

# **Rhetorical Analysis/Proposal**

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The homosexual agenda: a crisis that has gotten thrown around by people of the religious right and by right-wing media pundits to try to discredit the LGBTQ rights movement. The guiding ideology spread by people on the right is that the gay rights movement is actually a front for gay people to promote “unhealthy, immoral lifestyles” and recruit new people to their culture. While this crisis is in no way a real thing, the fact that so many people believe in it is an issue and hurts the progress of gay rights. Three key stakeholders are right-wing Christians who create the propaganda, far-right media outlets that perpetuate this “crisis,” and LGBTQ people who are victimized as a result of it. Each one of these stakeholders uses different rhetorical strategies as a part of this discussion: both groups on the far right that spread this information use fear tactics, which forces queer people to go on the defensive.

The stakeholder with the strongest voice regarding this “crisis” is the right-wing media. The right-wing media perpetuates the idea of the homosexual agenda in an effort to delegitimize the LGBTQ rights movement and spread fear about gay people. “The Real Homosexual Agenda,” from the conservative media site TrueNews.org, is a good example of a right-wing media organization expressing their beliefs about the gay agenda. The article has no listed authors and is more or less stylized as a list of incidents that support their claim that the homosexual agenda is a real thing, that radicals in the gay-rights

movement are attempting to convert people to “immoral” lifestyles, and that gay people view themselves as enemies to Christianity. At the top of the article, there is a box with a lengthy quote claiming to be stated by a gay-rights activist. The article uses it to stir fear in its readers: “we shall sodomize your sons... we shall seduce them... wherever men are with men together. Your sons shall become our minions and do our bidding. They will be recast in our image. They will come to crave and adore us. All churches who condemn us will be closed” (“Real Homosexual Agenda”). The language in this quote is striking and graphic; it portrays homosexual men as a wicked and evil force. It also outlines all of the claims made by conservatives about the dangers of the homosexual agenda. This quote was claimed to be reported in a gay community newspaper; however, it is instead linked to another conservative propaganda site, “Traditional Values Coalition.” Within the same header box is a link that says: “Find out about the homosexual movement and its link to pedophilia.” Under the first box is a list of “downloads” giving more information about homosexuality; however, one must request that information from a site moderator. These downloads include “homosexual lifestyle comparisons,” implying that being gay is unsafe; “homosexual propaganda”; “gays and pedophilia,” implying that gay men are pedophiles; and “causes of homosexuality,” which implies that sexuality is a choice; and others (“Real Homosexual Agenda”).

After the quote and downloads at the head of the article, the unnamed author begins his/her article. The author starts with a statement: “clearly not everyone in the homosexual movement is an extremist... However, many militant homosexuals and their

supporters have different beliefs" ("Real Homosexual Agenda"). The "not all...but many" structure of the phrase suggests that "extremist homosexuals" are a very widespread issue. The choice of words is also a noticeable rhetorical strategy in this article. The author uses the word "militant" to describe queer people. This implies that gay people are an organized, massive, planned coalition preparing some type of attack. The author then lists the "tactics" with which gays "force their beliefs on society" ("Real Homosexual Agenda"). It's structured into an easy-to-read bullet-point list, but the choice of wording is also striking. Some of the words the author writes in this list to describe the actions of the gay-rights movement include "harassing," "preying on children," "destroying and undermining," "annihilating," and "deceptively" ("Real Homosexual Agenda"). This wording implies violence, deceit, and hatred to describe an entire group of people. This rhetorical strategy is meant to stir immense fear in the reader, and this is only in the first two paragraphs of an article that is about 1000 words long. The usage of violent and fearful rhetorical language continues throughout the entire article and is used in almost every single sentence.

The author also uses ethos to gain credibility. As the author is unnamed, there is no mention of expertise in the field. However, he or she may be perceived as such with the aforementioned list of downloads. These downloads are supposed to give more information about the gay agenda; therefore, the implication is that the writer knows much more than is being presented in the article. There are also multiple links to other sources throughout the article. This certainly gives the author more credibility. However, there are far too few links

presented for all of the information that is given. Any time the author presents statistics that should be cited, there is no citation. At one point a reference is simply, “ask those who have walked away from that lifestyle” (“Real Homosexual Agenda”). There are times when a credible source such as the Associated Press will be mentioned in the writing, but without link or reference. Additionally, all of the formally referenced sources are not credible, and almost all of them are links to right-wing propaganda sites. Despite the fact that this article is obviously unreliable to people who are privileged enough to receive a college education, the visitors of TrueNews.org who will be reading this article most likely will find it credible. The fact that the article even lists sources in the first place is quite an improvement from the other blogs that toss around the idea of a homosexual agenda. And even though the sources are untrustworthy, chances are someone who is interested in this article will only agree with all of the other references in the article and interpret them as reliable sources. This writing is dangerous. It spreads false, uncorroborated evidence as truth and creates fear at the expense of a marginalized group of people, just to further right-wing interests.

GLAAD, formerly the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, is a watchdog organization devoted to making sure that queer people are accurately represented in the media. Their article, “GLAAD Media Reference Guide - Terms To Avoid” represents a key stakeholder in the issue of the gay agenda: the LGBTQ people who are targeted by the homophobic rhetoric. The article is a list of terms that media should try to avoid using in reference to LGBTQ people. One of the terms they list is “homosexual agenda.” According to GLAAD,

making claims about a homosexual agenda is bad because it hurts the gay-rights movement, and “notions of a so-called ‘homosexual agenda’ are rhetorical inventions of anti-gay extremists seeking to create a climate of fear by portraying the pursuit of equal opportunity for LGBT people as sinister” (“GLAAD”). Each section of the list is bolded with a group of offensive terms and with more appropriate alternatives to those terms below, also in bold. Each of these is followed by one or two paragraphs explaining the history of the term, why it is offensive, and how one can avoid using it. The second part of the article is subtitled “DEFAMATORY LANGUAGE.” This is a list of words and slurs that are offensive. Similar to the first part, lists of specific words to avoid are followed by a paragraph about why these terms should be avoided (“GLAAD”).

Unlike the more conservative article by TrueNews.org, the language has a much more professional and easy-to-read tone. Each paragraph contains only a few sentences, making it as simple and clear as possible. It also remains politically correct in its use of language. Many of the words and actions the article lists as offensive are given in quotation marks to suggest that the language used is incorrect: “The term ‘sexual preference’ is typically used to suggest that being lesbian, gay or bisexual is a choice and therefore can and should be ‘cured’” (“GLAAD”). The specific term that this part of the article talks about is “sexual preference,” and putting this in quotes emphasizes that it is something that is not politically correct or appropriate to use, and therefore tends to be used by people who are trying to demonize gay people. Putting “cured” in quotes shows that the idea of curing someone’s sexuality is also only used by homophobic people. The

professionalism and careful use of language is quite different from the tone and language used in the TrueNews article.

While the language is much more professional, the GLAAD article uses some similarly strong language as the conservative article, primarily in calling the other side “extremists” (“GLAAD”). However, even though “extremist” is a strong word, the GLAAD article uses it to provide context, while TrueNews.org uses it as an attack. When GLAAD says a term is used by an extremist, they are being truthful in that these are terms used by anti-gay activists. Meanwhile, TrueNews.org calls all gay-rights activists extremists in an attack on the group of people in general. The usage of this language by LGBTQ people is defensive in response to those who attack them. Another similarity is the usage of links within the article. GLAAD’s article has multiple links to another one of their articles that provides more information and examples, but it does not link to outside sources in the same way TrueNews.org does. However, GLAAD does not need to do this, as they are already a well-established media-monitoring organization and does not need those outside sources to establish their credibility. But a reader who is unaware of GLAAD may interpret this as a lack of credibility and may not take the article seriously.

The final stakeholder in this crisis are the (primarily evangelical) religious organizations that created the idea of the homosexual agenda in the first place. According to Christian blogger James R. Aist in his article, “The Gay Agenda: What in the World Is Going On?” the homosexual agenda was a term coined originally by evangelicals as a way to describe the motives of the gay-rights movement (Aist, “Gay Agenda”). Despite this admission, the article is

still written to “alert born-again Christians about aspects of homosexuality that they really should know in order to be able to perceive and understand the culture war that’s underway in today’s world” (Aist, “Gay Agenda”). This choice of language is very strong, as at the very beginning of the article it addresses the conflict between LGBTQ people and the religious right as a “war.” This is very similar to the conservative news site in that it uses war language to spread fear about queer people. The article repeatedly uses this language, as well as trying to accuse gay people of trying to dismantle churches and religious organizations, as it is written from a conservative Christian perspective.

The article is divided into different sections: first an introduction, which is followed by a list of 21 reasons why Christians should be concerned about the gay-rights movement. Some of these reasons are extreme and even go so far to say that hate crimes against gay people should be legal. The third section is about how Christians should respond to the homosexual agenda. In this section, he suggests that anybody “who even approves of or encourages the sins of homosexuality will, someday, have to answer to God for it” (Aist, “Gay Agenda”). This is implying that even simple acceptance of LGBTQ people will send someone to hell. However, he urges kindness toward gay people in an effort to convert them to Christian lifestyles. He also argues for the election of outwardly anti-gay politicians and for preachers to more aggressively attack gay people in their messages. Throughout this final section, he quotes from the Bible and lists many verses as references (Aist, “Gay Agenda”). This is to make a further appeal to Christian readers.

Aist tries to establish credibility in several ways. The final section is a list of sources he used; however, not a single one of these references is from a trustworthy source. One of the listed sources is even "Conservipedia," basically Wikipedia for right-wing conspiracy theories. The end of the article mentions that he is a professor and links to his website, which certainly makes him seem credible. I followed the link, and on his website, he claims to be a professor at Cornell who has written multiple books and peer-reviewed articles and is an expert on issues of religion and sexuality (Aist, "ABOUT"). I went to Cornell's website and searched for him, and it turns out that he does not specialize in any of the issues he writes about, but in Plant Pathology and Plant Microbe Biology ("Emeriti Faculty"). It then may seem confusing that a professor at Cornell who boasts about his experience in peer-reviewed sources would write articles based on such untrustworthy information. But it makes sense that even scholars cannot base their arguments in real facts, as there is no real scientific basis for the gay agenda.

The homosexual agenda was used primarily to discredit the LGBTQ rights movement by spreading fear and panic about the motivations of gay people. This ideology was perpetuated primarily by the religious right and today is generally thought to be incorrect. The term was popularized in 1993 with a video used as right-wing propaganda to prevent gay people from serving in the military (Carpenter). It gained the most recent attention when the gay-rights movement focused on same-sex marriage as more states were legalizing it at the start of the 2000s. However, after marriage was legalized nationwide, much of the rhetoric stopped, and the idea of a



homosexual agenda was thrown around much less. Many people still believe this is a crisis, however. It is very hard as a queer person to read the types of blatantly homophobic things that are being said, and many other LGBTQ people have trouble with this rhetoric as well. But overall, the homosexual agenda is not a real crisis and was created as a method for the religious right to spread fear and panic in response to the gay-rights movement and the growing acceptance of homosexuality; however, this rhetoric is inherently flawed and dangerous to queer people.

I plan to explore the rhetoric used on either side of this issue to show that the gay agenda is not a real crisis by any means. I have yet to find a credible source that explicitly refers to the gay agenda as a real phenomenon. I plan to pick apart the arguments made by the right by their sources in order to prove that the “crisis” is inherently flawed. I will accomplish this by disproving the ethos of conservative sources that make the claim that the gay agenda is a real crisis, both through analyses of references and author credibility. I also will do my own separate research about the claims some of these articles are making about the “dangers of homosexual lifestyles,” on topics such as HIV, pedophilia, factors that contribute to sexuality, and the purpose and effects of prosecuting hate crimes.

I also will examine how the aggressive language surrounding the issue is very problematic and how the two sides are framed as being adamantly opposed to one another. I will explore how language and propaganda have perpetuated the issue and also how this affects people outside of the mentioned stakeholders. Will they be more swayed by pro-LGBT+ or anti-LGBT+ arguments, and what factors

determine what they believe? Are outsider opinions of this “crisis” more influenced by more exposure to LGBTQ people, education, or simply political leaning? Additionally, for context and further discussion, I will research the history of this “crisis,” why it gained so much attention at the time it did, and why the term is not used as much anymore. I will analyze how much of the language about the homosexual agenda hurts the progress of the gay rights movement.

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