The Gay Kids Are All Right

By Jesse Bering, Ph.D. | Posted May 17, 2011

Developmental psychologist Richard Bleich Spielman argues that not only are gays no more sick in point, and that the well-intentioned it Gets Better campaign nonetheless promotes a false "suffering-and-suicide script."

The recent tragic deaths of several teens who (wrongly, we are told) felt that their sexual orientation was unacceptable to their families and communities have ignited a firestorm of media attention. Even if we put aside the fact that some of these deaths, like the portrayal in a non-sensationalistic fashion, the overall impression from the mainstream media coverage is that to be gay is to be miserable.

Despite its apparently rosy-cheeked, sunny-side-up tone, the "It Gets Better" campaign, which Dan Savage launched in the wake of the Tyler Clementi suicide, appears to be yet another attempt to paint a dire picture of what it means to be gay. Dan Savage, bless him, means well, but he's a bit too fond of the "suffering-and-suicide script." Click to view

Conservative religious and political advocacy groups have made a cottage industry out of using the tragic deaths of these kids to promote their anti-gay agenda. Gloria Allred, for instance, has filed a lawsuit against the Tyrone, Pennsylvania, school district on behalf of one of the victims, claiming that the school did not do enough to protect the young man from the harassment he was facing. In addition, conservative groups have used the tragic deaths of these teens as an opportunity to suggest that the "gay lifestyle" is a dangerous one, and that it is better for gay youth not to be "encouraged" to be gay. Fox News, for instance, has even suggested that the "gay community" is responsible for the deaths of these teens, because it has "pushed" the idea that being gay is a good thing.

Even those not by research studies in the present day, the proportion of gay people who have attempted suicide is still far higher than the proportion of non-gay people who have done so. Gay people are also more susceptible to various mental disorders than are straight people, and they are more likely to be victims of violent crime. Yet, it is better for gay youth not to be "encouraged" to be gay than to be "encouraged" to be straight, because the "gay community" is responsible for the deaths of these teens, because it has "pushed" the idea that being gay is a good thing, and because Fox News has suggested that

Jan 2 Edited

Kerbert 2 months ago

I found the piece to be very engaging on some notes, but I had also some problems with the premise. I find it hard to believe the idea that Nietzsche's philosophy is "Christian" in any meaningful sense (Jeff Lewis's dissertation argued the same, presupposing Kierkegaard "The Sea Kalle Ann Kirkgard." Many people have pointed out that Nietzsche's ideas are in fact very anti-Christian, and I think that's a good thing. I'm not a Christian myself, but I think with the critics I call Stoic (like Sam Harris) that Nietzsche's "Christian" critique is a bad one. Read more

0 4 Reply

Kevin Williams 2 months ago

Kerbert 2 months ago

Thanks! Read more

0 1 Reply

View 1 more reply

Jan 2 Edited 2 months ago

I have been a long time "Nietzsche is a Christian" guy but I will be in my 17 years old. Do some use of 17 years. Despite going to a Christian school and being a Christian, I think that the idea of Christianity of Kierkegaard, Lewis, etc. No, he didn't consider himself a Christian. I think that Nietzsche's critique of Christianity is a bad one. I don't think that Nietzsche's critique of Christianity is a bad one. I don't think that Nietzsche's critique of Christianity is a bad one. I don't

additional observation that others have made is that even the Religious Right has... Read more »

+ 0 −

Ralph Higgins 10 years ago

Guest

Of course there is plenty of scientific research done to show that this is NOT a great time to be gay. The fact that Dr. Savin-Williams choses not to look at it does not make it disappear. This is a perfect example of how the fact that someone has a degree does not make him/her unbiased or pursuing a specific goal. Who is funding and/or supporting Dr. Savin-Williams?

+ 0 −

Ritch Savin-Williams 10 years ago

Guest

Reply to Ralph Higgins

And I assume that you would say that the "pro" gay youth suicidal side is also "biased" and pursuing a specific political goal? Such research has considerable government funding. I have none and never have; I am not selling books; I'm not getting paid for interviews; I am not fond of this kind of publicity. My motive: is to give voice to another perspective. Is that so hard to believe? And, I have read everything there is about gay youth suicide, all sides.

+ 0 −

Ritch Savin-Williams 10 years ago

Guest

I want to thank (most) of you for writing. Clearly, this is a very emotional issue for many of us. Several general points I want to make (if you will allow me): First, I never meant to attack the It Gets Better Campaign but to give voice to a second message that gives hope to gay kids and those who feel that they might be gay. I believe we can tolerate both messages. Second, I acknowledge that life can be exceptionally difficult for some youth and i will continue to go to court and to work in various communities to... Read more »

+ 0 −

Fenrox 10 years ago

Guest

Reply to Ritch Savin-Williams

Don't listen to the haters, these people aren't even reading your work. You have been very clear that you are providing interesting information about a "crisis" and that you are easily a supporter of reason and an ally to gay causes.

+ 0 −

Mmj 10 years ago

Guest

Reply to Ritch Savin-Williams

Did you really just say gayness?

+ 0 −

Ritch Savin-Williams 10 years ago

Guest

Reply to Mmj

Ok, not real scientific but I really did not want to use the usual biologic equivalent: "homosexuality."

+ 0 −

Dominick 10 years ago

Guest

Reply to Ritch Savin-Williams

Why not?

+ 0 −

Scootah 10 years ago

Guest

The respect I had for the Good Men Project as a publication with a worth agenda is diminished by their continued association with the author. Goodness I hope he goes away before he does any real harm to the vulnerable youth he's trying to capitalize on.

+ 0 −

Ritch Savin-Williams 10 years ago

Guest

Reply to Scootah

Sorry that you are not open to multiple perspectives. From my vantage point, I am trying to give hope to vulnerable youth that they can have a good life. Seems like a worthwhile goal to me. I would encourage you to do the same in whatever way you can.

+ 0 −

Sarah W. 10 years ago

Guest

Reply to Ritch Savin-Williams

"I am trying to give hope to vulnerable youth that they can have a good life."
Yeah, that's called the "It Gets Better" project. 😐

+ 0 −

Ritch Savin-Williams 10 years ago

Guest

Reply to Sarah W.

the difference for me is the present versus the future; my hope is that both messages can be delivered. And you?

+ 0 −

sandra s. 10 years ago

Guest

Reply to Ritch Savin-Williams

Hope is a very worthwhile goal. A genuine improvement in one's personal circumstances is even better. Ideally, it is the difference between the beginning of our work with clients and the end of our work with clients. It's also the purview of social justice. Do you see where the push-back is coming from?

+ 0 −

VanInSanDiego 10 years ago

Guest

Okay, who really wrote this? The Family Research Council? This sounds like pure bull to me.

+ 0 −

Ritch Savin-Williams 10 years ago

Guest

Reply to VanInSanDiego

don't worry; they too hate me with a passion!

+ 0 −

Scootah 10 years ago

Guest

'The Velvet Rage' by Alan Downs provides some excellent insights into just how hard it really is to be a young gay man. I unfortunately can't think of an even remotely civil comment to offer in regards to this post.
http://www.amazon.com/Velvet-Rage-Overcoming-Growing-Straight/dp/0738210110

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