

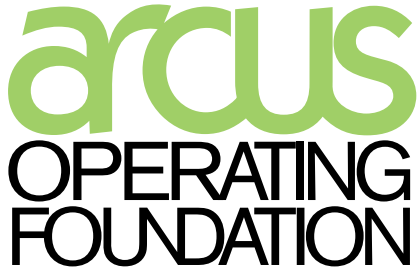


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OPERATING
FOUNDATION

LGBT Rights and Advocacy

Messaging to African American Communities

An Arcus Operating Foundation Publication written by Donna Victoria and Cornell Belcher for the Arcus Racial Justice, Sexual Orientation & Gender Identity Program



LGBT Rights and Advocacy

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About the Arcus Operating Foundation

The Arcus Operating Foundation was established in 2007 to support the work and mission of the Arcus Foundation through convenings and conferences, capacity and leadership development, research, publications and projects that increase philanthropic engagement.

Founded in 2000 by Jon L. Stryker, the mission of the Arcus Foundation is to achieve social justice that is inclusive of sexual orientation, gender identity and race, and to ensure conservation and respect of the great apes. The Foundation works globally and has offices in Kalamazoo, Michigan, New York City and Cambridge, UK.

About the Arcus Foundation's Racial Justice, Sexual Orientation & Gender Identity Program

This Arcus Foundation program works to increase the power and influence of LGBT people of color organizations and leaders, and strengthen the LGBT movement's commitment to racial justice. For more information, contact Roz Lee, senior program officer, Racial Justice, Sexual Orientation & Gender Identity program at roz@arcusfoundation.org.

The Arcus Foundation's Racial Justice, Sexual Orientation & Gender Identity Program and the Arcus Operating Foundation would like to thank the authors and participants for their thoughtful contributions to this report.

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For the purposes of this report, the abbreviation for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender, or LGBT, is intended to refer to the full spectrum of sexual orientations and gender identities as they exist across cultures, regions of the world and languages.

Executive Summary

In 2007 and 2008 the Arcus Operating Foundation commissioned extensive quantitative and qualitative research to articulate the complex intersections of sexuality and race with the goal of determining how this information can help activists create greater public support and message effectively when speaking to African American audiences.

After verifying that there was indeed very scant research into the attitudes and perceptions of African Americans on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) equality issues, the following research questions were developed:

- From where do African Americans develop their beliefs on sexuality?
- What concerns do African Americans have about gay rights specifically or LGBT persons generally?
- What are the best messages/avenues for building African American support for positive progress on these issues?
- Do African Americans perceive that advances in LGBT rights could negatively affect the need for greater progress on racial justice? How do we combat the concept that there is only so much room for advancement, and that African American and LGBT communities are competing for that room, as opposed to working together for expansive improvements for all? Is this a major problem and obstacle to coalition building, or a minor one?
- How do African American communities view gay and lesbian African Americans?
- Is it possible to “connect the dots” and develop greater African American acceptance of LGBT rights as a civil rights cause?

The first component of the research consisted of 36 in-depth interviews conducted in November and December 2007. The second component consisted of a national survey of 800 African Americans conducted in early February 2008. Both of these components were designed to assess African American attitudes and beliefs toward LGBT persons, and toward equality and discrimination issues for African Americans and for the LGBT community. The third component consisted of six focus groups with African American respondents to test out the message findings by showing mocked-up direct-mail pieces developed as a result of the research.

The final component, an online survey of 600 mostly white LGBT Americans, was completed at the end of April 2008. This survey was designed to complement and, in some instances, to parallel the national survey of African Americans conducted in February 2008. The focus was to gather information on the attitudes and perceptions of LGBT individuals as they relate to some of the same issues from the earlier survey of African Americans: LGBT rights; discrimination issues for African Americans, Latinos, and the LGBT community; and identifying ways in which African American and LGBT activists can work together to further their goals.

The key findings and conclusions from this multi-phased research are as follows:

- Solid majorities of LGBT survey respondents and African American survey respondents agree that “the best way to describe the struggle facing gays and lesbians” is to use the term “equal rights.”
- Many African Americans surveyed defined the term “civil rights” as specifically referring to the civil rights era of the 1950s through the 1970s, with its apex being the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964. This association is so powerful that many respondents specifically referenced the rights gained in that era (the right to vote and to eat in all restaurants) as rights the LGBT community already enjoys. The words “civil rights” have a very specific meaning for most African Americans, whereas many non-minority Americans use civil rights as a phrase that is interchangeable with equal rights or human rights.
- A solid majority of African American respondents believe LGBT communities face discrimination on a level close to that faced by African Americans themselves. Sixty percent say African Americans face “a lot” of discrimination, and 52% say gays and lesbians face a lot of discrimination.
- While African Americans surveyed would be less likely to support marriage equality than other Americans (67% opposed) this does not mean they are more hostile to other LGBT equality issues. They show strong support for hate crimes protection (80% favor),

protection against job discrimination (77% favor) and housing discrimination (74% favor), and health care and pension benefits for unmarried couples (60% favor). A solid majority of 54% of African American survey respondents support allowing gays and lesbians to serve in the military openly.

- Use of the words “civil rights” to describe the struggle for LGBT equality does not create a shortcut to acceptance or “connect the dots” for African American respondents. It can instead exacerbate tensions by suggesting that LGBT advocates are not willing to respect or listen to African American definitions of a term that is near and dear to them.
- Use of the terms “human rights” or “equal rights” causes respondents to make positive associations such as “we are all human” or “we are all equal.” Use of the term “civil rights” causes African American respondents to describe how race and sexual orientation/gender identity differ, and brings up negative connotations.
- Older African Americans, southerners, and those who do not know any gay people tend to be less supportive of LGBT equality than other African Americans — demographic findings that parallel nonminority variations.
- Gay rights leaders and organizations are not perceived as helping the African American community; only 14% say they “work hard to support” African Americans; the average ranking for gay rights leaders on this point is lower than that for Christian conservatives or the U.S. Congress.
- Many African Americans surveyed appreciate the nuances of religious and biblical language when they are used to counter anti-LGBT rhetoric: 81% of survey respondents agreed with the statement, “My religious background teaches me that we are all children of God who deserve love and compassion, and that includes gays and lesbians.” The concept of leaving judgment up to God was also mentioned repeatedly.

This research was designed and conducted as a joint effort between Donna Victoria of Victoria Research & Consulting and Cornell Belcher of Brilliant Corners Research & Strategies. Greater detail on the methodology can be found in the Appendix.

I. The Debate on Terminology

A. AFRICAN AMERICAN AND LGBT OPINION ON BEST TERMINOLOGY TO USE

A great deal of discussion has centered around whether or not to use the term “civil rights” in discussing the advancement of LGBT equality, and in this narrative we have decided to wade right into the question from the outset. It is our measured opinion that, after this extensive research and drawing on other sources, using the phrase “civil rights” to describe the struggle for LGBT equality detracts from having an effective message when communicating with African American audiences. What is so striking is that in this research, a solid majority of African Americans *and* a solid majority of white LGBT respondents feel exactly the same, as seen in Figure 1 to the right.

There were similar findings in the initial one-on-one phase of this research; African American participants were asked whether they would term the LGBT struggle “human rights, equal rights, or civil rights” and most preferred “equal rights” as the terminology. There is clearly a subset of African Americans who have no problem applying the words “civil rights” to LGBT equality; in the qualitative and quantitative research, they readily drew comparisons and saw this logic. Unfortunately, the research also shows that roughly a third of African Americans express very firm opposition or offense to use of the term “civil rights” by LGBT advocates.

B. THE MEANING AND EFFECT OF USING THE WORDS “CIVIL RIGHTS”

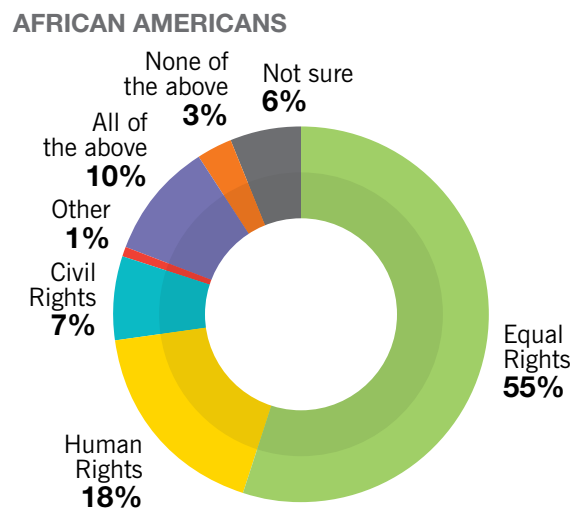
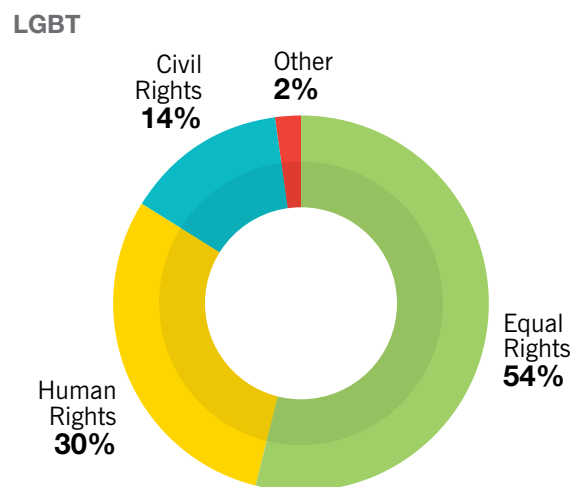
Use of the term “civil rights” to describe the LGBT struggle has become a contentious and emotional issue on both sides. This research leads us to a very strong conclusion that it is not beneficial for LGBT groups or spokespersons to claim the phrase “civil rights” in advancing LGBT equality for the following reasons:

- African Americans do not define the term “civil rights” as broadly meaning the struggle for equal treatment under the law for all people. For many, “civil rights” is specifically the historic struggle of the civil rights era — the period from the 1950s through the 1970s when great advancements for African Americans were made in civic participation, legal rights, and

the chance to fully participate in the economy. There are many references in the verbatim responses we received to the specific issues facing African Americans at that time — civil rights is about the right to eat at a restaurant, the right to vote, or the right to use a public restroom or other public accommodation.

- When African Americans hear the term “civil rights” applied to LGBT rights, they tend to focus on the differences between African Americans and LGBT people rather than on similarities and common ground.

FIGURE 1:
“What is the best way to describe the struggle facing gays and lesbians...”



- There is other, better terminology to use that prompts positive associations from African Americans. The phrases “equal rights” and “human rights” evoke comments that emphasize how we are all alike. For messaging, it is better to focus on language that is clearly understood by the audience and provokes positive associations for them.
- There are other ways to clearly describe the LGBT movement’s goals. A fight over the use of a term that is less effective is simply that — a fight over terminology. It takes away energy and resources from the fight to actually secure equality.
- Some LGBT advocates seem to think that connecting the dots between the civil rights struggle of African Americans and the LGBT struggle will provide more strength or a shortcut to success if African Americans accept the use of the term “civil rights.” In fact, in our online survey of white LGBT individuals, 88% of respondents agreed with the statement, “The African American and LGBT communities cannot truly work together until African Americans are willing to recognize and embrace the fact that gay rights and gay equality are part of the civil rights movement.” This research implies that African Americans are wary of this and feel that many other groups have simply tried to piggyback on the African American struggle. Again, what is meant to be a positive association with African Americans instead brings out negative associations.
- Some LGBT advocates use the different phrases interchangeably, a seemingly reasonable practice if it were not for the fact that African Americans describe a **very unique and specific definition of the term “civil rights.”**

1. How African Americans Define Civil Rights

When African American respondents could qualify the difference between “civil rights” and “human rights” or “equal rights,” the discrepancy lay in being denied specific legal rights — most notably the right to vote, but also segregation in buses and restaurants. While the African Americans interviewed acknowledge that the LGBT community suffers from discrimination, some noted that its members are not denied many of the basic rights that were at the heart of the civil rights movement leading to passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964 —

“they can vote, can’t they?” Many African Americans tie the term “civil rights” quite literally to the specific set of rights dealt with in the Civil Rights Act, as seen in the verbatim quotations below:

Verbatim African American Responses to “Are these issues civil rights?”

“Civil rights are something that people worked hard for; people put their neck out on the line; people struggled for. MLK did not say ‘I have a dream that I see two men walking down the street’ ... when you think of civil rights you don’t think of nothing but the struggle, especially if you’re black.”

– Alabama, Male, Age 25-34

“The right to vote, and they have the right to vote. So they’re not really being denied any, like, civil rights... Now human rights are like if they ever got married, they get denied those same rights... They have the same civil rights; they can use those. Because nowhere on a ballot does it say, if you are homosexual you can’t vote.”

– Alabama, Female, Age 18-24

“I think that when we talked about civil rights, back in the old days? Black people, minority people did not have a right to anything. They did not even have a right to a court. They were strictly second-class, or no citizens at all, even our history books did that. Even our Supreme Court judges did that. But when things came to a head in the 60s, Johnson put forth his bill, all of these rights, that the majority of people had, suddenly became everybody’s.”

– Michigan, Male, Age 65+

“They still have opportunities to do things, they’re not totally denied anything. They may be looked at funny or something when they’re together, but they still can actually walk into a restaurant, sit down, and eat. When you’re dealing with the civil rights, MLK and all them, they marched, because we weren’t able — blacks had to go to the back door; they couldn’t come to the front door.”

– Alabama, Female, Age 25-34

“Well, when you say civil rights, I think about the 60s, I don’t think about gays... because that’s what it was labeled, the civil rights era, segregation and all that, so I don’t associate that with gay rights at all. So I just will say equal rights.”

– Alabama, Female, Age 35-49

“Because I’ve heard a lot of...homosexual people on television saying things, that being gay is just like being black: they’re treated the same way; they have the same obstacles to overcome... The first time I heard it, I was very offended, because I heard it from a white man! And I’m thinking, there’s absolutely no way that they’re the same! Because (every)time I walk into a room, people know what I am. But until you tell someone, they don’t know. So, that to me — maybe that’s how it feels to a gay person — that it’s the same thing like, but that to me is sort of an offensive statement... I think that even when a black gay male walks into a room, the first thing that people notice is that he’s black, not that he’s gay.”

– Alabama, Female, Age 35-49

“It’s basically ... well there’s a lot of difference. Because in our struggle, which was going on over 200 years, and which was truly right before the eyes you could see, but now in their struggle for equality and human rights, their main concern seems to me to be being together and getting the same rights as a married couple.”

– Alabama, Male, Age 65+

“My reaction to that is that, well as far as employment and housing, a gay person has the right already to employment and housing. Unlike, a black person who’s had to fight for it. See gay, in my opinion, is not something you can look at someone and tell. It’s out there only if you tell that to someone. So I can’t really equate that with a civil right, with something that people obviously (snap) pick up on like that.”

– Alabama, Female, Age 35-49

“That’s an old story. I’ve heard that story a lot, that they don’t want civil rights compared to homosexual rights or lesbian rights. I’m of the camp that does not have problems with civil rights being extended to gay people. I don’t think that they can be separated. But I do have a problem when gay people say, ‘well this is just like when blacks were having problems with whites’. I have a problem with that... If you didn’t know what their preference was, how can you discriminate against them. That’s how I’m able to separate this civil rights from that.”

– Michigan, Male, Age 65+

What is also evident from the selected quotations is that resistance to the use of the term “civil rights” is **not** about hostility toward LGBT people or a dispute with the central tenet of fair and equal treatment of LGBT people; rather, African Americans are wary about describing LGBT equality as “civil rights,” and instead offer the terms “human rights” or “equal rights” in their responses.

The first of several unintended and undesirable forms that the discussion around terminology takes involves the oft-repeated concept that “gayness” can be hidden, while skin color cannot. Conversely, when respondents were asked what “human rights” means to them, they invariably said something along the lines of “we are all human.” For “equal rights” the responses leaned toward the idea that everyone deserves equal treatment, or that “we are all created equal.” Both of these phrases led to a positive association, as opposed to the mixed response and confusion evident when the LGBT movement tries to claim the civil rights movement mantle.

It should also be noted that this resistance is not universal, as some respondents were more open to an expansive definition of civil rights that includes LGBT equality.

Verbatim African American Responses to “Are these issues civil rights?”

“You know, even with that, a lot of people think that the civil rights are basically just for black people and that’s not true. It’s a misconception. I mean civil rights was for everybody. The black person happened to be the low man on the totem pole that didn’t have any rights, but I wouldn’t say it’s just their civil rights, or just their legal rights or whatever. But at this juncture, I think it’s a struggle just to be accepted, period.”

– Maryland, Female, Age 65+

“I’d say their civil rights. I think that everyone has, according to the government, everyone is created equal and everyone has the right to be able to conduct themselves according to the Constitution, everyone has those abilities that are listed.”

– Maryland, Male, Age 35-49

“It’s used for everybody. For the blacks, use it for the Mexicans, use it for the Gay, Lesbian, Transgender or Bi(sexual)... LBJ signed it into law in 1964, I was a baby when that happened, now it’s up for renewal... let’s add text about gay rights to the civil rights package.”

– Michigan, Male, Age 35-49

“In equal, I’m putting all of that under that umbrella: civil rights, equal rights would be the same to me in terms of, you couldn’t have equal rights if they weren’t under the law as well. When I think of civil rights, I’m not thinking of the march, but understanding that housing, employment, marriage all of that would be under equal rights.”

– Maryland, Female, Age 50-64

It is important to realize, however, that the African Americans espousing the views above were the respondents who already support marriage equality and LGBT equality fully. African Americans who are persuadable are more likely to resist use of the term “civil rights.”

2. Role of Civil Rights Leaders and LGBT African Americans

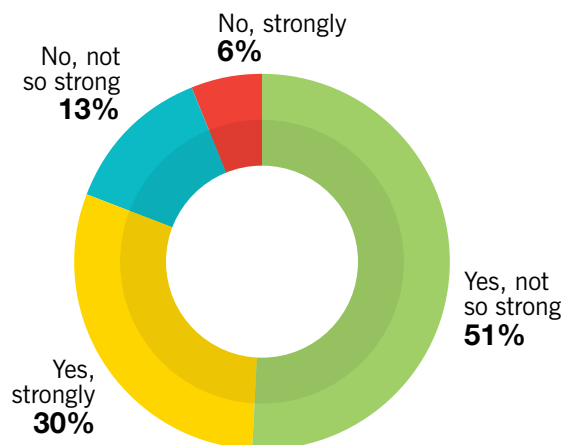
There are two groups that have the standing in the African American community to carry on a unique dialogue with other African Americans on LGBT issues: African American civil rights leaders and LGBT African Americans. We know that many civil rights leaders and organizations support LGBT equality and have no hesitation using the phrase “civil rights” to describe this fight. Their support is invaluable; but again, we would not want them to direct their time and energies to changing the prevalent African American definition of civil rights when it would more useful to focus on the issues at hand using language that instantly speaks to African Americans. On issues of ending discrimination and inequality, many civil rights movement leaders stand for and with the LGBT equality movement.

Individuals who identify as LGBT and African American may convey how the disconnect between equality for African Americans and equality for LGBT persons is irrational in their lives, and it is certainly their place to do so. Their very existence bears witness for other African Americans on how “the struggle” applies to their sexual identity as well. While LGBT African Americans have to decide for themselves whether or not to confront the issue about the term “civil rights” directly with friends and family, white advocates are advised not to take up this call even when they have the support of some African Americans in their cause. **Having an African American civil rights leader or an African American LGBT advocate as part of your leadership or group does not give blanket license to those who are not African American to freely use the term “civil rights.” The speaker is part of the message; if that speaker at any given time is not African American, use of the phrase “civil rights” is at the very least counterproductive and may in fact be offensive.**

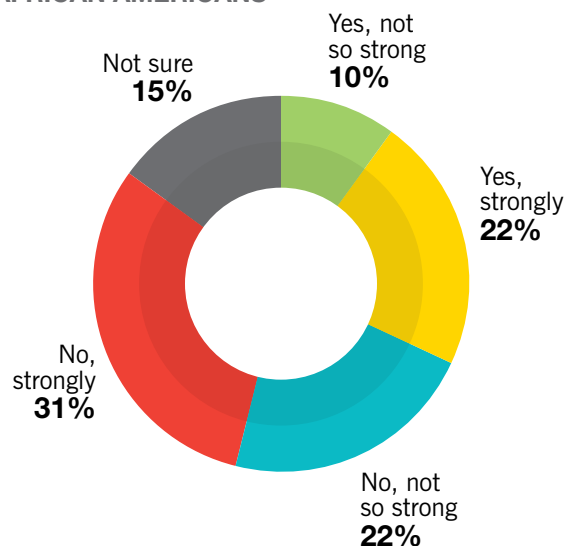
FIGURE 2:

“Is progress on LGBT rights a logical extension of the civil rights movement for African Americans or not?”

LGBT



AFRICAN AMERICANS



3. The Concept of “Connecting the Dots” as a Shortcut to Equality

Because the civil rights movement is so important to African American history, many LGBT advocates make the assumption that the way to reach and persuade African Americans is to link LGBT issues to the civil rights movement. Our data shows that this assumption is incorrect. What we have observed is that this “shortcut to equality” tactic often leads to insensitivity to African American history and beliefs, and places the LGBT movement in an unfavorable “comparison of injustice” framework in which hard feelings are almost inevitable.

LGBT advocates must be more aware of the historical context of the civil rights movement — they are not the first interest group to try, and fail, at this tactic of connecting the dots. Recently, immigration reform advocates have run up against the same conundrum, finding that African Americans can also feel alienated from the language and appeals of the immigration reform movement.¹

There is absolutely no progress to be made by comparing injustices — comparison inevitably leads to rankings

of injustice, and then to pointing out the differences between groups that are all struggling for equality. It is unproductive to engage in a conversation about whose history of wrongs is greater, yet that is where these conversations often lead.

1) <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/21/attitudes-toward-immigration-in-black-and-white>

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II. Building Bridges: Finding Common Ground

One of the most troubling aspects of the debate over use of the phrase “civil rights” is that it overshadows all the good news about African American attitudes. There is an incredible amount of positive information gleaned from this research on how to communicate positively with African Americans, and on the common ground African Americans believe **they do share** with LGBT Americans.

A. THERE IS PLENTY OF EQUALITY TO GO AROUND

One of the first avenues to common ground and shared goals is the finding that simple self-interest is not a conflict for most African Americans. African Americans do not feel that LGBT progress toward equality will impede progress or clout for African Americans. Only 33% of African Americans in our survey agreed with a statement that “there is only so much room for progress on equal rights” and that LGBT gain would equal African American pain. In both the qualitative and quantitative research, this concept simply had no traction with African Americans.

B. AFRICAN AMERICAN VIEWS ON DISCRIMINATION

A singularly important finding from this research is that African Americans believe discrimination is a big problem for African Americans **and** for LGBT people in our society. When the discussion turns to discrimination, there is no need for explanation or persuasion: African Americans are right there with the LGBT community.

Verbatim African American Responses on LGBT Discrimination

“Because I’ve been discriminated against, for other reasons, and to me it’s live and let live, you know. If this is what somebody else likes, why should you be trying to change somebody else’s life. It’ll take you six months to mind your business, and six months to leave mine alone. That’ll handle the whole year.”

– Maryland, Male, Age 50-64

“I went and filed all kinds of complaints about this because it was wrong. If anybody else wanted to take a shower, they would have kept the shower curtain up. Don’t do that just because this man is gay. And they looked at me funny cause you know I’m single and they thought I was gay.”

– Maryland, Male, Age 35-49

(n.b. This was a law enforcement officer describing harassment of another officer and his involvement in stopping it.)

“When you discriminate against people... they’re going to discriminate against the gays now, the next thing is gonna be discrimination — well they do it anyway — they discriminate because people have certain diseases... If you start discriminating against one group, the next day you’re gonna have a snowball reaction, and it’s gonna work down to everybody.”

– Maryland, Female, Age 65+

“I could not honestly say that I would be afraid of someone getting those rights... in fact I think everyone is entitled to, as our Constitution says, ‘certain inalienable rights,’ and I wouldn’t take that from gays or KKK or any other organization.”

– Michigan, Male, Age 50-64

“I’m not going to sit up here and tell you what you can and can’t do... At the end of the day it’s discrimination. If brothers are discriminated against because they are gay, because they are black, in the end it’s discrimination.”

– Michigan, Male, Age 18-24

“I would not discriminate against them at all. I’m against people being homosexual. I’m not going to discriminate against someone because of the way that they are. I’m against it; I’m definitely against it, but I’m not going to discriminate. I believe if someone can do a job, and they can perform a job, then they should get the job. It doesn’t matter what their sexual preference is, they should be able to get the job.”

– Maryland, Male, Age 25-34

While both the concept and very word “discrimination” work to highlight shared problems when communicating to African Americans, we would note that research conducted by the Movement Advancement Project (MAP) indicates that use of the word “discrimination” is generally ineffective with white audiences, and that many African Americans do not equate the concept of discrimination with the denial of marriage for same-sex couples.

FIGURE 3:

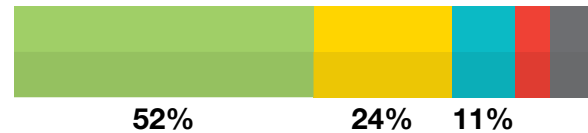
African American Opinion on Discrimination Against African Americans and Against Gays and Lesbians

“I’m going to read a list of different groups and for each one, please tell me whether you think that group of people is discriminated against in this society a lot, somewhat, a little, or not at all?”

AFRICAN AMERICANS



GAYS AND LESBIANS



■ A lot ■ Somewhat ■ A little
■ Not at all ■ Not sure

1. Views on Discrimination Against African Americans and LGBT People

African American survey respondents were asked about several groups and the degree to which they face discrimination. As seen above, the answer in their view is clearly that African Americans and LGBT people are discriminated against a lot.

Sixty percent of respondents feel that African Americans face “a lot” of discrimination in our society, but the figure for “gays and lesbians” is nearly as high, with 52% of African Americans saying gays and lesbians also face “a lot” of discrimination. Equally telling is the fact that no other racial, ethnic, or religious minority is seen as having the same degree of problems (respondents were also asked to assess Latinos and Hispanics, Arab Americans, Jewish Americans, and women). This opportunity to forge a closer bond between LGBT and African American communities and work toward common goals is too often overshadowed.

2. Working Together = Strength in Numbers, but Are LGBT Groups Working To Benefit African Americans?

Another positive finding is that African Americans do not hesitate when asked whether civil rights groups or leaders should work together with LGBT groups. Fifty-nine percent of African Americans and 93% of LGBT respondents feel that there is strength in numbers if these entities start working together.

There is a conundrum in that neither African Americans nor LGBT respondents think that the LGBT rights movement has worked very hard to advance the priorities of African Americans. Sixty-two percent of African Americans and 76% of LGBT respondents agreed with the following: “Gay rights leaders want support from the African American community on their issues, but it should be a two-way street; they have not worked very hard at all to advance the goals of the African American community.”

3. Issues of Common Ground

Marriage equality is one issue for which African American support does indeed lag behind support from other demographic groups in this country; in our national survey, 67% of African Americans opposed “allowing gays and lesbians to legally marry,” at a time when polls nationally showed opposition from all Americans to be about 10 percentage points lower than this.² Once hate crimes or discrimination in housing and jobs are brought up, however, there is virtually no hesitation: nearly all African American respondents feel this is wrong and that everyone should work together to solve these problems. The strongest intersectional issues for building African American support are housing, job discrimination, hate crimes and bullying. While a few African American participants did not believe LGBT people face housing or job discrimination, most concurred that where it exists, it is a logical place for groups to work together. Hate crimes are immediately, viscerally understood as a problem for both African Americans and LGBT people; many participants noted that their first experience with an LGBT person was witnessing someone get bullied in school.

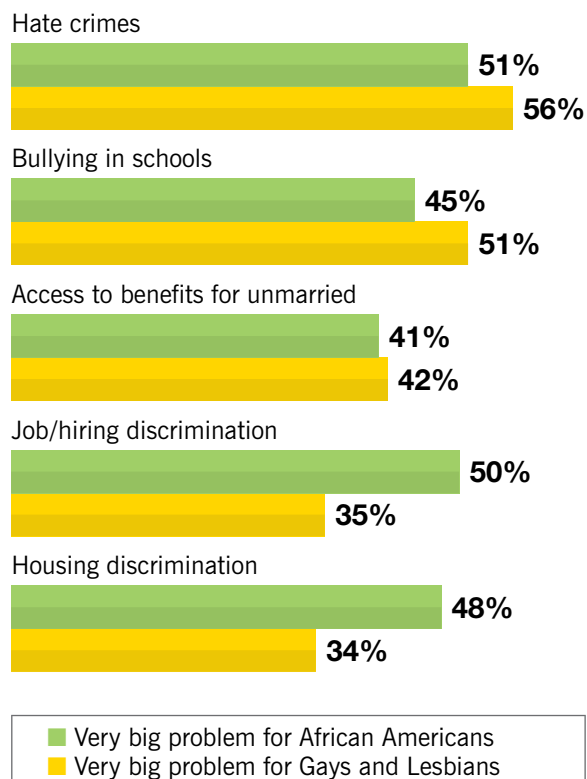
² <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/40/wedge-issues-on-the-ballot>;
<http://pewforum.org/docs/?DocID=389#3>

FIGURE 4:

African American Opinion on Discrimination Problems Faced by African Americans and Gays and Lesbians

“Here is a list of ways in which people face discrimination today. After you hear each, I’d like you to give me a rating between 1 and 5, where 5 means the issue is a **very big problem** for African Americans and 1 means that the issue is **not a current problem** for African Americans at all. You can use any number from 1 to 5.” Then: “I’m going to read the same list again, and this time I want you to think about gays and lesbians facing discrimination.”

“5” RATINGS SHOWN



	“4-5” Big Problem	“3” Problem	“1-2” No Problem	Mean Rating
Hate crimes — crimes committed because the criminal hates the group to which the victim belongs.				
Problem for African Americans	71	14	12	3.94
Problem for Gays and Lesbians	72	13	11	3.96
Bullying in schools that goes beyond simple name-calling and is more like harassment, threats of violence, or intimidation.				
Problem for African Americans	61	21	16	3.72
Problem for Gays and Lesbians	70	13	14	3.85
Access to health care and pension benefits for unmarried couples.				
Problem for African Americans	66	20	18	3.52
Problem for Gays and Lesbians	57	17	18	3.44
Job discrimination and discrimination in hiring.				
Problem for African Americans	72	18	9	4.03
Problem for Gays and Lesbians	52	22	19	3.38
Housing discrimination, where home buyers or renters are steered away from certain properties or denied a lease.				
Problem for African Americans	68	16	13	3.88
Problem for Gays and Lesbians	47	22	23	3.24

III. General Issue Priorities for African Americans

In addition to differences of opinion, it is not at all surprising to find that African Americans and LGBT people have very different issue priorities in general. These surveys were conducted in the spring of 2008; while the economy and job market were the top priorities of both the African American and the LGBT respondent pool, their priorities diverged sharply from there. A startling 40% of LGBT respondents said that their top national issue was “equality and civil rights,” and another 22% chose “same-sex marriage.” In contrast, only one in 10 (10%) African Americans chose “equality and civil rights” as one of their top two priorities, and only 4% chose same-sex marriage. When planning a message to a broad audience of African Americans, it is important to note that these issues have far lower relative importance for African Americans than they do for LGBT people.

A. THE FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

Family ties are a source of strength for many, but African Americans in particular place family as a central force in their lives. One interesting finding in this research was how often African American participants talked about learning tolerance from their mothers. In some instances, we even had mothers telling us how they had schooled their children not to judge people. This part of the African American experience — that of parents “preparing” their children for discrimination and injustice by cautioning them against judging others on appearances — is clearly a survival mechanism, but it is also a powerful avenue for exploring ways to develop a resonant message for African Americans, one that picks up on the lessons learned in childhood.

Verbatim African American Responses Regarding Family Teachings on Tolerance

“My mother used to preach to me that there was nothing wrong with a gay person, if you had a gay person as your friend, you had a friend for life.”

– Michigan, Male, Age 65+

“Oh my mother. My mother told me that everyone has their own path and their own life to live, and if that’s that person’s choice, everyone has a choice that they have to make in life.”

– Maryland, Male, Age 35-49

“Mainly, I give credit to my mother... She was the type of person that, whatever she could do for you, she didn’t sit back and judge — criticize a person because you were this way, or that way.”

– Alabama, Male, Age 65+

“But like I said, my mother always, even when I was 4 or 5 years old, (said) ‘you’re no better, you’re no worse than anybody.’ We are all the same, we try to do the same things, we all try to push forward the same.”

– Maryland, Male, Age 35-49

“My dad is pretty much ‘ok, that’s what you want to do, well, we’re going to go along.’ That was his whole thing, not getting upset. I try not to get upset very easily... you can’t force nobody to do anything, if they choose to do that, or if that’s what they want to do...”

– Alabama, Female, Age 25-34

“I would just let them know that they are partners and they love each other and they decided to be with one another. Like that, because I would like to raise my girls to respect people’s decisions, that how I raise them, and to have an open mind.”

– Alabama, Male, Age 25-34

“Just like I told my son, ‘you can’t do that. You can’t hate a person because of the way they are...’ He overcame it after a while, you know, and I told him how God loves everyone. God created us all, and the choices that we make in life, you know, we have consequences, however, that’s the choice that he has chosen right now... but you can’t hate him for that, you can’t dislike him. You have to accept people for the way they are.”

– Alabama, Female, Age 50-64

Several other issues about family and community were raised in this research but had less than conclusive results. Participants had very little to say on the subject of African American LGBT people, and no one expressed the view that African Americans or members of racial/ethnic minorities are less likely to be gay. African Americans do, however, view LGBT rights organizations as largely non-inclusive groups, which creates greater distance between African American and LGBT equality proponents.

The notion that gay men might be seen by African American women as competing for potential mates is not supported by the research, and our participants did not draw a comparison between African Americans and LGBT people being two groups with high levels of domestic partnership or unmarried partners, which could lead to common goals on health care and pension benefits, or on hospital visitation rights.

B. THE CHURCH

It is well documented that African Americans attend church more often and describe themselves as more religious than other Americans.³ It is thus not surprising at all that religion is an important, though complex, part of the equation for African American views on LGBT issues. African Americans readily turn to the Bible

3) <http://pewforum.org/docs/?DocID=389>

and religious language **first** and **foremost** in discussions of LGBT issues and especially marriage. While there is a tendency to talk about sin, “one man/one woman,” and other items claimed to have come directly from the Bible, at the same time, there was a surprising amount of savvy and skeptical discussion in qualitative interviews about how one piece of scripture may contradict another or allow another view on an issue, and about the motivations of respondents’ own ministers when they preach against homosexuality. Seventy percent of survey respondents said they did not rely on their ministers’ views when they make political decisions “about whether things like gay marriage should be legal.” The pushback evinced by African Americans when they disagree with their ministers is illuminating but should not be construed as license for LGBT advocates to criticize the Black church. What is useful is to note that African Americans are far more likely to be familiar with the Bible, to read it regularly, and thus, to be able to make nuanced judgments about whether scripture supports or opposes a certain political or moral position.

Verbatim African American Responses to “When your minister says homosexuality is wrong...”

“He can’t give me his opinion, because I got my own. He can tell me as far as... (but you don’t believe him when he says it’s wrong?) No, I’ve got my own opinion — he can say it’s wrong, but when he talks to me from the Bible, that’s what I’m forming my opinion on.”

– Alabama, Male, Age 65+

“Love everybody. That’s the key. The Bible may talk about men should not lay down with men, but it also says ‘Love everybody.’ They can take that and turn it any way they want. There are a lot of ministers who are gay. That’s kinda surprising.”

– Michigan, Male, Age 65+

“What does he have to do with the way I feel? He’s just a minister. I’m entitled to what I feel, my opinion. He has his; I have mine. He gonna kick me out of the church?”

– Maryland, Female, Age 35-49

“She asks each individual member about that. And I told her the same thing, I do believe that a man and a woman should be bonded together, but I also believe that God gives every person the free will, the right to choose. And let God, I tell everyone this, let God make that decision. And they say, ‘Well, they’re not gonna go into heaven.’ And I say let God — if God can put two prisoners on a cross into heaven, well, then let God, let him make that decision.”

– Maryland, Male, Age 35-49

“I told him, ‘Reverend, do you think that’s the right attitude for you to have as a minister?’ I said, ‘You should be trying to show them maybe another way of life,’ and he said, ‘Well I’ll tell you what Sister L – –, even God has given up on them, I can show it to you in the Bible.’ I said, ‘I don’t think so. Because if God gives up on any of us, we’re all in trouble. God doesn’t ever give up on any of us.”

– Alabama, Female, Age 50-64

“They are opposed, including mine. Harshly. And I totally disagree with that... I don’t go to church as much as I used to... Because of some of the things that they say...what they’ve done has basically driven me away.”

– Maryland, Male, Age 65+

IV. Messaging That Works Well With African American Audiences

As mentioned earlier, “discrimination” is unifying language for African Americans and the LGBT movement. Unlike white audiences, fighting discrimination is hard-wired for African Americans and immediately gets their attention. The survey results clearly indicate that African Americans believe LGBT people, even **more so than other groups**, face real problems with discrimination. This is a huge advantage in bringing African Americans along in their support for fairness and equality for LGBT citizens. Unlike the issue of the use of the phrase “civil rights,” no one voices any concerns about “discrimination” being the appropriate term for unequal treatment of LGBT people.

The final segment of this research consisted of six focus groups with various African American audiences in order to test some sample direct-mail pieces for a fictitious “Treat Everyone Fairly” campaign. The focus groups were conducted in late March and early April 2008 in Detroit, MI, Greenbelt, MD, and Jacksonville, FL. These locations were selected because they could provide significant regional diversity while still allowing access to large, diverse African American communities. West Coast locations were considered, but due to the prominence of the Proposition 8 campaign in California and relatively small African American populations in other western states, this was rejected. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, only 8.9% of African Americans live in the West census quadrant, while 54.8% of **all** African Americans

reside in the South (Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Redistricting Data). The groups served as a way to test communication pieces developed from the results of the first research components: the in-depth interviews and the national surveys.

While qualitative research such as focus groups cannot be projected to a broader universe, they are an important tool for testing imagery and detecting nuances in public opinion. The results can provide direction on how a broader group feels, thinks, or talks about a particular issue. When talking about issues involving race, religion, and human sexuality, it is advisable to keep focus groups as homogeneous as possible; for that reason, groups were segmented by gender, age, education and church attendance.

Overall, we tested eight pieces and asked participants to rank each piece from 1 to 10: 1 being the least persuasive or agreeable and 10 being the most persuasive or agreeable. One piece, **Hate**, was the most well-received, with an average rating of 8.27 out of 10. Four pieces were relatively persuasive: **Stand** (7.85), **Ask/Tell** (7.69), **Family** (7.59) and **Judge** (7.49). Two pieces were less popular, **Civil** (6.94) and **Same** (6.94), and one piece was clearly the least effective, **Choice** (5.51).

MEAN SCORES — BY GROUP

	Hate	Stand	Ask/Tell	Family	Judge	Civil	Same	Choice
TOTAL	8.27	7.85	7.69	7.59	7.49	6.94	6.94	5.51
Mixed gender 55+ non-college church-going	9.25	7.63	7.63	7.38	8.25	8.88	6.50	6.38
Women 18-36 some college or less	8.00	7.78	7.78	7.67	7.22	7.11	6.67	4.44
Mixed gender 55+ college grad+ church-going	7.00	7.25	6.00	7.50	6.13	5.13	5.38	5.63
Mixed gender 18-36 college grad+	8.00	8.63	8.25	6.25	6.38	7.25	8.00	5.13
Women 40-54 some college or less	9.86	9.57	8.75	10.00	9.88	7.13	9.75	6.88
Men 40-54 some college or less	7.75	6.50	7.75	6.75	7.13	6.13	5.14	4.75

Another way to look at the group responses is by which pieces were most popular within a particular group:

- **Hate** (9.25) and **Civil** (8.88) were the most persuasive pieces for the Mixed Gender, Age 55+, Non-College, Church-going group in Detroit, MI
- **Hate** (8.00), **Stand** (7.78) and **Ask/Tell** (7.78) were the most persuasive for the Women, Age 18-36, Some College or Less group in Detroit, MI
- **Family** (7.50) and **Stand** (7.25) were the most persuasive for the Mixed Gender, Age 55+, College Education or More, Church-going group in Greenbelt, MD
- **Stand** (8.63) and **Ask/Tell** (8.25) were the most persuasive to the Mixed Gender, Age 18-36, College Education or More group in Greenbelt, MD
- **Family** (10.00) and **Judge** (9.88) were the most persuasive to the Women, Age 40-54, Some College or Less group in Jacksonville, FL
- **Hate** (7.75) and **Ask/Tell** (7.75) were the most persuasive to the Men, Age 40-54, Some College or Less group in Jacksonville, FL

The results again confirm the overall message guidance in this report, and also reveal a few nuances as to how certain imagery and words trigger particular responses. There are several ways in which communicating with African Americans can differ from communicating with other groups: one is in the use of religious language and imagery, and the second is an emphasis on strong family bonds and loyalty.

Clearly, religion is an area that can cut both ways on LGBT equality, but thus far opponents have mostly used it as a bludgeon, and LGBT advocates have not addressed religion adequately. Legal LGBT equality can exist in harmony with churches even if their faith tenets are exclusionary; marriage equality is about civil marriage, yet a distressing number of Americans still persist in the false belief that all faiths and religions will somehow be forced to accept and

perform these marriages. In our national survey, 34% of African Americans agreed with the statement “if gay marriage is legal, my church will have to perform these marriage ceremonies.” Another 9% were unsure, so an unacceptable 43% of African Americans are not clear on this issue.

- In messages developed for African American audiences, the main focus on religion should draw on more tolerant, inclusive and loving attitudes expressed in scripture or other religious teaching. By far the most powerful language tested was the phrase “judge not lest ye be judged,” which was well received in our mail piece testing and came up frequently in respondents’ own arguments. In contrast, it is ineffective to tell African Americans that their minister is simply wrong when preaching against same-sex marriage. It is more effective to draw on other nuances of faith, and this phrase about not judging is repeated time and again.
- Another phrase that successfully draws on religious themes is the following: “My religious background teaches me that we are all children of God who deserve love and compassion, and that includes gays and lesbians.” Eighty-one percent of African Americans agreed with this statement, 67% agreed strongly.

The African American family really came to the forefront in these evaluations, with the strongest pieces consistently being the ones that show African American parents. In “Hate,” a father is at the bedside of an injured son, victim of an LGBT hate crime, which draws both on the African American belief that hate crimes are a serious issue for LGBT Americans and on sympathy for family. “Family” shows a mother with a small child. These were the top-rated of the eight mail pieces developed. Another positively received piece shows two women, in what was assumed to be a mother-daughter relationship, with the headline “Family is the most important thing.” This piece produced wonderful discussions on loving a gay child, the struggle to accept family and stick by them, and identifying with other family members closing ranks around one of their own, whatever the situation.

DIRECT-MAIL TEST PIECES FOR FICTITIOUS CAMPAIGNS

HATE

The most persuasive piece overall, *Hate*, with a score of 8.27 out of 10, focuses on a man who had been attacked for being gay. Hate crimes and bullying are without fail one of the most persuasive bridges between the two groups.

FRONT



BACK



STAND

Also fairly persuasive, *Stand* (7.85 out of 10) uses a young African American woman with her toddler to ask, "Who am I to judge?" the gay people she knows. She concludes, "Like the man said, 'A threat to justice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.'"

FRONT



BACK



DIRECT-MAIL TEST PIECES FOR FICTITIOUS CAMPAIGNS

ASK / TELL

Ask/Tell (7.69 out of 10) focuses explicitly on the right of gay soldiers to serve openly in the military, and shows an African American woman with a quote that includes the lines, "I served my country... Now the Army is kicking me out..."

FRONT



BACK



FAMILY

Family (7.59 out of 10) combines the concepts of family love and acceptance with a reminder that "God loves us all."

FRONT



BACK

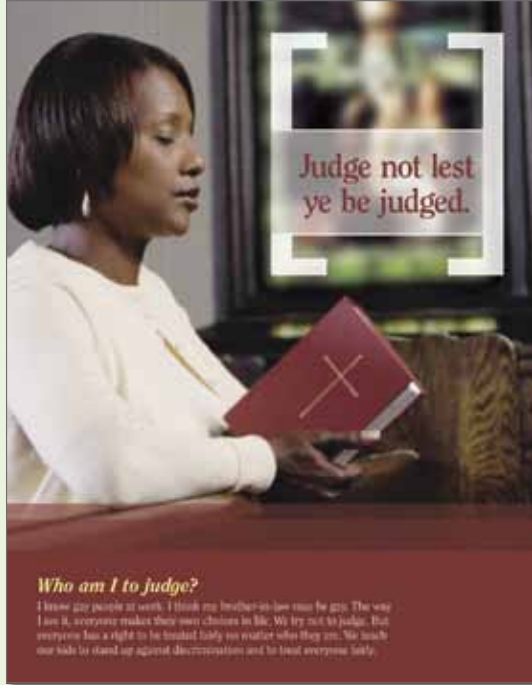


DIRECT-MAIL TEST PIECES FOR FICTITIOUS CAMPAIGNS

JUDGE

Judge (7.49 out of 10) unambiguously ties Christianity to tolerance. The front image shows a woman praying with a hymnal and the words, "Who am I to judge?" Like **Stand**, the woman is thinking about the people she knows who are gay.

FRONT



BACK



CIVIL

This piece and the one that follows were somewhat less effective: **Civil** (6.94 out of 10) quotes Julian Bond saying, "Gay Rights are Civil Rights." As is seen throughout the research, this equation can cause further alienation, rather than help bring the groups together.

FRONT



BACK

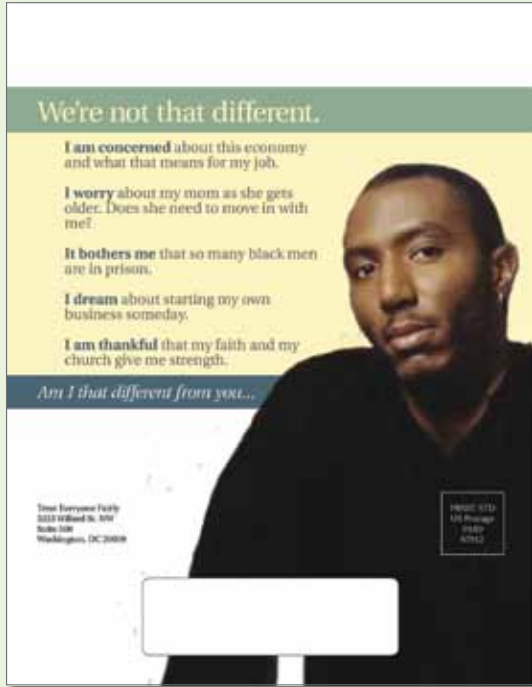


DIRECT-MAIL TEST PIECES FOR FICTITIOUS CAMPAIGNS

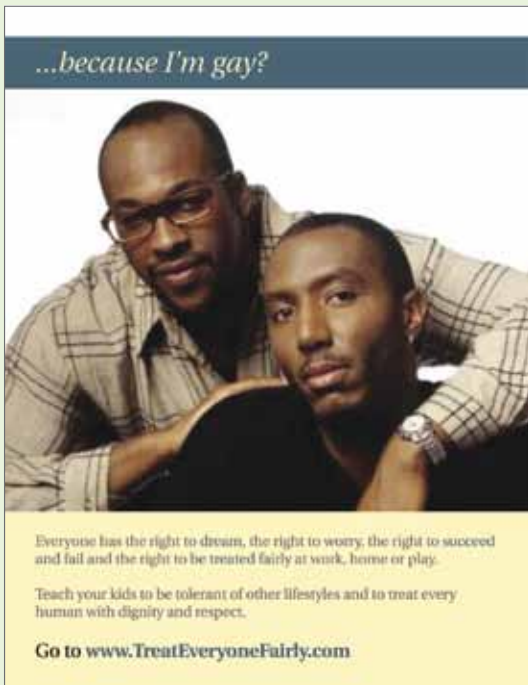
SAME

Same (6.94 out of 10) shows an African American man with a list of worries and dreams that are similar to those of many young African American men. The front page reads...“Am I that different from you...” The reverse side reads “...because I’m gay?”

FRONT



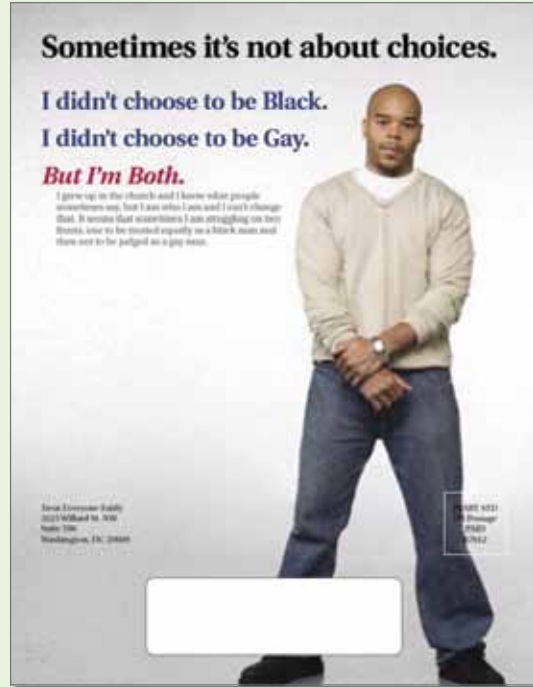
BACK



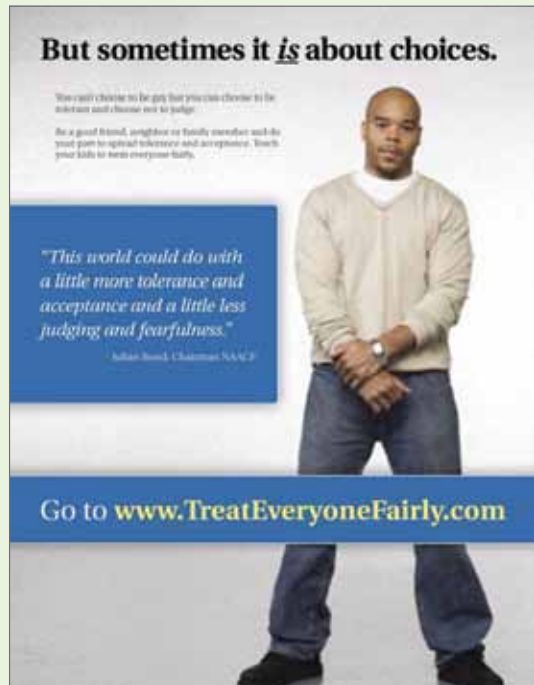
CHOICE

One piece was clearly the least persuasive: **Choice** (5.51 out of 10) explores the concept that a person no more chooses to be gay than he chooses to be Black. The reverse side reminds the reader, “We can choose to be tolerant.”

FRONT



BACK



Appendix

A NOTE ON LANGUAGE AND TERMINOLOGY

In the three sections of this research that had exclusively African American respondents, the phrase “gays and lesbians” was used consistently throughout the research. While this clearly does not fully describe all the permutations of sexual orientation and gender identity, this wording was chosen primarily to ensure clarity for the African American survey respondents participating in telephone interviews. The word “transgender” or phrase “gay and transgender” were not used because the audience may not fully understand the meaning of these terms. There is no evidence that one has captured attitudes towards transgendered people if the word is misunderstood, and there is no assurance that attitudes would not change if respondents did have a fuller understanding. While this is certainly a worthwhile area for further study, it was beyond the scope of this project. In addition, the acronyms GLBT or LGBT were not used because acronyms used during telephone interviews often cause confusion if the individual being interviewed is not aware of the acronym’s meaning. The researchers were concerned that these types of misunderstandings would frustrate or alienate the respondents, leading to lower participation and response rates for the survey. The two qualitative portions of the research — the focus groups and in-depth interviews — also used the phrase “gays and lesbians” for consistency.

The online LGBT survey used the acronym “GLBT” along with the phrase “gays, lesbians, and transgender people.” Use of the “GLBT” acronym was more appropriate since it was spelled out and the meaning could be read by the respondents.

In several findings, this report juxtaposes the attitudes of African American respondents with those of randomly selected LGBT respondents, 85 percent of whom were white. Certainly, African American, other people of color and LGBT communities overlap in significant numbers, but are not included in this research. As such, it is not the authors’ intent to create or suggest a false dichotomy between LGBT American and African American communities.

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

- Thirty-six (36) in-depth interviews with African Americans were conducted in a one-on-one, one-hour format in three locations: Southfield, MI (Nov. 14-16, 2007), Birmingham, AL (Nov. 27-28, 2007), and Greenbelt, MD (Dec. 3-4, 2007).
- Respondents were recruited to ensure a 50-50 split between men and women, and to get a range of ages, occupations, and educational levels. Respondents were also asked about their religious denomination and frequency of church attendance as background information. Respondents were given incentives for participation, ranging from \$50 to \$200, depending on the location and the length of time respondents were required to stay at the facility. A complete list of participants and their demographic information is appended.
- All interviews were conducted by Donita Buffalo, of Buffalo Qualitative Research, a nationally known expert in qualitative research among African American audiences. The benefits of Buffalo’s experience and ability were judged to outweigh the advantages of matching the interviewer by both race and gender.

NATIONAL POLL OF AFRICAN AMERICANS

- The sample for this survey was taken from the national registered voter file maintained by the Democratic National Committee and available for purchase. Recent modeling of this file has made it possible to find a relatively cost-effective national sample of African American registered voters. Likely African Americans are identified through surnames, voter registration information, and application of Census block information, among other factors. The list vendor who manages the file reports that their testing of the model shows a 75% success rate in correctly identifying African American households. While over 80% of African Americans are registered voters, a sample like this ultimately skews older, more female, and somewhat more affluent than the general population. The African American voter population

skews heavily female (about 58%), but in quotas we held this proportion down to 54%.

- This sample was a nationwide cluster sample; each cluster had 40 records from the file. In all, 800 interviews were completed. The following weights were applied according to the self-reported age of the respondent: under age 40 (1.231), 40-49 (1.426), 50-59 (0.929), 60-69 (0.762), and 70+ (0.747). The margin of error for an 800-person sample is plus or minus 3.5% at the 95% confidence level.

FOCUS GROUPS

- Focus Groups were conducted March 26, 2008 in Detroit, MI, on April 1, 2008 in Greenbelt, MD and on April 3, 2008 in Jacksonville, FL largely to test communication pieces developed as a result of the research. Respondents received incentives for participation and were recruited to meet the specifications listed in the table at right.
- These locations were selected because they could provide significant regional diversity while still allowing access to large, diverse African American communities. West Coast locations were considered, but due to the prominence of the Proposition 8 campaign in California and relatively small African American populations in other western states, this was rejected. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, only 8.9% of African Americans live in the West census quadrant, while 54.8% of all African Americans reside in the South (Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Redistricting Data).
- African Americans were segmented into groupings based on age, gender, education, and religiosity in order to explore group dynamics that might affect responses.

AFRICAN AMERICAN FOCUS GROUP RESPONDENTS

Group	Composition	Location	Date
1	Mixed gender 55+ non-college church-going	Detroit, MI	3/26/08
2	Women 18-36 some college or less	Detroit, MI	3/26/08
3	Mixed gender 55+ college grad+ church-going	Greenbelt, MD	4/1/08
4	Mixed gender 18-36 college grad+	Greenbelt, MD	4/1/08
5	Women 40-54 some college or less	Jacksonville, FL	4/3/08
6	Men 40-54 some college or less	Jacksonville, FL	4/3/08

NATIONAL ONLINE LGBT POLL

- Respondents for this survey were invited from an online panel of 10,000 LGBT individuals maintained by Socratic Technologies, Inc., a San Francisco-based market research firm specializing in online survey research techniques and online panel development.⁴ Invitations to participate in the study were sent out in waves to four subgroups: gay men 18-34 years old, gay men 35+, lesbians 18-34, and lesbians 35+. When the 150-interview quota for each of these cohorts was reached, no further respondents from that group were accepted. When asked to self-report their gender, 50% replied Male, 49% Female, 1% FTM, and 0% (1 respondent) MTF. Other demographic results are shown in the table at right.
- This panel was originally developed for market research purposes, and clearly it does not provide a perfect representation of the entire LGBT community, but that was not our goal for this project. Due to the racial attitudes discussed, our intent was to survey a largely white swath of the openly gay community (in essence, the group that African Americans “see” as the LGBT community) in order to examine how their racial biases might hinder or help the goals of this project, and to foster greater communication and cooperation between these demographically different groups of Americans on equality issues.

⁴ <http://www.sotech.com>

LGBT POLL RESPONDENTS

Age:

18-25	13%
26-35	37%
36-49	30%
50+	20%

Region (Census):

Northeast	21%
South	31%
Midwest	21%
West	27%

Sexual Identity:

Gay	49%
Lesbian	33%
Bisexual	16%
Queer	2%

Race:

White	85%
African American	4%
Latino/a	5%
Asian/Other	4%

Number of invites sent	5,923
Number of completes	600
Number of partials	45
Number of terms	196

Any further questions regarding methodology should be directed to Donna Victoria at donnav@victoriaresearch.com.

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