

As my mother and grandfather sit on the couch watching *Modern Family*, Cam and Mitchell, a gay couple, come on the screen and my grandpa asks, “Why do they have to be like that?” When my mother recounted this conversation to me the next day it stunned me how much ignorance lay within in the minds of my own family members. See, as a seventeen year-old, white, straight female I have no fear in openly discussing my identity, but millions of people around the world do not have the same luxury. Consider those who live in fear to reveal who they actually are due to possible backlash from family or peers. Could you imagine being shamed by your own parents for your sexuality? Sadly, this situation exists for too many people.

Now you may argue, “well gay marriage became legal two years ago, what’s the problem?” Think about it, more than one hundred and fifty years ago President Abraham Lincoln abolished slavery with the *Emancipation Proclamation*, but racism still exists in the United States to this day. LGBTQ rights fall into the same sort of category, they have been given freedoms that everyone else has, but they still aren’t viewed as equals by everyone. Ultimately, the issue lies with the fact that so many people fail to fully understand their community and still view it as a cloud shrouded with stigma. In order to move forward as a society, we need to learn to have civilized discussions about our opinions. Nowhere can this be seen better than through the treatment of the LGBTQ community.

First, we will have to identify how the lack of open and honest communication has led to the unfair prejudices these people continuously face. Second, we will examine the negative effects this intolerance has on members of this community. Finally, through the proposal of a more courteous approach to conversations, we will have the potential to help others better understand those of the LGBTQ community. Most people know what LGBTQ stands for;

however to refresh, The American Psychological Association defines “LGBT” as, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender, but this acronym represents more than these four groups; it stands for all categories of gender identification and sexual orientation that do not fall into typical standards. Since then, the acronym has even been expanded to “LGBTQ”, with the “Q” standing for Queer or Questioning.

More likely than not, people would prefer to not publicly discuss their political views with peers, friends, or even family members. At this point, it seems that only right and wrong exist when it comes to opinions; either someone supports the group or cannot comprehend their lifestyle and becomes dead set against basically any rights for them. We can not have calm, respectful discussions because our society purports the idea of fear and failure into our heads, so that we find little point in sticking up for our values. Therefore, people become unwilling to even listen to the thoughts of others and we fails to expand our horizons.

By now, what the LGBTQ community entails has become public knowledge. Actions such as, the legalization of gay marriage in all fifty states have helped to bring forth progress for this group; however, those who identify as part of this community still face widespread discrimination from all kinds of people. Over the years, various organizations have addressed the effects of this prejudice. One such group being, the “Humans Rights Campaign,” an LGBTQ civil rights advocacy group, which took a survey of 10,000 people between the ages of 13 and 17 who identified as members of the LGBTQ community. “Roughly three-quarters (73%) of LGBT youth say they are more honest about themselves online than in the real world.” Though many admit to being out to their close friends and family, several still feel more comfortable being themselves around strangers inside a screen. I love the internet as much as every other

technology-obsessed teenager, but it creates distortions and allows people to hide from reality. Social media has enabled us to proclaim our thoughts into the electrical abyss without the repercussions of a live interaction. People avoid having conversations about particular subjects because they have the option not to and if they see an opinion they do not like they can scroll away. Instead, we need to be talking to these LGBTQ youth in real life, offering help and creating a safe environment for them to live in. As more teenagers come out during their adolescence, there lies importance in having discussions at school and home about accepting others of different cultures and minorities.

As children they told us to not be bystanders, but many of us failed to take this out of school. Honestly, most of us probably never applied it there either, but as adults, understanding how to respectfully listen to someone else's thoughts, without stomping your own all over them, seems crucial for the well-being of more than just the parties involved. Not only does lack of open-mindedness deter us from having intellectual interactions, but it hurts those who may be perceived incorrectly such as those who identify as LGBTQ. According to the American Psychological Association, "[s]exual prejudice, sexual orientation discrimination and anti-gay violence are major sources of stress... Although social support is crucial..., antigay attitudes and discrimination may make it difficult for lesbian, gay and bisexual people to find such support." Even the support they receive from their family members can not mask the intolerance they face from other groups of people, due to the significant toll it takes on their mental health and confidence. The Trevor Project, a non-profit organization focused on suicide prevention among members of the LGBTQ community, cites, "The rate of suicide attempts is 4 times greater for LGB youth and 2 times greater for questioning youth than that of straight youth." In a nation

where suicide serves as one of the leading causes of death for adolescents, why does nobody mention this statistic? Depression can be deadly for anyone who suffers from it, especially for people who identify as LGBTQ and face such emotionally scarring discrimination and bullying. Being a teenager can be difficult enough, but having to go through the process of coming out and discovering who will accept your real self can take a toll on a person.

No one can pick their sexual orientation, and I can never emphasize that enough. Whether a person figures out their identity at the age of ten, or fifty makes no difference. Everyone has their own lifestyle, just because it may differ from someone else's does not mean it should be looked down upon or valued any less. Members of the LGBTQ community deserve happiness; they should not have to face a constant struggle of who will validate their lives and who will not. Ignorance can never be bliss for those being ignored. While I am sensible enough to realize that most people are set in stone with their opinions, especially with a topic like this, imagine the effect it could have if we just talked to each other. Maybe kids would not have to fear going to school because of what their peers may think of them; or maybe more people would feel comfortable discussing their sexual orientation if they knew others would not look down upon them for it. For more than twenty years now, an organization in Scotland has taken this idea and run with it. "LGBT Youth Scotland" helps countless Scottish LGBTQ youth, through the frameworks of policies such as, "Getting It Right For Every Child", "Curriculum For Excellence", and "National Youth Work Strategy 2014-19." This group reaches out to young people who may not know how to handle their sexuality or gender identification and them the value of their lives. This organization makes these youth define their goals, helps them to become ambitious, builds their self-confidence, and provides them with the platform to build

relationships with other members of the LGBTQ community. Each person is provided with a “checkmate” who serves as a confidant to whom they can turn when they may not receive much-needed support from family or other friends. This group is transforming the lives of hundreds, if not thousands, of Scottish teenagers and making them happy to be in their environments. If this sort of organization can be established in one country, where’s the harm in trying it in others? Now it may be unrealistic. However, if we could help one person better understand and become more accepting, it would mean a world of difference for someone who truly needs it.

Maybe I need to revisit my conversation with my grandfather. We could listen to each other and possibly reach some sort of mutual understanding. The discussion will not be perfect, and the outcome may not be what either us originally searched for, but at least it would be a start.