

The continued discrimination against homosexuals



Homosexuality is very common in society. However many individuals still discriminate against them. Their prejudgments are based on stereotypes, and lack of information. Due to our social perception, people who are different from them is deem to be threatening. In this report, discrimination against homosexuals will be discussed, with facts, different supporting examples and cases from Singapore and the United States, with Singapore being the more traditionally conservative one. Ways to reduce discriminations against them is also mentioned and explored.

The issue and who are involved?

We can fall in love, but why can't they?

Homosexuality is romantic and/or sexual attraction or behavior among members of the same sex or gender, making up around 10% of the population. Sadly, they continue to be one of the least protected by the government and discriminated against by the society. Homosexuality was categorized as a mental disorder until 1973. The words “ gay” and “ lesbian” are used to refer to homosexual men and women and “ bisexual” refers to those that are attracted to both men and women.

Brief History on Homosexuals in Singapore

In 1960s, Homosexuality was categorized as a condition in a Singapore Armed Forces (SAF). Before enlistment, all enlistees would undergo a medical checkup and asked to declare their homosexuality status. Those declared will be downgraded to a Public Employment Status of 3 and were assigned to be clerks.

In 1998, Senior Minister, Mr Lee Kuan Yew , live on CNN International, said, '...what we are doing as a government is to leave people to live their own lives so long as they don't impinge on other people. I mean, we don't harass anybody.' these words helped set the tenor for official policy on homosexuality for many years. His comments is said to be one of the most significant events relating to gay rights.

Before 2003, homosexuals were forbidden from being employed in "sensitive positions" in the Singapore Civil Service. Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong abolished this in a widely publicized statement.

In 2006, Liberty League, an organization that " promotes gender and sexual health for the individual, family and society", was granted \$100, 000.

Brief History on Homosexuals in the US

After W. W. II, thousands of homosexuals were dishonorably fired from the armed services and jobs, due to public display of homosexuality, and were ostracized from families and communities. In early 1953, homosexuality became by a necessary and sufficient reason fire any federal employee from one's job.

In the 1970s, in some cities, anti- discrimination for homosexual laws was placed. California had its first openly gay elected official; Harvey Milk.

Compared to Singapore, the US has a richer and more open homosexuality culture. In recent years, the US has slowly begun acceptance for homosexuality. Several television programs with elements of homosexuality, Will and Grace, Glee, Queer Eye for the Straight Guy, Grey's Anatomy were

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aired. As the popularity of these shows increases, the gay community is closer to acceptance and justice by the society. They have gay pride parades and homosexual marriages supported by many areas of US, unlike Singapore.

Discrimination against Homosexuals

With the laws placed and the better recognition of the homosexual community, the situation in both countries seems favorable. However, homosexuals still face rampant stereotypes from the world and may worsen if deeper understanding of homosexuals is not being promoted and measures are not taken. This topic has been chosen because this is a very important issue in this society, and feels that they should have the same rights as heterosexuals. There have been many incidents of bullying and victimizing homosexuals that led to deaths in the US. Many have gone into depression. These should not be tolerated and something has to be done.

Homosexuals do not come out for many reasons, the most common being that they are uncomfortable to declare to any society that is perceived to be homophobic.

Negative stereotyping is often a result of homophobia, which refers to an irrational fear, prejudice or discrimination towards homosexuals, and can be name-calling and teasing to serious crimes like assault and murder.

Positive stereotypes, or 'counter-types,' also exist but may be no less harmful, as they are still oversimplified views of the group being stereotyped.

Some examples of the common stereotypes that gays are described to be expressing too much of his feelings, very vulnerable and sensitive, likes touching himself and other people. They are also stereotyped to love talking about feminine things; the use of cosmetics, very concerned with their lips, skin and hair protections.

Why this prejudice and discrimination affect society and is important.

Current situation in Singapore

Although being homosexual in Singapore is not illegal, performing any homosexual acts in public or privately, is. Section 377 of the Singapore Penal Code records the penalty for indecency between individuals which includes consensual, private, adult homosexual acts; imprisonment is up to 2 years.

A gay group was denied permission to hold a forum on the role of homosexuals in society. The local media avoids homosexual issues in fear of getting their licenses suspended. In schools, sexuality courses focus more on heterosexuality-the only mention of homosexuality reminds students that it is illegal. Moreover, homosexual couples in Singapore, cannot rightfully own a home through the public housing scheme, thus many rent as private housing is unaffordable to them.

Unsurprisingly, this shows that Singaporean society remains deeply conservative and the governments are still not as open to discussions about gay rights. Attitudes towards homosexuality are also tied up closely with the different religious values in this multi-racial society, like Muslims and Christianity which considers it as a sin.

In Singapore, the government uses Confucian readings “ to create a certain amount of ideological coherence in its version of Asian Values and to give it some academic respectability”. From an interview, 68. 6% of the surveyors expressed negative attitudes towards homosexuality. Christians and Muslims were found to be least tolerant, older people are less tolerant and more educated people are more tolerant. Therefore, Singapore who is a traditionally conservative society may not be ready for a change.

Current situation in United States

Recently, there have been many news on homosexual bullying leading to suicides, for example , Tyler Clementi, a 19 year old student from Rutgers University. After his college roommate lived-streamed Tyler having sexual relations with his boyfriend, Tyler threw himself off a bridge. Asher Brown was a 13-year-old was tormented for the way he dressed and being gay. His bullies acted out mock gay sex acts in classes. His parents repeatedly contacted school officials on his bullying. Nothing was ever done. He shot himself in the head.

Policy on lesbian, gay, bisexual, in US has evolved over time and varies between different regions. Five states and one district have legalized same-sex marriage. President Obama announced that he will work with Congress and the military to repeal the “ don’t ask, don’t tell” policy that forbids homosexuals from openly serving in the military. However, there is still much opposition, commenting that homosexuals’ identities should not be made known.

However, there have been many interviews and surveys that show that the US is slowly accepting homosexuals. For example the graph below shows that attitudes towards homosexuality in the US, over the years seem more positive.

Source: [http://www. norc.](http://www.norc.)

[org/GSS+Website/Browse+GSS+Variables/Subject+Index/](http://www.norc. org/GSS+Website/Browse+GSS+Variables/Subject+Index/)

Why is it important?

A continuation of homosexual discrimination is detrimental to their mental health, which may increase suicidal tendencies or other mental afflictions.

There are many websites contending that homosexuality is a sin, stating that it is entirely up to choice, easily changeable, and giving excuses to put down homosexuals, using reasons like “ God hates fags”.

People tend to associate HIV and AIDS as a gay related disease, thinking that as long as they avoid having sex with homosexuals, they are safe from HIV. This ignorance can cause them to practice unsafe sexual intercourse.

Stereotyping them to be rapist, pedophiles are very common and these send a wrong message to the public, causing fear. This increases the fear in homosexuals for being discovered to be gay, causing them to feel immense stress and pressure, doubling the chance of depression and suicidal tendencies.

The rejection and misinformation results in homophobia causing them to bully other people , verbal assaults, causing other people psychological

stress and pain. Homosexuals may also face family and friends rejections. The result is a vicious cycle of prejudice and discrimination.

Where can we start to fix the problem?

How such prejudice and discrimination creates inequality to the society.

The law, sec 377a, criminalizing sexual acts between homosexuals, encourages Singaporeans discriminate against homosexuals indirectly. Other countries have accepted same sex marriage and have laws to protect them. Homosexuals should also have the same benefits as heterosexuals. In Singapore, some teachers were being forced to quit because of their sexuality like Otto Fong, and Alfian Saat. In national service, they are downgraded to positions like clerks, and disqualified from some “sensitive” areas. All these are deemed to be discrimination and homosexual inequality.

Workable solutions for individuals and institutions

From what I have found out, these prejudice and discriminations comes from ignorance and misinformation. Unbiased sex education can help to change mindsets of people about homosexuality at large. Singaporeans are consistently taught that sexual acts between homosexuals are illegal but do not talk about why and how we should learn to accept them in our society. This is an important issue, thus this topic should be in Civic Moral Education where students can learn about it. The society can also educate homosexuality in the media, television shows, or host public homosexuality talks and events. For example, in the US, they have a “Wear a Purple Shirt Day” in honor of homosexuals that committed suicides due to bullying.

We as individuals have to learn not to stereotype and listen to people's misconceptions, but taking initiative to learn more about homosexuality from places like, internet and books. We are more than capable of making our own decisions, and more than capable of being accepting and inclusive.

We should create an environment of diversity and acceptance for both heterosexuals and homosexuals.

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