

Significant Incident

I sit down to write this essay, having just returned from a speech given by Betty DeGeneres. Ms. DeGeneres is the mother of Ellen, the actress/comedian who publicly “came out” on television. Betty spoke about the importance of unconditional love of our children and the need for education on the topic of homosexuality. During her talk, there were several statements made regarding homosexuality that I could relate back to my psychology, ethics, and systems classes last week.

Let’s look at the recent Boy Scouts’ decision to exclude gays from their organization. In psychology, we learned from Erikson’s psychosocial theory of development that Stage 4, which occurs between the ages of 6 and 12, is the time children develop a positive self-image through industry. Freud’s psychosexual theory says that during this same time period, which he labels the latency stage, children embark on the socialization process which occurs through school, friendship, hobbies, and sports. Betty DeGeneres said that many children realize they are “different” at this early time in their lives. So now, in addition to feeling “different,” the current Boy Scouts’ ruling excluding gays from their ranks is telling these children that there is something wrong with them as well. Instead of industry and good socialization, what these young people are more likely to experience is the destructive power of inferiority and the sense of not being wanted.

"Incident" to which theories learned during previous week's class will be applied

Brief description of incident and main topic

Theory from psychology class

How theory fits the theme of incident

Conclusion drawn, pointing out the importance

Theory from ethics class

Moreover, if one looks at advertising (as we did last week in ethics class) I find that sometimes this “difference” is exploited. The travel industry is a case in point. I checked on the Internet and found 380 travel sites listed as catering to the gay community. Some of these providers are “mainstream” operations. Are they providing services because they want to be inclusive? I think not. As in most cases when it comes to advertising, it is simply a matter of money. Gays and lesbians (and bisexuals and transgendered individuals) have dreams and leisure dollars to spend. There’s the dream of being included, so an ad promising to get someone on a gay cruise on the QE2, Celebrity, Princess or Norwegian cruise lines is feeding right into that person's desire to belong. Some of the advertising I deem to be outright irresponsible. One ad I read marketed gay travel to Thailand as an opportunity to meet gay Thai men, implying that a good time was to be had. Having been to Thailand and being aware of the AIDs epidemic there, I wondered at not seeing any note of caution in that ad. To paraphrase George Soros, advertising can truly be an obstacle to the survival of mankind unless society—the system-- changes.

How theory fits the theme of incident

Conclusion drawn, pointing out the importance

Theory drawn from systems class

How theory fits theme of incident

We have learned from systems class that a system that cannot change will eventually die. As more and more people find the courage to express who they are, society will change, if for no other reason than economic survival. It is doing so now. DeGeneres stated that 100 of the Fortune 500 companies now offer partner benefits to their gay and lesbian employees. To remain competitive, companies must be attractive to all of the talent available to their workplace.

Conclusion drawn,
pointing out the
importance

Also, companies are instituting diversity programs in the workplace, recognizing that unless differences are valued businesses will experience a loss on their human capital investment, the one area that has the potential of providing a return four times greater than material capital investment.

Concluding
point that
integrates
materials from
all three
classes

integration of ethics
class content

Toward the end of her talk, DeGeneres made a statement that included the phrase “gift of honesty.” Just think a moment. If there were the “gift of honesty”

integration of
systems class
content

in advertising, desirable objects would be marketed without manipulating the desires of the consumer, as Buddhism warns against. The “gift of honesty” would allow systems to change by welcoming the input of different sources to produce an output that would be inclusive, serving the needs of the entire community.

integration of
psychology
class content

And the “gift of honesty” in how we view ourselves and others would allow for dialogue leading to the understanding of, and appreciation for, differences and the value they can add to our society.