



API EQUALITY-LA
Asians and Pacific Islanders for LGBT Equality

Talking to Chinese Americans About LGBT Issues

Guidelines for Educating, Persuading, and Mobilizing
Chinese Americans for LGBT Equality



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About API Equality-LA

Founded in 2005, API Equality-LA has been a tireless advocate in the Greater Los Angeles Asian and Pacific Islander communities for the fair treatment of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people and marriage equality for same-sex couples. API Equality-LA's vision is to create a society that celebrates the loves and lives of all people—free from discrimination and injustice.

About the Author

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Chinese American Demographics

Chinese Americans are the largest and one of the most diverse Asian ethnic groups in the United States. There are myriad ways in which demographic variables correlate with or influence attitudes toward LGBT people. The four principle variables are age, language proficiency, religiosity, and nativity. Quantitative studies have convincingly demonstrated that being younger, less religious, English proficient, and born in the United States are associated with having pro-LGBT attitudes.

This report will discuss the latest findings on Chinese American attitudes toward LGBT people and make recommendations for working with the Chinese American community in three sub-categories: (1) Chinese-speaking Chinese Americans, (2) English-speaking Chinese Americans under 35, and (3) English-speaking Chinese Americans ages 35 and over. Each of the three groups has unique attitudinal characteristic and merits a separate discussion.

The three groups are defined as follows:

Chinese-speaking Chinese Americans:

US citizens and residents who *prefer* to communicate in a Chinese dialect. This group includes people who are bilingual in Chinese and English, but who prefer to use a Chinese dialect in their daily lives. With very few exceptions, all people in this group are foreign born. Many get their news in Chinese language media.

English-speaking Chinese Americans under 35:

US citizens and residents who *prefer* to communicate in English. This group includes people who are bilingual in Chinese and English, but who prefer to use English in their daily lives. The majority of people in this group are US born people of Chinese-descent. However, this group also includes a significant minority is of foreign born people who are fluent in English.

English-speaking Chinese Americans 35 and over:

This group has similar characteristics as Chinese Americans under 35.

Findings on Chinese American Attitudes

Due to the high level of diversity among the three groups, it is nearly impossible to identify characteristics that adequately describe the attitudes of Chinese Americans as a group. This section discusses the findings in each of the three groups.

Findings on Attitudes

Attitudes of Chinese-speaking Chinese Americans

- Vast majority describes and sees LGBT people as gender non-conforming.
- Vast majority has never thought about LGBT people and issues.
- Solid majority does not have basic understanding of the concepts of being LGBT.
- Many people's understanding of LGBT people contains significant negative stereotypes.
- Many people see LGBT people as "unnatural."

- Biggest concerns have to do with the perceptions that (1) LGBT people harm children, (2) LGBT people contribute to social decline, (3) being LGBT is a contagion, and (4) being LGBT is against tradition.

Attitudes of English-speaking Chinese Americans under 35

- Vast majority is accepting of LGBT people and supportive of same-sex marriage.
- Solid majority describes having one or more substantive relationships with LGBT people.
- Solid majority demonstrates strong understanding of being LGBT as a real, lived experience.
- Some express lingering concerns about LGBT people's impact on children.

Attitudes of English-speaking Chinese Americans 35 and over

- Attitudes toward LGBT people are variable for this group, ranging from strongly anti-LGBT to strongly pro-LGBT.
- Most people demonstrate basic to full understanding of the concepts of being LGBT as a real, lived experience.
- Some know of or are friends with people who are LGBT.
- Some refer to LGBT people as “unnatural.”
- Biggest concerns are similar to concerns of the Chinese-speaking Chinese Americans but the prevalence and intensity of the concerns are significantly less pronounced.
- People in this group are the most willing to change their attitudes toward LGBT people.

Factors that Move People toward Acceptance

Beyond understanding people's attitudes toward LGBT people, it is also helpful to understand the factors that move people's attitudes to become more accepting. Each subpopulation cites different types of reasons for becoming more accepting. Overall, the three categories of factors that move people to become more accepting are (1) new knowledge, (2) relationships, and (3) identification of injustice.

New knowledge

New knowledge moves people to acceptance by providing explanations about the nature of being LGBT, clarifying the nature of LGBT relationships, revealing the LGBT identity of a person that one admires, or a combination of the above.

Relationships

Relationships, in two different forms, help to create movement to acceptance. They come in the forms of a sustained period of substantive interaction with LGBT people in various settings, an intense personal journey prompted by the revelation that someone in close proximity – such as a family member or a close friend – is LGBT, or a combination of the above.

Identification of injustice

Identification of injustice also serves to help create accepting attitudes. It comes in the form of the identification that LGBT people face injustice, the identification that such injustice is similar and related to another instance of injustice that one may face personally, or a combination of the above.

Most effective factors moving people to acceptance

Chinese-speaking	English-speaking 35 and over	English-speaking under 35
New knowledge Relationships	New knowledge Relationships Identification	Identification

Recommendations

Given the demographic and attitudinal diversity of the Chinese American population, it pays to use a variety of strategies to work with the different subpopulations. This report recommends using three different types of strategies when working with Chinese Americans. The three strategies are education, persuasion, and mobilization.

Education:

Education means getting people to think and think differently about LGBT people and issues by providing information that introduces the basic concepts surrounding LGBT people, dispels the most common negative stereotypes, and directs people to obtain additional information on their own.

Persuasion:

Persuasion means changing the hearts and minds of people who are conflicted or in soft opposition to LGBT equality by modeling the journey to acceptance with culturally relevant and linguistically appropriate messages.

Mobilization:

Mobilization means getting people who already support LGBT equality to engage in one or more of the following activities: education of people who are undecided and those in the opposition, persuasion of people who are undecided, and neutralization of active opponents.

Chinese-speaking Chinese Americans

The recommended strategy for this group is “**Education.**”

In major metropolitan areas with a significant Chinese American population, this group constitutes a *solid majority* of the Chinese American population. The vast majority of Chinese-speaking Chinese Americans are not ready to be persuaded to support LGBT equality. They lack basic understanding of LGBT concepts, have no openly LGBT friends or relatives, harbor negative stereotypes of LGBT people, and do not know where to turn for accurate information or support.

Chinese-speaking Chinese Americans get their news from the Chinese language media, including newspapers, television, radio, and online sources. Using Chinese language media to communicate to Chinese-speaking Chinese Americans is the most effective way to reach this audience.

Objectives

- Present information that explain **basic concepts** of LGBT issues, including the nature of LGBT relationships, the causes of being LGBT, the consequences of conversion therapy, and the presence of LGBT people in the Chinese American community.
- Show **positive role models** of LGBT people of Chinese descent. The role models should be successful people in the eyes of Chinese Americans.
- Identify **well-known, well-respected** Chinese Americans or people of Chinese or other Asian descent to speak positively about LGBT issues or use press statements containing remarks by the same that are favorable to LGBT people.
- Provide a **model for learning about LGBT issues** and dealing with LGBT people and **modeling the process of change.**

Best Practices

Things to Do	Things to Avoid
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Describe LGBT relationships and demonstrate that LGBT people have love and commitment to each other. ▪ Provide credible information, when appropriate, to dispel the most common and negative stereotypes. ▪ Talk about family and the need for everyone, including LGBT individuals, to be included. ▪ Use storytelling and presentation of positive role models to demonstrate common characteristics between LGBT and non-LGBT people. ▪ Cite statistics showing trend of acceptance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Make comparison between race and sexual orientation. ▪ Draw historical and current “parallels” between sexual orientation discrimination and other forms of discrimination. ▪ Talk about “rights” and legal issues ▪ Assume that people understand the nature of LGBT relationships. ▪ Assume that people in this demographic group identify as “Asian American”. ▪ Use the word “same”. Instead, show them that LGBT relationships have same characteristics as non-LGBT ones. Using the word “same” will trigger an automatic response in which people search for and focus on the differences.

English-speaking Chinese Americans under 35

The recommended strategy for this group is “**Mobilization.**”

It is not a surprise that people in this demographic group, in general, are already highly supportive of LGBT people. In addition to being supportive, people in this group also have more time and propensity to engage in activism relative to other demographic groups.

Objectives

- Identify, engage, and recruit supporters to **participate in your organization’s activities.**
- Identify, engage, and recruit supporters to **organize their peers** to support the causes of full equality.
- Identify, engage, and recruit supporters to **communicate to their older friends, relatives and families** about LGBT equality.
- Use **social media** as an organizing tool for this population.

Best Practices

Things to Do	Things to Avoid
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Talk about discrimination of LGBT people as a grave injustice of our time.▪ Make comparison between racial discrimination and that based on sexual orientation.▪ Tell a larger “story of us” as Chinese Americans and Asian Americans that draws historical parallels of miscegenation and current discriminatory laws.▪ Be prepared to provide a compelling reason and a concrete opportunity for people to get involved.▪ Make sure that people know exactly how they can make a difference.▪ Use messengers, as practicable as possible, who are in the similar age range.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Assume that all people in this group are automatic supporters.▪ Be condescending.▪ Be unprepared to maximize every recruitment opportunity.

English-speaking Chinese Americans 35 and over

The recommended strategy for this group is a mixed approach that includes, “**Education,**” “**Persuasion,**” and “**Mobilization.**”

The attitudes of this demographic group are the most diverse and the methods of communicating and outreaching to this group are also the most resource intensive. Unlike the Chinese-speaking Chinese Americans who generally do not support LGBT equality and the English-speaking Chinese Americans under 35 who do, this group has mixed attitudes.

Additionally, unlike the Chinese-speaking Chinese Americans who can be easily reached by using Chinese language media and the English-speaking Chinese Americans under 35 who can be targeted in college student organizations, youth groups, and young professional organizations, it is less clear how to deliver messages to this group in a targeted fashion.

Objectives

- Objectives for this group should include all objectives for both the Chinese-speaking Chinese Americans and English-speaking Chinese Americans under 35 groups.

Best Practices

- First, get a sense of where the audience stands. If the audience is not a supporter or is undecided on the issues of LGBT equality, then one should follow the best practices for Chinese-speaking Chinese Americans. If the audience is a supporter, then one should follow the ones for the English-speaking Chinese Americans under 35.

Miscellaneous Recommendations

Chinese American Christians

It can be effective and persuasive to talk about LGBT issues in a Christian context when talking to self-identified Christian Chinese Americans. Most effective Christian messages are ones that are familiar and well-known – that Jesus says that the greatest commandment is to love and “Thou shalt not judge” because only God can judge. In contrast, messages that appear to reinterpret or take less familiar Bible texts out of context can draw backlash.

A Note on Messengers

Given the diversity of the Chinese American population, it is difficult to pick an ideal messenger that truly communicates effectively with all segments of the community. Existing research demonstrates the message of a Chinese-speaking Chinese American mother describing her journey to accept an LGBT child seems to be the most effective across all groups in terms of its ability to move people to become more accepting and avoid generating negative responses.

If resources permit, it is best to have a combination of messengers who can carry two to three core narratives. Effective messengers include parents of LGBT children, heterosexual allies of LGBT people, and respected community leaders. Messengers to avoid include LGBT parents of children and LGBT activists.

Mini Case Study

In July of 2011, California established a law called the FAIR Education Act that mandates all public schools to include historical contributions of LGBT people in social science lessons from kindergarten to 12th grade. Immediately after the bill's passage, anti-equality organizations began efforts to repeal the legislation in a referendum.

In September, a group of Chinese American Christian ministers held a press conference for the Chinese language media to denounce the legislation by spreading lies about the law and fear about LGBT people.

Fortunately, the efforts to repeal the FAIR Education Act, despite the fear campaign, ended in failure and API Equality-LA wanted to use this opportunity to put its messages out to the Chinese language press. Before we communicated to our audience, we had to answer the following five questions:

- To **whom** are we communicating?
- What are the **attitudinal and behavior change** that we are trying to create?
- What **messages** do we need to communicate?
- Who are the best **messengers** to deliver those messages?
- Through what **channels** are we communicating?

We came to the consensus that we were communicating to Chinese-speaking Chinese Americans to provide accurate information about the FAIR Education Act and a positive portrayal of LGBT people. We wanted our audience to see that Chinese Americans are standing together in support of LGBT people and that LGBT people are a part of Chinese American community. To effectively drive our message, we picked two Chinese mothers to talk about family, a well-known Chinese psychologist to talk about LGBT people, and the co-chair of API Equality-LA to talk about the overwhelming support of LGBT people in the Chinese American community.

In addition to answering the above referenced questions, we also needed to make sure that our communication efforts fit the following criteria:

- **Show** not tell.
- Connect at the level of **values**.
- **Meet people** where they are.
- Be **culturally relevant**.
- Be **linguistically appropriate**.

In order meet these criteria, we made sure that our communications included stories about the importance of keeping families together regardless of a family member's sexual orientation. By doing so, we "showed" the story and connected at the level of family values. We "met people where they are" by providing information to address their discomforts. We were culturally relevant by talking about family in a way that Chinese-speaking Chinese Americans talk about family. Lastly, we were linguistically appropriate by sending the press release and pitching to reporters in Chinese.

Our press statement was covered, in many parts verbatim, by the three largest Chinese language newspapers in Southern California: World Journal, Sing Tao-USA, and China Press-USA. These three publications have a combined daily circulation of around 250,000 copies.

The following is the English version of the press statement that was used.

ANTI-EQUALITY ORGANIZATIONS FAILED TO QUALIFY REFERENDUM

API Equality-LA ready to engage community in honest dialogue

Today, anti-equality advocates failed to submit the required number of signatures to place a referendum for the June 2012 ballot to overturn the Fair, Accurate, Inclusive, and Respectful (FAIR) Education Act.

The FAIR Education Act was signed into law by Governor Jerry Brown earlier this year. It requires schools to integrate age-appropriate and factual information about the historical roles of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people and people with disabilities into existing social science instruction.

“Opponents of equality grossly distorted the intent and the effect of the FAIR Education Act and perpetuated blatantly false information about LGBT people in their quest to secure signatures for this referendum,” said Eileen Ma, Executive Director of API Equality-LA, “We are ready to engage the entire Chinese community in an honest dialogue about the importance of giving students a fair education.”

Marshall Wong, co-chair of API Equality-LA, said, “Chinese Americans across California are standing up for the FAIR Education Act and LGBT people. In the California legislature, all seven Chinese American legislators voted to pass this legislation, including Dr. Richard Pan, Fiona Ma, Paul Fong, and Mike Eng in the California Assembly, and Ted Lieu, Carol Liu, and Leland Yee in the California Senate.”

Stella Wang, mother of a lesbian adult daughter, stated, “Today is a great day for the Chinese community. As a mother, I love and completely accept my lesbian daughter. However, it hurts me to see my daughter having to struggle for many years just to accept herself. LGBT people are our colleagues, friends, and family members. The FAIR Education Act helps to dispel stereotypes of gay people and ensure that everyone can be honest with each other about who they love.”

“As a Chinese psychologist, I am saddened by the lack of understanding of LGBT people in our communities,” stated Terry Gock, PhD, “Modern psychology conclusively demonstrates four facts about being LGBT/gay: (1) it is not a disease, (2) it is not unnatural, (3) it cannot be learned, and (4) efforts to change sexual orientation can be harmful.”

Kathay Feng, a Chinese mother, added, “It is shameful that opponents of the FAIR Education Act are fanning false fears about gay people. As a Chinese mother, I value family unity and social harmony. LGBT people are part of our family and community. The opponent’s lies divide our families and poison our community. Today’s victory shows that Chinese people are standing up for truth and love.”

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