

Does it Get Better? Exploring “It Gets Better” Videos Using Visual Sociology

Richard A. Brandon-Friedman and M. Killian Kinney

Indiana University School of Social Work

Corresponding Author:

Richard A. Brandon-Friedman

902 W. New York St, ES 4138

Indianapolis, IN 46202

rifriedm@iupui.edu

---

This is the author's manuscript of the article published in final edited form as:

Brandon-Friedman, R. A., & Kinney, M. K. (2021). Does it get better? Exploring “It Gets Better” videos using visual sociology. *Journal of LGBT Youth*, 18(4), 421-437. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19361653.2019.1691107>

### Abstract

In 2010, the It Gets Better (IGB) project website was launched to house videos containing messages of support for youth who identify as sexual and/or gender minorities (SGMs). Despite success as a virtual social movement, scholars have suggested that the imagery portrayed may unintentionally exclude those who are most marginalized and that the videos often implore individuals to endure suffering now to gain happiness later. Using visual sociology methodology, the visual messaging and demographics of IGB video producers were examined and compared against criticisms of the project. Imagery portrayed was consistent with common concerns about exclusions of minorities, those who do not fit social standards of physical attractiveness, and those who challenge heteronormativity and adherence to gender norms. Despite IGB videos' intentions to promote hope, the tales of struggle and hardship relayed often resulted in the depiction of negative emotions. Expressions of confidence, defiance, and empathy were visible, but the most prevalent emotion was sadness. Negative visual presentations and exclusion of significant demographics within the SGM community suggest IGB videos project more complex visual signals and different messaging than would be expected from videos designed to be supportive. Professionals should be attuned to these concerns when working with SGM youth.

**KEY WORDS:** It Gets Better, Visual Sociology, Sexual Orientation, LGBT, Social Support, LGBT Youth, Suicide

### Does it Get Better? Exploring “It Gets Better” Videos Using Visual Sociology

Following the highly publicized suicides of two gay teens, in September of 2010 Dan Savage, the popular advice columnist, and his husband Terry Miller posted a video on their YouTube channel meant to reassure youth who identify as sexual and/or gender minorities (SGM youth) that even if they are struggling at this point in their lives, they have a positive future ahead of them. By mid-October, the original It Gets Better website was launched with a mission to “inspire hope for young people facing harassment... to create a personal way for supporters everywhere to tell LGBT youth that, yes, it does indeed get better” (It Gets Better, 2016). Soon many individuals, celebrities, politicians, and employees of major corporations began creating support videos of their own. Since inception, the IGB project has collected over 50,000 videos, has over 500,000 followers on social media, has released a book of video transcripts, and has created an online docuseries featuring well-known SGM figures talking about the struggles they faced earlier in life and successes since then (It Gets Better, 2016).

Despite success as an online social movement, the IGB project has been criticized. Most prominently, SGM individuals have openly questioned whether life really does “get better.” Undoubtedly, great strides have been made in societal acceptance of SGMs, increased legal recognition and protection for them, and improved accessibility of services geared to their unique needs, but the high rates of substance use, psychosocial difficulties, and trauma among adult SGMs indicate that the future may not be as positive for SGM youth as projected (Plöderl & Tremblay, 2015). Many SGMs will continue to suffer bullying, harassment, and discrimination throughout their lives and suffer psychosocial consequences based on it (Bostwick, Boyd, Hughes, West, & McCabe, 2014), leading Femmephane (2010), lim (2010), and Nyong'o (2010) to suggest the IGB project provides false hope by implying life will improve for all SGMs.

A separate line of criticism emphasized the sociodemographic characteristics of the founders and questioned their messaging. Muller (2011) and Nyong'o (2010) noted that Savage and Miller are White, wealthy, and very attractive, suggesting these aspects of their lives may have assisted with them overcoming their negative early experiences and colored their recollection and retelling of their stories. Others have noted Savage and Miller's message is heavily neoliberalist, and emphasizes economic wealth, career stability, being in a coupled relationship, having children, being cisgender, and generally adhering to a heteronormative and assimilationist middle to upper-class living (Grzanka & Mann, 2014; Puar, 2010). Such messaging is concerning, as feelings of not fitting within normative media images of SGMs can increase feelings of isolation for SGM youth (McInroy & Craig, 2016). Despite these critiques, the social success of the IGB project seemingly indicates that individuals must be identifying with the videos.

### **SGM Youth Well-Being**

During adolescence, youth begin developing their independent identities as they navigate a transition from childhood to adult roles that requires exploring their personal beliefs, values, desires, and goals. Peers and social interactions take on a heightened meaning as youth seek increasing autonomy from family members and emphasize peer engagement. Further, youth begin experimenting with romantic and sexual relationships, leading to an increase in the salience of their sexual identities. Correspondingly, middle to late adolescence is when many SGM youth begin the process of developing their SGM identities and revealing that identity to other (Argüello, 2018).

Bullying based on LGB-identification is widespread across life domains and perpetrated by peers, family members, teachers, coaches, clergy, support staff, police, and community leaders (Mishna, Newman, Daley, & Solomon, 2009). Within the educational environment, over

half of SMG youth have felt unsafe, almost three-quarters have been verbally harassed, and over one-third have been physically harassed (Kosciw, Greytak, Zongrone, Clark, & Truong, 2018). Unsurprisingly, SGM youth experience increased rates of mental health disorders, substance misuse, deliberate self-harm, suicidal ideation, suicide attempts, isolation, hopelessness, and completed suicide than heterosexual peers (Plöderl & Tremblay, 2015).

Institutional support such as discussions about SGMs in curriculum and supportive programming, integrated social opportunities, enhancement of truth in being (the importance of being true to oneself in spite of cultural negativity), familial support, and gay and ally community supports for SGM youth are effective ways to combat the negative impacts of bullying (Higa et al., 2014). Sexual identity development in SGM youth is particularly enhanced from supports by other SGMs (Brandon-Friedman & Kim, 2016). Yet, social supports are lacking for many SGM youth, especially those in more rural locations; who come from a more religious background; who come from a more traditional culture, ethnicity, or family; and/or who are socially isolated for other reasons (Page, Lindahl, & Malik, 2013; Swank, Frost, & Fahs, 2012). For these SGM youth and many others, the internet is often a primary resource for support, self-understanding, and construction of self-identities (Craig & McInroy, 2014; Harper, Bruce, Serrano, & Jamil, 2009).

Virtual social supports provide some benefits to youth experiencing psychosocial distress (Van Uden-Kraan, Drossaert, Taal, Seydel, & van de Laar, 2009). The most beneficial aspects seem to be the sense of community they create and normalization of difficult experiences, both of which are goals of the IGB project. Alternatively, online support groups can have iatrogenic effects when individuals experiencing similar difficulties interact and amplify negative behaviors or when unmoderated groups exacerbate negative emotions (Dishion & Tipsord, 2011). As a project consisting of self-produced videos and messaging about difficult life experiences that are

not regulated by any central authority, the IGB project may be particularly susceptible to such occurrences.

### **Research on the It Gets Better Project**

Examinations of the IGB project have questioned the degree to which video producers attempt to challenge the status quo. Rattan and Ambady (2014) and Gal, Shifman, and Kampf (2015) noted that many of the videos consist of life narratives that adhere to a message of self-elevation, rather than seeking to spur individuals toward advocating for societal change. Further, Majkowski (2011) criticized IGB video messaging for seeming to place the onus on youth to improve their own lives rather than challenging the politicians, celebrities, corporations, and well-to-do individuals who produce videos with messages of waiting out difficult times.

Further, Grzanka and Mann (2014) suggested that producers' emphasis on past struggles might simultaneously imply to viewers it is normal or expected that they be suffering now, thereby counteracting the intended effect. For them, not criticizing social ills suggests a sluggish complacency and acceptance of the current norms instead of propelling individuals to confront a sociocultural milieu that seemingly accepts being bullied as a rite of passage for SGM youth. These concerns notwithstanding, the literature supports the adage that if individuals survive a difficult period in their lives, they may feel more prepared to tackle difficult situations later in life (Samuels & Pryce, 2008), suggesting this narrative may have benefits.

Asakura and Craig (2014) explored IGB videos' verbal messaging, high-lighting the resiliency present in many youths' stories as they accentuated improvements as they left the more familiarly- and educationally-prescribed environment of adolescence for an adulthood that allowed for more self-selection of social environments. While these experiences are certainly positive, this messaging also emphasizes a degree of privilege as it assumes individuals have the means to change environments as they reach adulthood, which is not the case for everyone.

Youth who may not have these opportunities could start to believe progress is less attainable for them, unintentionally creating a sense of helplessness.

### **The Use of Visual Methodologies**

Critical interpretations often focus on verbal texts, but more is communicated when videos are viewed. Visual analysis seeks to uncover the meanings communicated through visual signals without the noise of non-visual communication (Cipriani & Del Re, 2012). Further, it can also explore how individuals present, construct, and interpret their identities (Jensen Schau & Gilly, 2003). Identification Theory (Kelman, 1961) suggests individuals consider the degree to which they match the individuals communicating with them, and they are more likely to identify with messaging from those similar to them. Conversely individuals are less inclined to relate to, and may even feel increased distance from, those who appear different from them. His theory has been further developed and capitalized upon in media advertising, as companies manipulate models' gender presentations, races/ethnicities, and wealth projections depending on the demographic they intend to primarily reach (Sierra, Hyman, & Heiser, 2012). While demographic similarities are only a piece of what increases salience and enhances the impact of messaging, if Muller's (2011) critiques of producers' presentations are warranted, IGB videos could be isolating those that they seek to embrace.

Going further, scholars have noted that visual emotional cues can affect not only the emotional response of the recipients, but also the way the recipients interpret the verbal messaging (Stouten & De Cremer, 2010). Emotional expression is particularly salient for support messaging as it can convey warmth and empathy, whereas incongruence between verbal messaging and the visual cues can cause confusion and difficulties in processing the message (Henry, Block, Ciesla, McGowan, & Vozenilek, 2016). Ultimately, the projection and reception

of emotions may provide the means through which individuals understand, experience, and internalize others' situations (Benski & Fisher, 2014).

Even though emotions portrayed by speakers are just as important as verbal message, no research has systematically examined the visual messaging communicated through IGB videos. Seeking to remedy this gap, this study incorporated a new type of analysis to examine how the images projected within IGB videos serve to either enhance or disrupt producers' ability to enhance positivity within viewers' lives. The presumed needs of viewers are high, but so are the possible repercussions of further alienation if the imagery leads to further distantiation. Thus, the central questions of this study were:

- 1) What demographics are visually represented among the producers of IGB videos?
- 2) What emotions do producers of IGB videos portray?
- 3) Do the emotions portrayed align with the intended messaging of the IGB project?

### **Methodology**

Visual content analysis translates visual imagery into quantitative data that can be analyzed for frequencies, correlations, or trends (Rose, 2001). This study followed Bells' (2001), protocols for visual content analysis: Form hypotheses; define variables explicitly, clearly, and quantifiably; determine study procedures, including rater assignment and testing of inter-rater reliability; collect results; run analyses; and analyze results by exploring conglomerated data, interpreting meaning using sociological theories, and comparing findings to previous research.

Videos on the IGB project's website are assigned identification numbers and at the time of review, there were 2730 videos posted on the IGB project's website. Using a random number generator, videos were randomly selected and examined to ensure they met inclusionary criteria of: Being in English, being self-produced, including only one individual who was American, and the producer self-identifying as an SGM. Demographic limitations were due to significant



inconsistencies in interpretations of the emotions of individuals from different cultural backgrounds than the video raters during pilot testing. A sample size of 50 videos was predetermined to ensure sufficient variability. Over 600 videos were checked against inclusion criteria to obtain the sample with an independent individual listening to verbal text to ensure that inclusionary criteria were met. Primary exclusionary reasons were being corporate-produced, being created by an ally who did not identify as an SGM, and the producer being from outside the United States or speaking a language other than English.

Inventory items were selected based on Muller's (2011) critiques of the original IGB video, common critiques of SGM mainstream presentations, and common media stereotypes of SGMs. Categorical items included producer's perceived demographics and socioeconomic status as well the video's framing. Socioeconomic status was informed by the subcategories of clothing style, presence of clear clothing branding, and estimated clothing cost (with considerations for accessories and manicuring of persons' appearance). Discrepancies on categorical items were discussed and consensus reached. Perceived gender and mannerisms were triangulated to identify the final category of gender conformity using crosstabs of perceived gender by gender mannerisms. A scaled estimation of the physical attractiveness of the video producer focused on facial and bodily features based on social norms of beauty. While physical beauty is certainly subjective, research has indicated most people agree on who is attractive (Langlois et al., 2000).

Emotional evaluation consisted of scaled scores on joy, shame, sadness, confidence, defiance, empathy, and overall emotional expression. Emotions reviewed were selected based on reviewers watching a sample of videos and noting the emotions they saw displayed. Reviewer notes were compared to determine the most prevalent emotions. A consensus-based rater reference sheet including a definition of each emotional expression, example visual cues for emotions items, and anchors for scaled items (e.g., for overall expressiveness, a zero rating

would be equivalent to a flat affect) was then developed. A second sample of videos was tested using the codebook and comparisons made between raters to examine the comprehensiveness of prevalent emotional expressions and reliability of the codebook and edits were made as needed. Edits were compared to final pilot sample of videos before analysis of the actual sample began.

Three independent raters viewed each video simultaneously and recorded their ratings on the Video Data Sheet produced for this study (Appendix A). Videos were muted to limit distractions from the sounds or judgments based upon the verbal message. After the first image appeared, the video was paused so reviewers could complete the variables of initial perceptions (gender, race/ethnicity, age, framing of video, socioeconomic indicators, and attractiveness). Inter-rater reliability was assessed using Interclass Correlation Coefficient (ICC) for the continuous variables (Hallgren, 2012) and Cohen's kappa for categorical variables (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken, 2004). Analyses indicated appropriate reliability (all ICC  $\geq 0.799$ ,  $p < .001$ ; all  $\kappa \geq .846$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

## Results

The sample featured more males ( $n = 27$ , 54.0%; Table 1) than females ( $n = 16$ , 32.0%), with 14% ( $n = 7$ ) presenting as gender neutral or non-binary. Participants appeared to primarily be in their 20s or 30s ( $n = 38$ , 76%), with 98% being of average weight ( $n = 49$ ) and 50% an average build ( $n = 25$ ). Eighty-four percent of the sample appeared to be White ( $n = 42$ ). Ninety eight percent of this sample was produced by individuals coded as coming from the lower middle class or above ( $n = 49$ ), of which 28% in the upper middle class or upper class ( $n = 14$ ). Mannerisms split much more than gender presentation, but there was a high preponderance of conformity between gender presentation and mannerisms ( $n = 38$ , 76%).

The highest mean scores were for Confidence ( $M = 7.49$ ,  $SD = 1.72$ ; Table 2), Physical Attractiveness ( $M = 7.13$ ,  $SD = 1.23$ ), and Overall Expressiveness ( $M = 6.03$ ,  $SD = 1.54$ ). The

lowest mean emotional scores were on Joy ( $M = 3.53$ ,  $SD = 2.36$ ) and Shame ( $M = 3.34$ ,  $SD = 2.24$ ), while the largest variations were in Defiance (range = 10), Sadness (range = 9.33), Shame (range = 8.67), and Empathy (range = 8.67). Four items – Overall Expressiveness, Sadness, Confidence, and Defiance – had at least one individual that received the maximum score of ten, whereas three items – Joy, Shame, and Defiance – had individuals that received the lowest score of zero, indicating that the emotion was not demonstrated.

[INSERT TABLE 1]

[INSERT TABLE 2]

### Discussion

Videos made for the IGB project are intended to provide emotional support to SGM youth and help them realize that even if they are struggling currently their lives will improve. While certainly a noble cause and a successful media movement, critics have suggested the imagery portrayed in the videos could alienate the intended audience through a lack diversity, emphasizing a heteronormative and neoliberal lifestyle with which many youth may not identify, introducing a contagion effect that suggests suffering is appropriate for SGM youth, and giving youth misplaced hope that their lives will inevitably get better for them when this may not be the reality for them. This study examined the validity of these criticisms using visual analysis to look beyond the videos' verbal texts and into what the imagery represents.

Results support Muller's (2011) assertion that the majority of videos follow the presentation style of Savage and Miller's original video and the interpretation that one of the IGB project's goals is to create a sense of shared community dialogue. The tight, close-up framing and direct conversational imagery of the videos convey a sense of intimacy. This desire

to relate directly to the viewers was also demonstrated through attempts at direct eye contact with the viewer, pausing at times during the conversation as if to let the message sink in or for the viewer respond, and the high levels of empathy projected.

This emotional realness undoubtedly contributes to the IGB project's success as a social movement. Producers' emotional investment and their willing to show love, fear, anger, pain, and hope in such a public manner enhances the messages' impact and provides the sense of connection important within supporting relationships. While some question the propriety of individuals trying to use virtual support communities in place of real-world supports, the internet can be an important conduit for supportive messaging (Van Uden-Kraan et al., 2009) and for adolescents to do sexuality-related identity work (Harper et al., 2009). Further, many SGM youth live in locations without in-person support groups or community centers, are uncomfortable visiting such a place, or are not out and therefore unable to access family transportation, thus receiving messages of support in the privacy of their own home may be extremely valuable.

Producer demographics were generally proportional to United States population data with the exception of the ethnic/racial makeup. Eighty-four percent of the producers were perceived to be White, disproportionately high higher than their 76.9% makeup within United States population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). Individuals who identify as African American/Black make up just over 13% of the United States population, whereas only 4% of producers were perceived African American/Black. It is important to note classification of producers' racial/ethnic background was based on visual presentation, not producers' self-identities. This may underestimate the proportion of racial/ethnic minority producers, but viewers also interpret their similarity or difference from producers and consequent sense of inclusion or exclusion based on visual presentations so this imagery is important.

Underrepresentation of racial/ethnic minorities may undermine the self-esteem of individuals who identify as such or reduce their engagement with the messaging (Behm-Morawitz & Ortiz, 2013; Sierra et al., 2012). These negative effects may be compounded among SGM youth, as youth who identify as both sexual and/or gender minorities and racial and/or ethnic minorities already report less supportive everyday environments in general and therefore may be most in need of supportive messaging (Frost, Meyer, & Schwartz, 2016). Unfortunately, these findings indicate Harris' (2009) concerns about the marginalization of the marginalized within SGM communities may be further occurring.

Savage and Miller's presentation has been criticized for projecting wealth through designer labels, but most producers were judged to be from the middle class and expressed themselves casually. While some of the clothing worn may have been designer label despite not having clearly visible insignia, that type of presentation would not correspond with that line of criticism. Individuals generally consciously choose how to present themselves when interacting with others online (Jensen Schau & Gilly, 2003), whereas those in the upper class make up a smaller proportion of the population. While people in lower socioeconomic classes may have access to a computer at a library or public location or on mobile phones, these are often not conducive to making a serious video intended to be shared publicly. Unfortunately, this presentation could further serve to alienate those who may already feel they do not fit within the middle to upper class image often portrayed within media geared to SGMs. Thus, while criticism of the upper-class imagery present in the original video may be reasonable for that specific video, other self-produced videos are more socioeconomically-inclusive even while excluding others.

Media is often criticized for presenting only those who are physically attractive and either negatively portraying or excluding those who are above average body weight or do not fit within

socially constructed beauty standards (Ata & Thompson, 2010). Video producers' attractiveness ratings skewed toward the high end, indicating video producers were perceived to be more attractive than average individuals. Further, while over two-thirds of the United States population over the age of 20 are considered overweight or obese (National Center for Health Statistics, 2013), only one individual in this sample was coded as weighing above average.

These findings are perhaps not surprising, given that people who are over average body weight or consider themselves less attractive are more likely to be reserved and self-conscious about their image and self-presentation (Strauss, 2000), making them less likely to create a video of themselves for public viewing. Concerns about physical appearance may be especially relevant to this sample, as research has shown that gay men place a stronger emphasis on physical attractiveness than heterosexual men and therefore may have heightened concerns about judgement of their physical presentation (Yean et al., 2013). There may be some positivity to the producers' attractiveness given many view attractive individuals as more trustworthy and are more attentive to what they say (Langlois et al., 2000), possibly making their supportive messages more meaningful. Yet the lack of representation of individuals who are over average body weight may further exacerbate feelings of social isolation and alienation from the SGM community.

Conformity to gender stereotypes is especially important when exploring the lives of SGM individuals as genderqueer and nonbinary individuals report that gender-rejecting physical expression and behaviors form a core aspect of their gender identity (Kinney, 2018). Further, visibility and acceptance of gender diversity is crucial as harmful bullying and social harassment often is based upon judgments of these characteristics (Toomey, Ryan, Diaz, Card, & Russell, 2010). Yet, contrary to stereotyping that SGM individuals exhibit a gender inversion of physical

features, mannerisms, and social presentation, over three quarters of the producers of the videos were judged to be gender-conforming.

While reasons for this were not clear, they may be related to how individuals choose to self-present when placing themselves in front of the public in a way that may lead to social judgements. Further, despite the emotional pain many participants expressed, their high levels of self-confidence may be attributable to experiencing comparatively less (though still significant) social harassment, bullying, and exclusion than those who defy conventional standards more fully. In other words, producers' degrees of gender conformity may have contributed to reduced negative social interactions, leading to the development of the level of self-confidence required to engage in as risky a social endeavor as making and publicly posting a video about such personal experiences.

Contradictorily, youth who are bullied the most and are at the most risk are those who the IGB campaign is targeting. If youth who reject gender norms are unable to identify with video producers, they may feel further alienated and ostracized based on differences in their gender presentation. As with other concerns about producer representation, this would directly contradict the IGB project's expressed purpose.

The marked incongruence between the presumed intended messaging and emotional expression is noteworthy. Previous research has indicated that when verbal and nonverbal messaging conflict, the nonverbal communication achieves primacy during affective communication (Grebelsky-Lichtman, 2016). This suggests the high level of sadness present may be counteracting the positivity of the messaging. Further, if the messages provided are tinged with sadness, the visual presentation of sadness will impact the viewer more strongly. This accentuation of negativity lends credence to concerns about negative emotional contagions and their possible harmfulness to viewers.

Alternatively, the high level of confidence, empathy, and defiance displayed could be beneficial to viewers. Such displays emphasize strength in presentation and an ability to overcome. If viewers internalize this messaging and focus on inner strength, they may learn to focus on positivity and defiance of the status quo, as happens within many SGM youths' lives (McInroy & Craig, 2016). When working with SGM youth, attention must be paid to the social messaging they are receiving so that the benefits can be emphasized and concerns mitigated. This may require helping the youth with interpretation of what they are seeing and hearing or discussing the messaging to ensure they are internalizing the positive aspects and using the negative parts to build resiliency and defiance rather than increasing their hopelessness. Further, this is a reminder that professionals need to remain aware of youths' socioeconomic and familial situations and current environments so that they do not become part of a system that may project false reassurances of neoliberal success or social emancipation if such experiences may be less likely for the youth in the nearer future. Hope for a better future and working toward life improvements are essential aspects of social service provision, but denying or minimizing current realities can increase isolation and inspire hopelessness – the antithesis of what is desired.

Several limitations of this study must be noted. First, while fifty videos were rated, this is a small number compared to the advertised 50,000+ videos created as part of the IGB project. Second, video selections were made from videos posted directly on the IGB website. The website only contained 2,730 videos, making it a limited population from which the sample was drawn. The analysis also specifically excluded videos produced by celebrities and other public officials. The social capital of these well-known individuals may contribute to their messages having more of an impact on viewers. Similarly, group and corporate videos were excluded, some of which may have also had a larger impact based on who they represent. Finally, the



ratings were based only on visual analysis, which may have diluted the impact of the messaging. Positive verbal messaging likely increases the videos' positive emotional impact, even if they are partially contradicted by the visuals presented. Future analysis of IGB videos should consider both visual cues and verbal messaging, preferably with a comparison of the two.

### **Conclusion**

This study sought to examine the self-presentation styles and visual messaging present in a sample of IGB videos to assess if they visually portray the optimistic hope ("it gets better") intended and if they represent the diversity within the SGM community. Findings supported critiques of the videos' overall messaging and representation. Even without hearing the video producers' verbal messages it was clear that many producers were experiencing strong negative emotions and either telling very personal stories or making personal appeals, but the negativity present in their emotional displays may be hampering the effectiveness of the positive messaging. Displaying more sadness than joy projects mixed messages to viewers, while the extensive display of defiance, while arguably also positive, indicates that adversity is inherently a part of SGMs' lives.

Despite the heightened levels of suicidality and suicide attempts among racial and ethnic minority SGMs, videos portrayed few racial/ethnic minorities. This lack of diversity and that a vast majority of the producers appeared to be from the middle class, to be more physically attractive than the average person, and to be largely gender-conforming lend credence to concerns about the alienation of many SGM youth. Despite the IGB project's intention to reach and provide messages of support to all SGM youth in need, the historical marginalization of the marginalized may still be occurring.

Producers of IGB videos clearly believe strongly in the cause and are willing to place themselves into a public arena in an attempt to build supports for those whom they will likely

never meet. Yet, the benefits to the entirety of the intended audiences are suspect, raising questions about the effectiveness of the project. Research examining the congruency between the visual and verbal messaging, further analyses of verbal messaging, evaluating how a diverse group of SGMs perceive IGB videos, and an examination of whether the messages of support are being properly conveyed to viewers would be valuable next steps. False hope could be harmful to SGM youth as can further alienation from intended supports. Considering the ongoing sociopolitical marginalization of the SGM community, the intent of IGB videos to project social support is still important, but new mechanisms of explicit support and better representation of diversity are needed..

## References

- Argüello, T. A. (2018). Identity Development. In M. P. Denato (Ed.), *Social work practice with the LGBTQ community: The history of history, health, mental health, and policy factors*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Asakura, K., & Craig, S. L. (2014). "It Gets Better" ... but how? Exploring resilience development in the accounts of LGBTQ adults. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment, 24*(3), 253-266. doi:10.1080/10911359.2013.808971
- Ata, R. N., & Thompson, J. K. (2010). Weight bias in the media: A review of recent research. *Obesity Facts, 3*(1), 41-46. doi:10.1159/000276547
- Behm-Morawitz, E., & Ortiz, M. (2013). Race, ethnicity, and the media. In K. E. Dill (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of media psychology* (pp. 252-266). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Bell, P. (2001). Content analysis of visual images. In T. Van Leeuwen & C. Jewitt (Eds.), *The handbook of visual analysis* (pp. 10-34). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Benski, T., & Fisher, E. (2014). Introduction: Investigating emotions and the Internet. In T. Benski & E. Fisher (Eds.), *Internet and emotions*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Bostwick, W. B., Boyd, C. J., Hughes, T. L., West, B. T., & McCabe, S. E. (2014). Discrimination and mental health among lesbian, gay, and bisexual adults in the United States. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 84*(1), 35-45. doi:10.1037/h0098851
- Brandon-Friedman, R. A., & Kim, H.-W. (2016). Using social support levels to predict sexual identity development among college students who identify as a sexual minority. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services, 28*(4), 1-25. doi:10.1080/10538720.2016.1221784
- Cipriani, R., & Del Re, E. C. (2012). Imagination and society: The role of visual sociology. *Cognitive Processing, 13*(Suppl 2), 455-463. doi:10.1007/s10339-012-0433-4

- Craig, S. L., & McInroy, L. B. (2014). You can form a part of yourself online: The influence of new media on identity development and coming out for LGBTQ youth. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Mental Health, 18*(1), 95-109. doi:10.1080/19359705.2013.777007
- Dishion, T. J., & Tipsord, J. M. (2011). Peer contagion in child and adolescent social and emotional development. *Annual Review of Psychology, 62*, 189-214.  
doi:10.1146/annurev.psych.093008.100412
- Femmephane. (2010). Why I don't like Dan Savage's "It Gets Better" project as a response to bullying. Retrieved from <http://tempcontretemps.wordpress.com/2010/09/30/why-i-dont-like-dan-savages-it-gets-better-project-as-a-response-to-bullying/>
- Frost, D. M., Meyer, I. H., & Schwartz, S. (2016). Social support networks among diverse sexual minority populations. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 86*(1), 91-102.  
doi:10.1037/ort0000117
- Gal, N., Shifman, L., & Kampf, Z. (2015). "It Gets Better": Internet memes and the construction of collective identity. *New Media & Society, 18*(8), 1698-1714.  
doi:10.1177/1461444814568784
- Grebelsky-Lichtman, T. (2016). Verbal versus nonverbal primacy: Children's response to parental incongruent communication. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 34*(5), 636-661. doi:10.1177/0265407516651158
- Grzanka, P. R., & Mann, E. S. (2014). Queer youth suicide and the psychopolitics of "It Gets Better". *Sexualities, 17*(4), 369-393. doi:10.1177/1363460713516785
- Hallgren, K. A. (2012). Computing inter-rater reliability for observational data: An overview and tutorial. *Tutorials in Quantitative Methods for Psychology, 8*(1), 23-34.
- Harper, G. W., Bruce, D., Serrano, P., & Jamil, O. B. (2009). The role of the Internet in the sexual identity development of gay and bisexual male adolescents. In P. Hammack & B.

- J. Cohler (Eds.), *The story of sexual identity: Narrative perspectives on the gay and lesbian life course* (pp. 297-326). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Harris, A. C. (2009). Marginalization by the marginalized: Race, homophobia, heterosexism, and “the problem of the 21st century”. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services*, 21(4), 430-448. doi:10.1080/10538720903163171
- Henry, B. W., Block, D. E., Ciesla, J. R., McGowan, B. A., & Vozenilek, J. A. (2016). Clinician behaviors in telehealth care delivery: A systematic review. *Advances in Health Sciences Education*. doi:10.1007/s10459-016-9717-2
- Higa, D., Hoppe, M. J., Lindhorst, T., Mincer, S., Beadnell, B., Morrison, D. M., . . . Mountz, S. (2014). Negative and positive factors associated with the well-being of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ) youth. *Youth & Society*, 46(5), 663-687. doi:10.1177/0044118X12449630
- It Gets Better. (2016). It Gets Better. Retrieved from <http://www.itgetsbetter.org/>
- Jensen Schau, H., & Gilly, M. C. (2003). Are we what we post? Self-presentation in personal web space. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 30(3), 385-404. doi:10.1086/378616
- Kelman, H. C. (1961). Process of opinion change. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 25(57-78).
- Kinney, M. K. (2018). *Carving your own path: Exploring non-binary gender identity ievvelopment*: Manuscript in preparation.
- Kosciw, J. G., Greytak, E. A., Zongrone, A. D., Clark, C. M., & Truong, N. L. (2018). *The 2017 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer youth in our nation's schools*. New York, NY: GLSEN.
- Langlois, J. H., Kalakanis, L., Rubenstein, A. J., Larson, A., Hallam, M., & Smoot, M. (2000). Maxims or myths of beauty? A meta-analytic and theoretical review. *Psychological Bulletin*, 126(3), 390-423. doi:10.1037/0033-2909.126.3.390

lim, e.-b. (2010). No kid play | Social Text. Retrieved from

[http://socialtextjournal.org/periscope\\_article/no\\_kid\\_play/](http://socialtextjournal.org/periscope_article/no_kid_play/)

Lombard, M., Snyder-Duch, J., & Bracken, C. C. (2004). Practical resources for assessing and

reporting intercoder reliability in content analysis research projects. Retrieved from

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/242785900\\_Practical\\_Resources\\_for\\_Assessing\\_and\\_Reporting\\_Intercoder\\_Reliability\\_in\\_Content\\_Analysis\\_Research\\_Projects](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/242785900_Practical_Resources_for_Assessing_and_Reporting_Intercoder_Reliability_in_Content_Analysis_Research_Projects)

Majkowski, T. (2011). The “It Gets Better Campaign”: An unfortunate use of queer futurity.

*Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory*, 21(1), 163-165.

doi:10.1080/0740770x.2011.563048

McInroy, L. B., & Craig, S. L. (2016). Perspectives of LGBTQ emerging adults on the depiction

and impact of LGBTQ media representation. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 20(1), 32-46.

doi:10.1080/13676261.2016.1184243

Mishna, F., Newman, P. A., Daley, A., & Solomon, S. (2009). Bullying of lesbian and gay

youth: A qualitative investigation. *British Journal of Social Work*, 39, 1598-1614.

doi:10.1093/bjsw/bcm148

Muller, A. (2011). Virtual communities and translation into physical reality in the ‘It Gets

Better’project. *Journal of Media Practice*, 12(3), 269-277.

National Center for Health Statistics. (2013). *Health, United States, 2012: With special feature on emergency care*. Retrieved from Hyattsville, MD:

Nyong'o, T. (2010). School daze | Bully Bloggers. Retrieved from

<https://bullybloggers.wordpress.com/2010/09/30/school-daze/>

Page, M. J., Lindahl, K. M., & Malik, N. M. (2013). The role of religion and stress in sexual

identity and mental health among lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth. *Journal of Research*

*on Adolescence*, 23(4), 665-677. doi:10.1111/jora.12025

Plöderl, M., & Tremblay, P. (2015). Mental health of sexual minorities: A systematic review.

*International Review of Psychiatry*, 27(5), 367-385.

doi:10.3109/09540261.2015.1083949

Puar, J. (2010). In the wake of it gets better. *The Guardian*, 16(11). Retrieved from

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/cifamerica/2010/nov/16/wake-it-gets-better-campaign>

Rattan, A., & Ambady, N. (2014). How "It Gets Better": Effectively communicating support to targets of prejudice. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 1-12.

doi:10.1177/0146167213519480

Rose, G. (2001). Content analysis: Counting what you (think you) see. In G. Rose (Ed.), *Visual methodologies: An introduction to the interpretation of visual materials* (pp. 54-68).

Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Samuels, G. M., & Pryce, J. M. (2008). "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger": Survivalist self-reliance as resilience and risk among young adults aging out of foster care. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 30(10), 1198-1210. doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2008.03.005

Sierra, J. J., Hyman, M. R., & Heiser, R. S. (2012). Ethnic identity in advertising: A review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Promotion Management*, 18(4), 489-513.

doi:10.1080/10496491.2012.715123

Stouten, J., & De Cremer, D. (2010). "Seeing is believing": The effects of facial expressions of emotion and verbal communication in social dilemmas. *Journal of Behavioral Decision Making*, 23(3), 271-287.

Strauss, R. S. (2000). Childhood obesity and self-esteem. *Pediatrics*, 105(1).

doi:10.1542/peds.105.1.e15

- Swank, E., Frost, D. M., & Fahs, B. (2012). Rural location and exposure to minority stress among sexual minorities in the United States. *Psychology and Sexuality, 3*(3), 226-243.  
doi:10.1080/19419899.2012.700026
- Toomey, R. B., Ryan, C., Diaz, R. M., Card, N. A., & Russell, S. T. (2010). Gender-nonconforming lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth: School victimization and young adult psychosocial adjustment. *Developmental Psychology, 46*(6), 1580-1589.  
doi:10.1037/a0020705
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2017). U.S. Census Bureau quick facts: United States. Retrieved from [www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/tableUS/PST045216](http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/tableUS/PST045216)
- Van Uden-Kraan, C. F., Drossaert, C. H., Taal, E., Seydel, E. R., & van de Laar, M. A. (2009). Participation in online patient support groups endorses patients' empowerment. *Patient Education and Counseling, 74*(1), 61-69.
- Yean, C., Benau, E. M., Dakanalis, A., Hormes, J. M., Perone, J., & Timko, C. A. (2013). The relationship of sex and sexual orientation to self-esteem, body shape satisfaction, and eating disorder symptomatology. *Frontiers in Psychology, 4*, 1-11.  
doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2013.00887



**Table 1: Frequencies**

Item	N <sup>a</sup>	%	Item	N <sup>a</sup>	%
Gender			Clothing Branding		
Female	16	32	Clearly branded	1	2
Male	27	54	Not branded	49	98
Gender neutral	2	4	Race		
Non-binary	5	10	White	42	84
Age			African American	2	4
Teens	7	14	Asian American	2	4
20s	26	52	Hispanic	3	6
30s	12	24	Multiracial	1	2
40s	4	8	Socioeconomic status		
50+	1	2	Lower Class	1	2
Framing			Lower Middle Class	35	70
Shoulder and up	40	80	Upper Middle Class	13	26
Waist and up	10	20	Upper Class	1	2
Weight			Mannerisms		
Under weight	0	0	Female	16	32
Average	49	98	Male	19	38
Over weight	1	2	Neutral	2	4
Build			Mixed	13	26
Slim	13	26	Gender conformity		
Average	25	50	Conforming	38	76
Stocky	9	18	Non-conforming	4	8
Muscular	3	6	Mixed	8	16

<sup>a</sup>Overall N = 50

**Table 2. Item Descriptives<sup>a</sup>**

Item	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min.</i>	<i>Max.</i>	<i>Range</i>
Overall Expressiveness	6.03	1.54	2.00	10.00	8.00
Joy	3.53	2.36	0.00	8.33	8.33
Shame	3.34	2.24	0.00	8.67	8.67
Sadness	5.56	2.30	0.67	10.00	9.33
Confidence	7.49	1.72	1.67	10.00	8.33
Defiance	5.55	2.37	0.00	10.00	10.00
Empathy	5.21	2.30	0.33	9.00	8.67
Physical Attractiveness	7.13	1.23	4.67	9.33	4.67

<sup>a</sup>*N* = 50

Appendix A

**Producer Rating Sheet**

---

**Gender**            Male                    Female                    Gender neutral            Non-binary

**Race**                White                    African-American            Asian                    Mixed/Other

**Ethnicity**            Hispanic                    Not Hispanic

**Age**                    Early teens            Late teens            Early 20s            Late 20s            Early 30s  
                                   Late 30s                    Early 40s            Late 40s            50+

**Framing of Video**                                    Close-up (Head/Shoulders)            Waist and Up            Full Body

**Socioeconomic**

**Socioeconomic status**                    Lower class            Lower middle class            Upper middle class            Upper class

**Clothing Branding**                    Generic (not clearly branded)            Branded

**Estimated Clothing Cost**            Under \$100            \$100-150            Over \$150

**Attractiveness**

**Physical Attractiveness** (1-10; 5 is average): \_\_\_\_\_

**Weight**                    Under weight            Average            Over weight

**Build**                    Slim                    Average            Stocky            Muscular

**Emotions**

**Expressiveness Overall** (0 as minimal – 10 as Extremely Expressive) - \_\_\_\_\_

<b><u>Joy</u></b>	<b><u>Shame</u></b>	<b><u>Sadness</u></b>	<b><u>Confidence</u></b>	<b><u>Defiance</u></b>	<b><u>Empathy</u></b>

**Gender Conformity**

**Mannerisms**            Male                    Female                    Neutral                    Mixed

**Gender conforming**            Gender Conforming            Gender Non-conforming            Neutral                    Mixed

---