

The Impact of Sexual Minorities' Coming Out Actions on Their Careers in the United States: Take the Film Industry as an Example

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Abstract: Although much has been done to protect LGBT people, coming out still seems to be a red line that cannot be crossed in the US film industry. Actors or Actresses who come out of the closet will still always lose job opportunities, just because of their sexual orientations. Or they will only act on some LGBT characters. Therefore, this article uses the case analysis method, to find out the impact coming out actions have on people's careers in the film industry in the United States, to explore why so many actors or actresses still choose to stay in the closet, and to give some suggestions. Finally, this article finds out that it is losing quality acting resources, disruption to private lives, conflict in works, and excessive public opinion pressure which stop them from coming out. Based on the findings, this paper also provides some suggestions which can be used to eliminate occupational discrimination against sexual orientations in the American film industry at family, school, and society levels.

Keywords: LGBT, film industry, coming out, United States.

1. Introduction

Sexual minorities, known as LGBTQIA+ people, made up 7.1% of the US population, according to a new Gallup poll survey. It is society's duty to protect sexual minorities, it is also everyone's obligation to respect anyone different. However, many people who identify themselves as sexual minorities are discriminated against in their working places, especially in the film industry. It is a gray zone for a long time.

Some researches indicate that discrimination based on sexual orientation is very common in many industries. In the sports field, some athletes are compelled to quit their job after coming out. In the hip-pop industry and video game industries, many people are suffering from discrimination from their audience, managers, or even peers and teammates. Many people are afraid of coming out and they have to find themselves deep in their hearts. In the film industry, this phenomenon is especially severe. Many LGBT actors or actresses are not willing to come out, and actors or actresses who come out will lose many job opportunities. There is even an actor who didn't come out until his seventies after he had a wife.

Not much research specific in this field has been done, and they lack case studies. Revealing the consequences of coming out in the film industry and assessing the reason and what should be done

to improve this situation in this paper can accelerate the actions to stop discrimination against sexual orientations as well as people's attention to protect sexual minorities.

This paper uses the case analysis method to assess the impact come-out actions have on people's careers in the film industry and gives some advice. It first analyses the influences coming out actions have and gives audiences two cases to conclude the reaction people have in reality. It also provides some suggestions on how to eliminate discrimination in all walks of life.

2. The Reason Many LGBTQIA+ Actors or Actresses Still Choose to Stay in the Closet

2.1. Losing Quality Acting Resources

After LGBTQIA+ actors or actresses come out, people may not continue to accept or in other words, "like" the straight characters they play. But why people can accept straight actors or actresses playing gay characters and cannot endure sexual minorities acting like straight people? That sounds not logical, yet it is true, and widespread all over the world, including in the United States. From research (Participant Ratings of the Actor and his Performance by Participant Gender and Actor Sexual Orientation), although knowing an actor is gay won't have a great impact on their performance rating and the conviction of the characters he makes, knowing an actor is a gay will decrease people's conviction on his masculine temperament and influence people's attitude toward straight men characters they figure [1]. If straight actors get Oscar awards for acting as homosexuals, people will praise them because they think that those actors are very good at acting since they have successfully molded queers. This indicates their excellent acting abilities. However, if actors or actresses who have already come out figure queer characters successfully, people will think this is nothing but expressing themselves in front of the stage. So, when an actor or actress comes out, he or she will lose the job playing straight characters as well as playing sexual minorities.

So why do such phenomena occur so widely? Why can't people accept their idols being gays? Film celebrities are combinations of both their imagines in and out of the television. They are deified to be perfect social figures by public relations departments and their agents who advocate their exceptional words and deeds. As soon as these perfect figures spread roots deep down audiences' minds, all the things about them seem of great importance, anything which contradicts their miens will destroy their inimitable fame. Being sexual minorities would of course have a great negative influence on celebrities if they didn't build up imagines as sexual minorities. Naturally, things like rumors, and being queers will make the figures they built up in people's mental collapse. Just like a small piece of snow can give rise to an avalanche, a little small different trait of LGBTQIA+ celebrities can destroy their nice future [2].

2.2. Disruption to Private Life

Like the context above, coming out of the closet means a lot, it can destroy one celebrity's future and it can also bring many disruptions to his or her private life [2]. If they come out, their work and life will be full of questions about sexuality. Like when in the interview, the whole conversation will go out of the center, and the compere will ask "what is your feeling being queers", and "does being sexual disrupt your working and private life" instead of some questions valuable, about their acting or filming. People pay no attention to their film and their work which need to focus on, but people have great interest in all kinds of box news. Paparazzi follow them all the time, trying to ask everything about them.

2.3. Conflict in Their Work

When an actor or actress comes out of the closet, just like the content above, they might receive some questions which are not associated with their work, like for gay actors “you're top or bottom”, people are too focused on such things and such things will dive their attention to their acting ability away.

Besides, film celebrities are not getting famous only by themselves. They have public relations companies behind them, they have agents to help them with their work. The money they get is divided by all the people behind, to support all of their lives. Therefore, coming out not only represents the loss of the actors or actresses themselves but also represents the deficit of the whole company and their agents and managers. With such complicated financial conflicts associated with the consequence of coming out, they have to be very discreet and have to take care of their footing after coming out. And if one day they decide to come out, many people will come and try to persuade them that doing this is selfish but not sincere [2].

2.4. Excessive Public Opinion Pressure

Except for the financial loss, many actors or actresses are afraid to be the spoke person of sexual minorities. When something occurs about sexual minorities, media and people will ask them about their attitude toward such things as Proposition 8 in California [3], and Clarence Thomas saying that gay marriage should be rethought [4]. They are actors or actresses but not politicians, they know little about the policies, and they don't want to become embroiled in public opinion, not to mention the consequences of irritating some conservatives. They need to care more about their future than telling the truth to society.

Besides, some sexual minority organizations are very radical, they often compel actors to come out of the closet. All of this aggressive action put a gray shadow upon coming out.

In Hollywood, US. Film workers can be divided into two groups. People who work behind the stage never need to hide, like David Geffen and Simon Halls. But in front of the stage, people need to be discreet, especially famous people. They need to consider every step carefully. There are a lot of American actors or actresses who came out publicly, but most of them inevitably lose many job opportunities. They are now being discriminated against by their boss co-workers, and there are still many others who choose to stay in the closet. Although, as society progresses, the LGBTQIA+ revolution has proceeded a lot, there are many LGBT-themed television programs as well as TV series which include sexual minor characters, the whole society should still be critical of this. Do sexual minorities really live happy, discrimination-free life? Why do so many actors or actresses still choose to stay in the closet? There are still a lot of difficulties that need to be come through, and people still need to keep fighting to guard their own wellness and rights.

3. Cases Description: Wentworth Miller and Matt Boomer Detailed Depict of Their Coming Out Influence and Consequences

Wentworth Miller came out when he refused to attend the Film festival in Russia, he was a very famous film star then. With the fame of the TV series prison breaking, his kudos nearly took up half of the world's entertainment circle. After he came out publicly, many people started discussing him. Matt Bomer came out when he accepted an award. He talked about his children and husband Simon Halls when delivering his acceptance speech.

3.1. Depict of Coming Out of Wentworth Miller and Matt Boomer

“I am deeply troubled by the current attitude toward and treatment of gay men and women by the Russian government,” Wentworth Miller wrote in the letter to director Maria Averbakh, who invited

him to attend St. Petersburg International Film Festival on August 21, 2013. “As a gay man, I am deeply troubled by the current attitude toward and treatment of gay men and women by the Russian government”. Added the actor: “the situation is in no way acceptable, and I cannot in good conscience participate in a celebratory occasion hosted by a country where people like myself are being systematically denied their basic right to live and love openly. If circumstances improve, I'll be free to make a different choice [5]”.

At that time, Russian president Putin had just signed anti-LGBT legislation which forbade “propaganda of nontraditional sexual relations” and imposed hefty fines on people who provide gay information to minors or who hold gay pride assemblies. Miller stood out to support LGBTQIA+ people in Russia.

On January 11, 2012, Matt Bomer arrived at the People's choice award. "I'd really especially like to thank my beautiful family: Simon, Kit, Walker, Henry," Bomer said during the Steve Chase Humanitarian Awards on Saturday. "Thank you for teaching me what unconditional love is [6]. You will always be my proudest accomplishment." By this, Matt Bomer came out officially.

3.2. Social Discussion after Wentworth Miller and Matt Boomer Came Out

Toward Miller's gay identity, people had different opinions, some people were not willing to accept his straight character and some others were proud of him. He confessed that he has been fighting against depression after coming out, and has been eating a lot to get relief. “In 2010, at the lowest point in my adult life, I was looking everywhere for relief, comfort or distraction, and I turned to food [7]”, Miller said. However, someone posted a meme on the internet, Miller was in that photo, fat and shirtless, and many people begin to laugh at him for his obesity, depression, and being gay. The discussion toward Wentworth Miller seemed controversial after his coming out, some people did not like him anymore but he also received some gay fans.

Toward Bomer's gay identity, many of his female fans' hearts were broken. People were all very surprised at him for being gay, especially knowing that he came out with his husband and his three sons. “I came out at a time when it was very risky to do so – I had a studio film that was about to premiere and a television series coming out”. Bomer recalls. “But it was more important to be my most authentic self, both for my family and for myself [8]”. Matt Bomer thought that being true to himself is more important than his fame.

3.3. The Impact of Coming Out on Their Careers

Wentworth has few resources after coming out, except for a series of Prison Break in which he was the protagonist, most of his works are only the guest performer in a few television programmes.

Bomer faced the same circumstance as Wentworth, he only performed in several films after his coming out, as a gay character like in the film band boys and normal heart, there is also speculation that Matt Bomer didn't pass the audition of Superman just because he's a gay identity.

3.4. Analysis of the Reasons for Identity Discrimination in Career

Why does this phenomenon appear? Wentworth successfully sculpted a straight man in Prison Break for five seasons and Bomer succeed in depicting a straight man in the White Collar for six seasons. They are indeed gays but they did do a great job, why just people cannot accept them being gay actors? As the first theme above, many things need to be changed.

4. Suggestions to Eliminate Occupational Discrimination against Sexual Minorities

Much efforts need to be spent on eliminating discrimination based on sexual orientation, the content below mainly divides this problem into three parts to give some feasible suggestions.

4.1. Education

Why do some people discriminate against others in working place? Because they don't regard others' actions as appropriate. They also don't have the disposition of tolerance as well as love for anyone else. They don't have wider eyesight either. In other words, they didn't receive proper education which guide them to be moderate beings. Hence, education seems of great importance. The content below will discuss how education influences discrimination phenomena and how to eliminate discrimination against LGBT people from an educational perspective.

4.1.1. The Family Level

To straight people, education in the family fundamentally forms one's basic ideology by which they judge things including what is not that "conventional". What people think and how they regard LGBT phenomena in daily lives have been shaped since their childhoods. So, if people want to change the discrimination in their lives, they will have to change the pattern some parents use to teach their children.

Family education also has a significant effect on LGBT people, one who grows up in an environment full of apathy, discrimination tends to have a higher suicidal disposition. In some anti-LGBT families, LGBT kids cannot get enough affection. Hence, it is of great importance to propagandize equal rights for sexual minorities as well as set up some LGBT helping centers in family communities that help them come out to family and protect them from some of their opposite family members [9]. People's ideologies need to be changed definitively to increase families' average acceptance of sexual minor kids.

4.1.2. The School Level

Like family education, school education is also an important part of one's ideology forming procedure. What needs people's attention is that schools are the place where many violent incident occur. Many LGBT students get bullied in school indeed, about 21% [10]. This bury the seed of timid and self-consciousness in their mind which will of course make them easier to be discriminated in working place because they are not willing to fight back. Moreover, if a school itself is anti-LGBT, the student from here are more disposed to become the discriminator in all walks of lives.

Like in some schools, LGBT people are being discriminated against a lot. Some of them cannot get scholarships, some of them are coerced to hide their sexuality and even coerced to be expelled just because they have "different" sexual orientations. Hence, complete projection which is against anti-LGBT is crucial. Some legislation needs to be promulgated to protect sexual minor students. In Brittney Griner's book *In My Skin*, some of the religious schools reveal the dark reality-they want the reputation and fame LGBT, but they refused to concede the sexual orientation equality. In their point of view, only man and woman marriage, which is like what the Bible said, is the so-called true love [11]. This directly leads to the injure in Brittney's heart and it will also increase the possibility that she will be discriminated in the future, in the working place. Some people intentionally warp the religions into the anti-LGBT tools. They claim that having different sexual orientation is a sin. Much needs to be done to change the situation. Like the pride parade in Junes, it can solidify sexual minorities' self-identifications as well as people's positive attitude toward them. There is also one

point they should understand, sexual orientation is just a choice, it has no connections with one's disposition and what they look like.

Here is what school can do to help eliminate occupational discrimination in the LGBT student's future:

1. Teachers can encourage them to strengthen their self-identification.
2. School staff need to help them cultivate confidence.
3. Schools should tell them what to do when they're insulted, encourage them not to be silent and protect their own rights.

4.2. The Social Level

Like the content above, sexual minor communities suffer from all kinds of discrimination in society, in some walks of life, especially sports and film industries. Sadly, it is hard to change, some of the reasons objectively exist, the government can try to propagate the equality notion, but the environment in some places is still abominable for sexual minor groups. It is disturbing, but still necessary for LGBT people to stay in the closet when they need to protect themselves from discrimination.

4.2.1. Social Institution

Across the world, many nations have laws about LGBT people, and some countries acknowledge their rights and show them respect. However, in some countries being gay is still the death penalty. There are many things to be done by a country's government

First, the fundamental legislation needs to be promulgated to protect LGBT people's basic living rights and educational rights as well as their right to get married and their right to individual reputation. Second, the government also needs to protect them from discrimination in school and working place. It can publish some ordinances to regulate and eliminate things like this.

4.2.2. Social Consensus

What most people think about one phenomenon is based on social consensus. Social consensus is people's common opinion, it significantly associates with ideology. The social consensus will incline the way overall ideology recognizes one question.

About what such ideology affects LGBTQIA+ rights. Here is a specific example, the California government once proclaimed Proposition 8 which is an anti-gay law. It defined marriage as the combination of a man and a woman which led to gays and lesbians losing their marriage rights. The election result was posted then, 7,001,084 people agreed with this proposition while 6,401,482 people said no. This indicated that patriarchal ideology then argued that the power of the society should be controlled by straight men. It also stopped people from having the same rights to chase love. This was an assault on LGBT people about their freedom and liberty. And this ideology is an obstacle on the road by which people move to approach an equal harmonious society.

Therefore, to change discrimination, people need to change their ideology fundamentally. Besides changing the education children receive, they can strengthen social propaganda as well, like the annual pride parade. To acknowledge they are the same human beings, to respect them genuinely deep from the heart, the overall social consensus can be changed. Thus, discrimination in working place will disappear.

5. Conclusion

From the case analysis above, there are four crucial reasons why many actors or actresses still choose to stay in the closet: losing quality acting resources, disruption to private lives, conflict in work, and excessive public opinion pressure. Coming out has some negative impacts on their careers. Many people will discriminate against them if they come out publicly because the images they build in people's minds will collapse and this is not what people want to see. The actors or actress will have to handle conflict in work, and they will receive offensive disruptions as well. In both Matt Bomer and Wentworth Miller's cases, they lose some job opportunities. Much can be done to eliminate discrimination in the film industry. First, it is to help LGBT children strengthen their confidence and change people's ideologies from the family level and school level. LGBT helping centers can be set up to help sexual minority children solve family issues and face discrimination in school to help them build up confidence and prepare for their future work life. Family members and teachers or staff in the school also need to help LGBT children and eliminate discrimination in the community and school. They should also provide education with proper ideology. Second, the government can promulgate legislation to protect LGBT people's constitutional rights and reduce discrimination directly in the film industry. Things like pride parades can turn overall social consensus into LGBT-friendly.

This paper fills up the blank in LGBT field research specialized in the film industry. It gives some suggestions to reduce discrimination in daily life. It also helps to strengthen sexual minor actors or actresses' confidence and help them compare pros and cons in coming out actions. This paper still lacks a meticulous survey of the whole film industry, more complex field research need to be done to find out the internal association between the film industry and LGBT actor or actresses.

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