transgender equality"
AVOID <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gay marriage • Same-sex marriage 	This language sounds partisan and reinforces the conflict frame

Avoid Labels Or Terminology that Send Confusing Messages About Gay and Transgender People and Equality (Continued)	
Avoid the Following	Things To Keep In Mind
<p>AVOID</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equal rights • Gay rights • Civil rights 	<p>Instead, “equality,” “equality for all”</p>
<p>AVOID</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sexual orientation • Gay sexuality 	<p>Use simply “orientation” where possible, although “sexual orientation” is OK on first reference if needed to avoid confusion; never use “sexual preference” or “gay lifestyle”</p>

Avoid Partisan Language	
Avoid the Following	Things To Keep In Mind
<p>AVOID</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Democrat • Republican • Right-wing • The (political, religious, far) Right • The Left • Progressive • Conservative • Liberal 	<p>See <i>The Art and Science of Framing an Issue</i> for an explanation of why it’s best to avoid using partisan language in a way that makes it clear what “side” the communication is from</p>

Avoid Branding Our Opponents in Ways that Can Backfire with Moveable Middle Audiences, Particularly People of Faith	
Avoid the Following	Things To Keep In Mind
<p>AVOID</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Religious right • Anti-gay right • Religious extremists 	<p>Instead, “anti-gay activists” or “far-right activists;” “far-right Christians” can be used to distinguish between supportive or non-hostile Christians, and those vehemently opposed to gay and transgender equality</p>
<p>AVOID</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Religion-based prejudice • Religion-based discrimination • Religion-based bigotry 	<p>Instead, “opposition to gay equality”</p>

Avoid Language that Takes the Moveable Middle Past Acceptance and Requires Celebration and Endorsement	
Avoid the Following	Things To Keep In Mind
<p>AVOID</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Honor gay couples • Celebrate gay couples 	<p>Instead, use “accept gay couples;” for example, you might accept that your opponent has the right to his opinion, but you might not want to “honor” that opinion</p>

Avoid Language that’s Become Over-used or is Overly Abstract in Nature	
Avoid the Following	Things To Keep In Mind
<p>AVOID</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • USE CAUTION WITH “GLBT/LGBT” or repeated use of “gay lesbian bisexual and transgender” 	<p>Instead, “gay” or “gay and transgender”; note that this recommendation applies specifically to communications with moveable middle audiences</p>
<p>AVOID</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homophobe • Homophobia 	<p>Instead, “discomfort,” “fear,” “opposition,” or “anti-gay attitudes”</p>
<p>AVOID</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heterosexism • Heteronormativity 	<p>These are confusing and complex sociological concepts that moveable middle audiences don’t understand</p>

Sample Talking Points

Sample Talking Points

1. Emphasize Common Ground

1. “This is about everyday Americans who want the same chance as everyone else to earn a living, be safe in their communities, serve their country, and take care of the ones they love.”

- “Marriage is about commitment. It’s about responsibility. And it’s about being able to take care of the one you love.”
- “It’s important to look at the big picture and what it means. I was raised to believe that love, caring, compassion, and hope were the most important ways that we reveal God to others in our lives.”
- “I’ve served my country in the military, and I’ve been proud to serve shoulder to shoulder with brave, patriotic gay people who only want the chance to protect and defend their nation in a time of war.”

2. Illustrate Concrete Harms

2. “In America today, gay people don’t have the same chance to earn a living, be safe in their communities, serve their country, or take care of the ones they love.”

- “It’s hard to imagine what it would be like to be told that you couldn’t visit your husband in the hospital, or hold your wife’s hand and tell her you love her before she went into surgery. Why would anyone stand in the way of couples being able to take care of each other?”
- “Nobody should be fired from their job or kicked out of their home because of who they are. We should judge people on the quality of their work.”
- “I don’t see how America is made safer when brave, patriotic men and women are kept from serving their country in a time of war just because they’re gay.”

CLOSING THE DEAL?

We often want our communications to be THE definitive statement on a matter. We worry that we’ll lose our audience forever if we don’t take this one final chance to get all of our points across and “close the deal,” so to speak.

However, when we say everything, we risk overloading our message (and our audience). Pushing too far too fast can also create push-back. Give the audience food for thought, but don’t try to stuff down a whole buffet!

Remember: The movement toward equality is a process and it won’t happen overnight. Once the target audience hears a message, they’re going to sit with it for awhile. They may talk it over with people they know. They may go home and watch an episode of *Brothers & Sisters*. Or they may just file the message away and return to it the next time they hear a big news story on gay people—at which point, they may be more ready for the next message.

Sample Creative Idea

The “*Will & Grace* Effect” described above can reinforce certain stereotypes about gay people. The sample creative idea below helps straight people understand that gay people exist in all walks of life.

Sample Print Ad Concept

IMAGE: Female paramedic carrying resuscitation equipment, walking with purpose and looking slightly off the page.

TEXT: *Ever since I was a girl, I wanted to help people. Today, as a paramedic, I’m proud to be part of a team that’s in the business of caring for people.*

But I shouldn’t have to worry about how to respond when my colleagues ask me what I did last weekend. Can I tell them I went to the game with Rebecca, my partner of eight years? Can I put a picture of her on my desk? Can I tell my neighbor that I’m not interested in getting fixed up with his nephew?

I love Rebecca. We’ve made a commitment to take care of each other.

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