

IN FOCUS

RIGHT WING WATCH

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FOR THE
AMERICAN
WAY

THE RIGHT
WING'S ANTI-
ANTI-BULLYING
STRATEGIES



BIG BULLIES UPDATE

In reaction to increased media attention paid to bullying-related youth suicides, parents, students, teachers, school officials and community activists across the nation are escalating their efforts to combat bullying in schools --including the bullying of LGBT and LGBT-perceived youth. But the effort to recognize their struggles and protect them from harm has faced a steady and unrelenting backlash from Religious Right groups who have made children and teenagers the next target of their anti-gay agenda.

Last year, we released a report, *Big Bullies: How the Religious Right is Trying to Make Schools Safe for Bullies and Dangerous for Gay Kids*, which detailed the Religious Right's anti-anti-bullying effort. Anti-gay organizations, we reported, rely on discredited anti-gay myths in their effort to stop anti-bullying programs that identify the significant and unique problems many LGBT and LGBT-perceived students

localities adopt policies that would effectively leave LGBT and LGBT-perceived students unprotected and tie the hands of schools that try to deal with the problem.

After the Religious Right's obstinate resistance to common-sense measures against bullying stunned even some conservatives, many of these anti-anti-bullying groups are now proposing their own "remedies"—remedies that would ultimately weaken endeavors to prevent bullying.

WHAT BULLYING?

There would be no need for anti-bullying policies if bullying in schools didn't exist. Many Religious Right groups deny the existence of anti-gay bullying and claim that it is merely a threat invented by duplicitous gay rights advocates who want to "infiltrate" schools.

Liberty Counsel Director of Cultural Affairs Matt Barber said there is "[no evidence](#)" that LGBT people face either



Two days before Zach was assaulted, the perpetrator posted on Facebook, "check out the definition of a faggot." But Harvey insisted the case was "baseless" and an example of "pushing homosexuality onto our kids."

— **Linda Harvey, Mission America**

face. These organizations attempt to smear the LGBT community while painting themselves as the real victims.

Last year, many conservative political organizations, including Focus on the Family, the Family Research Council, the American Family Association, Liberty Counsel and Concerned Women for America vocally opposed attempts by school districts and public officials to combat bullying based on actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity—categories typically considered along with other attributes such as race, sex, age, disability and national origin. Moreover, these groups smeared and demonized advocacy groups that collaborate with teachers and administrators in developing best practices to combat bullying, warning that anti-bullying groups would encourage everything from "homosexualizing" youth to anti-Christian persecution to pedophilia.

Religious Right organizations demanded that schools and

discrimination or violence, and Robert Newman of the California Christian Coalition [said](#) that bullying is "part of the maturational process," adding, "I hardly think that bullying is a real issue in schools." Fox News host Steve Doocy even hosted a segment called "Bullying: Crisis or Panic?" in which he [asked](#) if bullying is an "exaggerated epidemic."

WallBuilders president and Republican operative David Barton falsely claimed that "the leading pediatric association in America" opposed anti-bullying policies that cover sexual orientation. Barton [argued](#), "If you'll just let this develop naturally, they'll end up being heterosexual unless you force them to be homosexual.... If you let it run its course it's gonna turn out normal and natural, unless you guys intervene and make the unnatural stuff natural."

As it turned out, the group Barton cited was a tiny, fringe anti-gay organization. The country's actual leading pediatric

group, the American Academy of Pediatricians, [contacted Barton's group](#) and requested a retraction, which Barton [promptly refused](#).

Linda Harvey of Mission America [attacked](#) gays and lesbians for “making a fuss” and “pitching a fit” over the beating of gay fifteen-year-old Zach Huston, a Chillicothe, Ohio high school student, which was caught on tape. There was strong evidence that the beating was motivated by anti-gay hate: two days before Zach was assaulted, the perpetrator posted on Facebook, “check out the definition of a faggot.” But Harvey insisted the case was “baseless” and an example of “pushing homosexuality onto our kids.”

“There is not an epidemic of bullying for homosexual kids,” Harvey [said](#), “there is simply not, that’s going unpunished.”

When West Virginia’s state Board of Education approved an enumerated anti-bullying policy that included sexual orientation and gender identity, the head of the state’s leading Religious Right group, the West Virginia Family

Minnesota’s Anoka-Hennepin school district, which retained a “gag policy” barring any attempt to address anti-gay bias, even after a spike in teen suicides and suicide attempts. The policy was ultimately repealed after a bitter legal and public relations battle in which Religious Right activists jumped to the school district’s defense. Family Research Council president Tony Perkins [railed against](#) advocates of “homosexual special rights and special status for homosexuals” for trying to “push their radical agenda through.” Barbara Anderson of the Minnesota Family Council [suggested](#) that the school district is now promoting “disease” and even pedophilia by beginning to allow students to start Gay-Straight Alliances and likened anti-bullying programs to “[child abuse](#).”

When whitewashing doesn’t work, some anti-gay activists just try to condone bullying. That’s what Rich Swier of Tea Party Nation attempted to do in a [column](#) sent out to members nationwide, dubbing the bullying of LGBT youth a “sham” and adding that if it does take place, it is “healthy” since homosexuality, like drug abuse, “cannot be condoned”

“Pray that parents will be alerted to the dangers of the ‘Gay,’ Lesbian Straight Education Network (GLSEN) as it seeks to infiltrate our schools and the school curriculum. Pray that people will rise up and speak out against this indoctrination and recruitment of our children.”

— Concerned Women for America



Foundation, urged that the policy be reversed, [asserting](#) that it “opens up the door for sexual orientation and gender identity to be the ‘Trojan horse’ to indoctrinate children in public schools.”

Similarly, the conservative Center for Arizona Policy [objected to state legislation](#) focused on curtailing bullying — even though the bill did not even mention sexual orientation or other enumerated categories. The right-wing organization opposed the bill purely because it dealt with bullying: “There is no doubt about it; the ‘bullying’ theme is agenda-driven propaganda.” The group said it would work to block the bill simply because it was supported by leading gay rights advocates. “The irony is that groups like Equality Arizona and GLSEN have chosen this issue to bully you and me into allowing them access into our schools and to our children,” the group wrote. National media attention on bullying focused on

and must be stopped:

This is not bullying. It is peer pressure and is healthy. There are many bad behaviors such as smoking, underage drinking [sic] and drug abuse that are behaviors that cannot be condoned. Homosexuality falls into this category. Homosexuality is simply bad behavior that youth see as such and rightly pressure their peers to stop it.

SMEARING ANTI-BULLYING ACTIVISTS

In one of the most cynical strategies of the anti-anti-bullying campaign, right-wing activists attempt to paint people who work to combat youth suicide and bullying as pernicious and dangerous.

Focus on the Family analyst Candi Cushman [suggested](#) that gay rights groups have an “agenda of inserting

homosexuality promotion under the category of bullying.” Cushman [advised](#), “If we really want students to be safe we shouldn’t be allowing groups to come in and sexualize our children.”

The Family Research Council’s prayer team, led by National Prayer Director Pierre Bynum, [requested](#) that members pray for the defeat of anti-bullying legislation, alleging that such legislation would “promote harmful and sinful sexual practices among our youth” and “can only lead to God’s judgment”:

May God help us to not to [sic] “bully” anyone, but to graciously yet urgently speak the truth in love to young people who are hurting themselves with the “LGBT” lifestyle. May believers across America not be “bullied” by our government’s efforts to promote harmful and sinful sexual practices among our youth and instead determine to stand courageously against these misguided efforts which can only lead to God’s



Matt Barber of Liberty Counsel [accused](#) GLSEN and the National Education Association of “running interference for the pedophile movement” by “sexualizing these children, making them receptive to potential advances from adults,” and [depicted](#) GLSEN as a “pro-pedophile” organization that has “tacitly advocated adult-child sex.”

judgment! The American Family Association, Concerned Women for America, Citizens for Community Values, Faith 2 Action, Liberty Counsel and Mission America, along with state-based groups such as the Illinois Family Institute and Save California, are organizing a walkout on schools that allow students to organize an anti-bullying Day of Silence. The Day of Silence, led by the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN), is a way for students to show solidarity to bullied LGBT and LGBT-perceived youth and draw attention to bullying and bias in schools.

Chelsen Vicari of Concerned Women for America [said](#) it is “imperative” for parents “to take a stand against Day of Silence.” Focus on the Family’s Cushman [claimed](#) that the Day of Silence is about “indoctrination, just promoting homosexuality and transgenderism.”

“Pray that parents will be alerted to the dangers of the ‘Gay,’ Lesbian Straight Education Network (GLSEN) as it seeks to infiltrate our schools and the school curriculum,” Concerned Women for America [urged](#). “Pray that people will rise up and speak out against this indoctrination and recruitment of our children.”

Perkins of the Family Research Council [denounced the Day of Silence](#) as “a cover for the promotion of homosexuality” and endorsed a Connecticut pastor’s campaign to ban participation in the event in his school district. The American Family Association [said](#) the Day of Silence is a “destructive” plan bent on “hijacking of the classroom for political purposes,” urging parents to keep their children absent from school that day. Jerry Newcombe of Truth in Action Ministries [maintained](#) that the Day of Silence will “indoctrinate children” into “a deadly lifestyle,” and even [linked](#) supporters of the Day of Silence to Adolf Hitler.

Liberty Counsel [claimed](#) that “schools face harsh pressure from the radical LGBT movement to support and promote the Day of Silence” and its “radical sexualized agenda.” The group’s chairman Mathew Staver [said](#) the Day of Silence “is about a radical and forced agenda of homosexuality” and LC’s Barber [accused](#) GLSEN and the National Education Association of “running interference for the pedophile movement” by “sexualizing these children, making them receptive to potential advances from adults,” and [depicted](#) GLSEN as a “pro-pedophile” organization that has “tacitly advocated adult-child sex.”

Linda Harvey of Mission America [dubbed](#) the Day of Silence a “God-dishonoring day that honors sin, sinful, immoral behavior,” claiming that GLSEN uses children

as “a tool for their ungodly agenda.” Harvey even [claimed](#) that GLSEN’s actions have “traditionally been a criminal offense” and [denounced GLSEN](#) for merely believing that LGBT people exist:

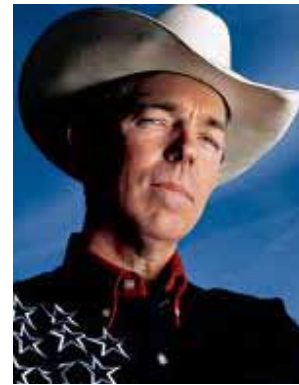
There is no proof that there’s ever anything like a gay, lesbian or bisexual or transgendered child, or teen or human. One of the other things you’re gonna see as I mentioned is a big campaign GLSEN’s gonna roll out this year calling for ‘respect.’ Respect! Not just for people, but for the homosexual lifestyle. The PR campaign to hold up gay as a good thing: the lifestyle, not the person, because there are no such humans.

Laurie Higgins of the Illinois Family Institute [encouraged](#) teachers to sabotage the Day of Silence by “plan[ning] activities that involve student communications so students are not allowed to do this.”

Anti-gay activists are even blaming gay rights advocates for causing teen suicides.

“Unless you’re willing to monitor what’s going on in that classroom, I guarantee you they are getting homosexual indoctrination.”

“Historian” David Barton



Longtime Religious Right activist Gordon Klingenschmitt said that Sen. Al Franken’s Student Non-Discrimination Act, which he labeled the “Homosexual Classrooms Act,” is a surreptitious attempt at “[homosexualizing kids](#),” [insisting](#), “by spreading even more lies to more teens, Franken is ultimately causing more suicides.”

“Teen suicide is tragic enough without Senator Franken recruiting more kids into homosexuality, which causes depression, self-hatred, self-rejection and self-murder,” Klingenschmitt wrote. “Franken’s plan will result in more teen suicides, not less.”

Anti-gay writer and activist Michael Brown [suggested](#) that gay rights advocates are using LGBT youth who commit suicide as “pawns” in a ploy to silence the anti-gay movement:

So for me what is so concerning is these kids become pawns in a larger political agenda because it’s a whole lot harder to look at a kid and a family where there’s a suicide, it’s a whole lot harder to look at that and hold to our convictions than it is to look at say two forty year old men that want to be married.

Brown also [alleged](#) that “gay activism” was responsible for the death of Lawrence King, a fifteen-year-old gay California student who was murdered in his school. Randy Thomasson of Save California similarly [blamed](#) “social engineering” and “indoctrination” under the guise of anti-bullying efforts for King’s death. Thomasson went so far as to say that King’s “parading around in makeup and high heels” and his ultimate murder added up to “two wrongs.”

Evangelical activist Bill Keller [said](#) that fifteen-year-old Jamie Hubley’s suicide was a result of his “destructive” sexual orientation and “brainwashing” by activists who “glorify this deviant, unnatural, and unhealthy choice of sexual activity.” He also [insisted](#) that “Anderson Cooper,

Rachel Maddow, Ellen DeGeneres, the media, and gutless pastors are guilty for the death of Rutgers student Tyler Clementi,” the eighteen-year-old gay college student who committed suicide.

Greg Quinlan of Parents and Friends of Gays and Ex-Gays (PFOX) and the New Jersey Family Policy Council [maintained](#) that gays and lesbians are obsessed with “sexual cannibalism.” “It’s an agenda,” he said. “We’re making martyrs out of kids that we’re recruiting to behave as homosexuals when no one is born that way, and that’s the problem and that’s the issue.”

Another self-proclaimed “ex-gay” activist insisted that Dan Savage, the founder of the It Gets Better Project, “[should be arrested](#)” because “homosexual kids are still killing

themselves after believing his message.”

The American Family Association launched a boycott of Old Navy after the clothing company began selling shirts that benefited the It Gets Better Project. AFA's Buster Wilson [argued](#) that “when you support [Old Navy] you are supporting what God calls an abomination to Him” by aiding “the promotion of the gay lifestyle.” Christian Anti-Defamation Coalition president Gary Cass [attacked](#) Old Navy for engaging in “a very immoral and very deadly topic,” charging the company with endorsing a “complete rebellion against God.” Cass even launched a series called, “[It Doesn't Get Better](#),” contending that the It Gets Better campaign hides the “many pathologies associated with homosexual behavior” and that life for homosexuals “actually gets worse.”

THE GLEE CONSPIRACY

The TV show “Glee,” which regularly addresses issues of sexuality and bullying, is a frequent and prominent target of the anti-anti-bullying movement.

Anti-gay activist Peter LaBarbera claimed that the program is “promoting homosexuality” and “promoting

perversion to boys.” Mission America's Harvey accused “Glee” of employing “[demonic manipulation](#).” Televangelist James Robison [claimed](#) “Glee” was under the control of “the Enemy” and “principalities and powers in the realm of darkness and deception.” A pastor affiliated with the National Organization for Marriage [said](#) the show's “two little effeminates” are promoting the “wicked, perverse lifestyle” of homosexuality.

Media Research Council president Brent Bozell dubbed “Glee” “[gay propaganda](#),” and MRC's Director of Media Analysis, Tim Graham, in an interview with an anti-gay radio show, [maintained](#) that Glee is “promoting the gay lifestyle” while excluding the “the idea that someone can change, that someone can choose their sexuality.”

To top it off, Liberty Counsel's Barber [insisted](#) that Glee is promulgating “social engineering” and “desensitizing” children to “sexually immoral behaviors” through “radical homosexual promotion that is nothing but pure indoctrination on television masquerading as entertainment.”

The American Family Association and its affiliate, One Million Moms, even organized a [campaign](#) to pressure



companies to pull their advertisers from Glee so as not to promote “deviant sexuality” and its “hidden agenda.”

LOOPHOLES FOR BULLIES

Kentucky’s GOP-controlled House [rejected](#) an enumerated anti-bullying bill that “would require schools to have a code of conduct that bans bullying and harassment motivated by a student’s race, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity or learning disabilities” because Republicans took exception to the inclusion of sexual orientation and gender identity. The Family Foundation of Kentucky actively lobbied against the legislation, [saying](#) it would “silence students with traditional or religious views” by making them “second class citizens.”

In Michigan, anti-gay activists were initially successful in attaching a Republican-backed amendment to a bullying prevention bill that created an exception, dubbed a “[license to bully](#),” for bullying grounded on “[moral conviction](#).” The amendment was [hailed](#) by the American Family Association’s Michigan chapter president and U.S. Senate candidate Gary Glenn, who said it would prevent the

contribute to an [atmosphere of anti-gay exclusion and bias in schools](#).

On Tuesday, April 17, 2011 Tennessee’s House Education Committee [approved](#) the “don’t say gay” bill, which along with the “license to bully” measures provide Religious Right groups a template to weaken and oppose anti-bullying bills throughout the country.

FACING THE PROBLEM

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students, and those perceived to be LGBT, encounter unique problems at school. LGBT youth are often not open about their sexual orientation to their families or friends, who are often an important support network for young people who are bullied. In many cases these children even face hostility from their families, other students, and school officials because of their sexual orientation.

The bullying of LGBT students has become a full-scale crisis: the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network’s 2009 [National School Climate Survey](#) found that close to

The Religious Right’s campaign against bullying utilizes an upside-down version of reality where the bullied are the bullies.

establishment of “special protection under law expressly on the basis of engaging in homosexual behavior.” AFA Michigan also [promoted](#) a Linda Harvey column [attacking](#) anti-bullying programs as “a carte blanche for sexual-deviance promotion.” Ultimately, the “license to bully” amendment was [removed from the final version of the bill](#), but an amendment to strengthen the bill by including enumerated categories also [failed](#).

The “license to bully” idea moved on to Tennessee, where a Religious Right group, the Family Action Council of Tennessee, [pushed](#) a [similar bill](#) “that would give students permission to harass or bully their classmates when expressing religious or political views.” One Republican state legislator [voiced his support for the bill](#) by arguing that the suicide of Jacob Rogers, an openly gay fifteen-year-old Tennessee student, which followed [relentless bullying](#), could “have had more to do with his own proclivities and behavior than anything to do with schoolmate bullies.”

Another bill in Tennessee, widely known as the “don’t say gay” bill, would [prevent](#) the mere mention of homosexuality by teachers, counselors and administrators and effectively

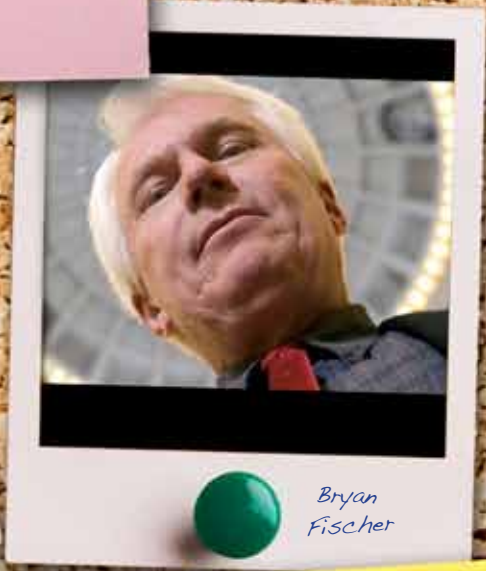
85% of LGBT students reported harassment because of their sexual orientation or gender identity, and nearly 20% reported “being physically assaulted at school in the past year because of their sexual orientation.” GLSEN found that peers and school officials frequently dismiss or mistreat LGBT youth who seek out help. According to [GLSEN](#), more than six in ten LGBT students “reported that they felt unsafe in school because of their sexual orientation,” and LGBT youth were far more likely than other students to miss class or school “because of safety concerns.” Not only does bullying damage academic and social prospects and emotional wellbeing, it has also contributed to dramatically higher rates of homelessness and suicide among gay and lesbian youth.

The Suicide Prevention Resource Center [reported](#) in 2008 that lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth “are nearly one and a half to three times more likely to have reported suicidal ideation” and “nearly one and a half to seven times more likely than non-LGBT youth to have reported attempting suicide.”

**THE
INDOCTRINATION
MYTH**



Candi
Cushman



Bryan
Fischer

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Anti-bullying programs are "homosexuality lessons."
—Candi Cushman

"Homosexuals cannot reproduce, so they have to recruit; it's the only way to swell their numbers."
—Bryan Fischer

The "radical homosexual lobby has done a masterful job of infiltrating our government schools to gain control of the minds of America's youth."
—Concerned Women for America



On a bullying prevention bill: "Its intent is to create special categories and special rights."
—The Liberty Institute



TONY PERKINS

**THE 'SPECIAL
RIGHTS'
SMEAR**

Anti-bullying programs create "inequity" by "promoting homosexuality."
—Tony Perkins

Anti-bullying legislation will "grant special rights and protect homosexuality."
—Texas Education Agency



RIGHT-WING ANTI- LIES

PLAYING THE VICTIM



Matt
Barber



Tom
McClusky

Anti-bullying programs are an "Alinsky-style, homo-fascist tactic to stifle any dissent."
—Matt Barber

Claimed that President Obama's efforts on preventing bullying push religious students "in the closet."
—Tom McClusky



Linda
HARVEY

BLAMING THE VICTIMS

Gay youth commit suicide because they intuitively know what they are doing is "immoral."
—Matt Barber

LGBT students feel "utterly hopeless" after undergoing a process of "cruel sexual manipulation."
—Linda Harvey

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“It would be difficult to overstate the impact of stigma and discrimination against LGBT individuals in the United States,” the researchers said, adding that “stigma and discrimination are directly tied to risk factors for suicide.”

But Religious Right groups demand that schools deliberately ignore the harassment of gay and gay-perceived students, and believe schools should pay no attention to anti-gay bullying when formulating bullying reduction plans. This resistance to building an amicable and nonthreatening environment for LGBT youth in schools has its origins in right-wing conspiracies about the gay community and the education system.

THE INDOCTRINATION MYTH

The crux of right-wing opposition to comprehensive bullying prevention programs is that by addressing bullying directed towards gay and gay-perceived students, schools may engage

in “homosexual indoctrination.” While modern scientific research and reports from the American Psychological Association confirm that sexual orientation is not a choice, anti-gay activists have a long record of arguing that people, especially youth, become gay as a result of “recruitment.”

During her notorious campaign in the late 1970s to overturn anti-discrimination ordinances and ban gay couples from adopting children, Anita Bryant [said](#), “Since homosexuals cannot reproduce, they must recruit and freshen their ranks.” In 2001, James Dobson, founder of Focus on the Family, warned of the “[national homosexualization of schools](#),” and two years later the Traditional Values Coalition’s Louis Sheldon [claimed](#) that “homosexual militants are pushing for aggressive recruitment programs in public schools.”

Such views have changed little in the contemporary Religious Right as the movement’s major leaders continue to parrot such false claims. Indeed, this indoctrination myth is at the center of the Religious Right’s opposition to anti-bullying efforts.

Bryan Fischer, the American Family Association’s Director of Issues Analysis, in October [argued](#) that “homosexuals cannot reproduce, so they have to recruit; it’s the only way to swell their numbers.” Tom Minnery, the head of Focus on the Family’s political arm CitizenLink, [said](#) the passage of California’s Proposition 8 “helps protect millions of children from radical indoctrination in the homosexual lifestyle.”

Focus on the Family founded the misleadingly named True Tolerance campaign, led by Candi Cushman, the group’s education analyst, to fight anti-bullying programs and safe schools initiatives across the country. Cushman dubbed such programs “[homosexuality lessons](#),” which she blamed on “activist groups who want to promote homosexuality to kids” in order to “capture the hearts and minds of our children at their earliest stages.” Cushman [labeled](#) efforts to reduce anti-gay bigotry and harassment on school sports

teams as “radical policies and teachings that fall in line with homosexual and transgender political activist goals.” When the White House convened a summit to address the problem of bullying in schools, Focus on the Family immediately criticized the gathering, claiming it would “[promote pro-homosexual curriculum](#).”

A staffer for Focus’ California branch, the California Family

Council, denounced the “[homosexual message](#)” of anti-bullying programs and dismissed the “gay activists in California [who] have been making a big to-do about ‘bullying’ because of sexual orientation.” Focus on the Family is even working with the far-right [Alliance Defense Fund](#) on legal plans to block “efforts to indoctrinate our society into supporting homosexual behavior.”

But Focus on the Family is far from the only group promoting the indoctrination myth. The Family Research Council is a major propagator of the falsehood that bullying prevention initiatives are attempts by gay rights activists to “recruit” students, and [lobbies states to pass laws](#) preventing students from joining Gay-Straight Alliance clubs. Peter Sprigg, FRC’s senior fellow of public policy, [authored](#)

An increasing number of conservative leaders and organizations have fiercely opposed anti-bullying programs for the sole reason that such programs identify and attempt to combat the widespread bullying of LGBT youth.

[a booklet](#) on how the “pro-homosexual movement” is “indoctrinating impressionable school children” through safe schools initiatives and anti-discrimination rules. He regularly criticizes organizations like the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN), which helps formulate safe schools programs, for allegedly trying to “[promote a homosexual agenda in schools.](#)”

Like the FRC, the American Family Association (AFA) uses the indoctrination myth when lobbying lawmakers to oppose anti-bullying bills. In Kentucky, the AFA called on legislators to vote against bullying prevention legislation, [declaring](#), “The intent of this bill is re-education and indoctrination.” Gary Glenn, the head of AFA’s Michigan chapter, described to the rabidly anti-gay extremist Peter LaBarbera of Americans For Truth About Homosexuality his group’s [strategy to oppose anti-bullying legislation](#): “On the bullying issue, the Republicans were floundering in the Michigan legislature as to how to stop this, we just simply framed it a different way” and developed the message that “homosexual activists are using the bullying issue, as you indicated, as a “Trojan Horse.”

Not to be outdone, Concerned Women for America [claimed](#) that the “radical homosexual lobby has done a masterful job of infiltrating our government schools to gain control of the minds of America’s youth. Their propaganda tactics are time-tested.” The group, which [says](#) that “homosexual acts are unhealthy” and “like smoking, alcohol, and drug abuse, they should be discouraged,” argues that acknowledgment of sexual orientation in anti-discrimination codes leads to the

“Homosexuals cannot reproduce, so they have to recruit; it’s the only way to swell their numbers.”

Bryan Fischer, American Family Association



“[indoctrination of very young children.](#)”

The Protect Kids Foundation, a California-based group, [suggested](#) that gay rights activists are “focused on radically transforming society by using our children as pawns for social change,” and when “radicals sympathetic to the LGBT agenda have taken over school boards, the indoctrination is overt and aggressive.” “Since directly promoting homosexual lifestyles to children is too controversial,” the group says, “LGBT activists hide their agenda behind the ‘safe schools’ and ‘anti-bullying’ curricula.”

Religious Right commentators are also broadcasting the indoctrination myth. David Barton is a self-proclaimed historian and prominent Religious Right figure who Glenn Beck has [called](#) “the most important man in America today.” On his radio show, Barton [derided bullying prevention programs](#), saying:

Unless you’re willing to monitor what’s going on in that classroom, I guarantee you they are getting homosexual indoctrination. I don’t care whether you’re in a rural area or not, because this is so much a part of textbooks, so much a part of curricular stuff, so much a part of what goes on with other kids.

Linda Harvey, a radio personality who leads the organization Mission America, frequently

condemns the “[brainwashing of young people](#)” and asserts that President Obama and gay rights advocates are “[hiding a depraved agenda behind the bullying issue.](#)” Harvey is a noted supporter of discredited “reparative therapy” for

“Homosexual militants are pushing for aggressive recruitment programs in public schools.”

**Louis Sheldon,
Traditional Values Coalition**

gays and lesbians. She [believes](#) “young people who have homosexual feelings are really in need of heterosexual friends” and calls on parents to “separate your child” from their gay and lesbian friends.

THE “SPECIAL RIGHTS” SMEAR

Just as dangerous as the indoctrination myth is the false claim that anti-bullying programs are schemes to give LGBT youth “special rights” over their peers.

Religious Right groups falsely describe measures from [workplace protections](#) to [health insurance benefits](#) for gays and lesbians as “special rights,” even though they simply attempt to end discriminatory policies. Now, the Right-Wing is deploying the same illogical argument against bullying prevention efforts.

Most bullying prevention programs consider a variety of reasons for bias and harassment in school; for example, discrimination due to a student’s race, age, gender, religion, or physical and mental abilities. When Religious Right activists deride “special rights” or “special protections,” they

According to Focus on the Family’s Candi Cushman, addressing anti-gay bullying will ultimately lead to “reverse discrimination”

try to make gay students appear more powerful than others, including their bullies. The Religious Right’s real objective is to drive teachers, school officials and policymakers to intentionally ignore the problem of bullying against gay and gay-perceived students and create or maintain a policy of inaction.

Focus on the Family’s Cushman [slammed](#) anti-bullying policies as “policies that single out certain characteristics for special protections,” calling them “counterproductive.” According to Cushman, addressing anti-gay bullying will ultimately lead to “[reverse discrimination](#)”:

Listing certain categories creates a system ripe for reverse discrimination, sending the message that certain characteristics are more worthy of protection than others. Instead of bringing more peace and unity, this can politicize the school environment and introduce divisiveness among different groups of students and parents.

Why not emphasize instead the things we have in common as Americans? For example, we can unite around the teachings of our Founding Fathers—in particular, the principle that all men are created equal and that they are endowed with unalienable rights.

Tony Perkins, president of the Family Research Council, [alleged](#) that safe schools initiatives create “inequity” by “promoting homosexuality,” and Sprigg of the FRC acknowledged that while such programs recognize many characteristics that play a role in bullying, he only finds “sexual orientation” to be a problematic “special protection.” Writes Sprigg in [Homosexuality in Your School](#): “singling out ‘sexual orientation’ for special protection (along with the usual categories of ‘race, color, national origin, sex, and disability’) is illogical. The latter qualities are usually inborn, involuntary, immutable, and innocuous—none of which is true of homosexual behavior, despite the claims of its advocates.”

Religious Right groups consistently employ such rhetoric while campaigning against anti-bullying laws. The Liberty Institute, a far-right Texas organization, blasted a state



bullying prevention bill, [saying](#), “It’s about gay rights. Its intent is to create special categories and special rights.” The Texas Eagle Forum similarly [stated](#) that anti-bullying legislation would “grant special rights and protections to homosexuals.” In Kentucky, the AFA [opposed](#) a bullying prevention bill, claiming that “the homosexual movement” was trying to get the government to “recognize them as a special group with special protections.”

The erroneous “special rights” rhetoric is all about trying to make some of the most vulnerable, marginalized and victimized students appear to be repressing others, primarily, the Religious Right.

PLAYING THE VICTIM

The Religious Right’s campaign against bullying utilizes an upside-down version of reality where the bullied are the bullies. Just as right-wing activists [falsely predicted](#) that [hate crimes laws](#) would lead to the [arrest, prosecution](#) and



When the White House convened a summit to address the problem of bullying in schools, Focus on the Family said it would “promote pro-homosexual curriculum.”

[imprisonment](#) of people of faith and the [criminalization of religion](#), now they say that anti-bullying programs will force religious students out of schools.

Tom McClusky, FRC’s Vice President of Government Affairs, audaciously claimed that President Obama’s efforts on preventing bullying push religious students “[in the closet](#),” saying the President’s efforts will lead to “bullying by the federal government and by a homosexual agenda that seeks to make children hide their Christianity and their religion in the closet and to silence those who would speak out against what they don’t believe.” Cushman of Focus on the Family even [implied](#) that groups like GLSEN want school sports teams to “ban athletes using their freedom of speech to voluntarily share the Gospel with those who disagree with their viewpoint.”

Matt Barber, Liberty Counsel’s Director of Cultural Affairs, who is also an Associate Dean of the Liberty University School of Law, said that anti-bullying programs are an “[Alinsky-style, homo-fascist tactic](#) to stifle any dissent.” Shawn Akers, the Public Policy Analyst for Liberty Counsel and a professor at Liberty University, agreed, and called bullying prevention efforts “a form of indoctrination and reeducation that smacks of socialist and communist countries.”

Brian Camenker, the head of the anti-gay group MassResistance, said on David Barton’s radio show that “homosexual activists” represent “[a very aggressive, fascist type of movement](#) and these guys define the term ‘bullies.’” The Protect Kids Foundation even argued that anti-bullying efforts will “[homosexualize](#)” children and “trample” on the civil rights of heterosexuals:

“Homosexual activists” represent “a very aggressive, fascist type of movement and these guys define the term ‘bullies.’”

**Brian Camenker,
MassResistance**

The civil rights issue actually runs in favor of the estimated 96% of the population who are not homosexual. Having LGBT activists homosexualize their children will trample upon their civil rights. For the first time in our history, America is faced with a powerful movement that defines its alleged “rights” in terms of the deprivation of the fundamental rights of others. As a result, the homosexual movement is depriving other Americans of civil liberties guaranteed by the Bill of Rights.

After Illinois Gov. Pat Quinn signed a law that addressed bullying based on “race, color, religion, sex, national origin, ancestry, age, marital status, physical or mental disability, military status, sexual orientation, [and] gender-related identity or expression,” the Illinois Family Institute cried that the inclusion of ‘sexual orientation’ and ‘gender identity’ in anti-bullying programs will allow “[homosexualists to use them as cultural battering rams](#) to destroy First Amendment speech and religious protections” in order to “[censor the expression of traditional moral beliefs and ultimately eradicate them.](#)”

When the Religious Right isn’t trying to distort reality by claiming that anti-bullying programs are meant to hurt instead of help students, they allege that supporters of gay rights and gay students themselves are responsible for bullying and anti-gay violence.

BLAMING THE VICTIMS

In one of the crudest aspects of the Religious Right’s desperate efforts to block schools from putting anti-bullying programs in place, many right-wing activists are suggesting that the LGBT community should be blamed



for bullying. Their stigmatizing and demonizing rhetoric only exacerbates problems by making bullies feel justified when they torment their gay peers while pushing gay youth on a path of shame, depression, and self-hatred.

AFA's Bryan Fischer blamed LGBT suicides on gays and lesbians who allegedly "[recruit](#)" students through "[brainwashing](#)" in school. "I'm suggesting that adults that pressure these students to declare a disordered sexual preference when they are too young to know better, that they share some culpability for those who take their life," Fischer [explained](#), "it would be just like an adult encouraging a young student to experiment with injection drug abuse."

Barber of Liberty Counsel maintained that gay youth commit suicide because they intuitively know what they are doing is "immoral." [Barber claimed](#):

Kids who are engaging in homosexual behavior often look inward and know that what they are doing is unnatural, is wrong, is immoral, and so they become depressed and the instances of suicide can rise.

homosexual or that they are born that way, and then these kids are locked into a lifestyle with their choices limited, and many times this can be disastrous to them as they get into the behavior which leads to disease and death in some cases."

Linda Harvey of Mission America [said](#) that LGBT students feel "utterly hopeless" after undergoing a process of "cruel sexual manipulation." "As the supporters of homosexuality nudge kids into a known risky behavior," Harvey said, "they simultaneously suppress, marginalize or mischaracterize traditional views that discourage homosexuality."

Proponents of [discredited](#) ex-gay "[reparative](#)" therapy believe that rather than addressing anti-gay bullying, schools and society should stop tolerating and affirming LGBT students and instead encourage them to alter their sexual orientation.

Focus on the Family's True Tolerance campaign launched what it calls a "[Day of Dialogue](#)" to challenge GLSEN's April 15 "Day of Silence," an existing program designed

The Family Research Council said the gay rights community is to blame for cases of suicide among gay teenagers, rather than the people who condemn and attack them.



FRC's Perkins [wrote in the Washington Post](#) that gay rights groups are "exploiting [youth suicide] tragedies to push their agenda." He said that the gay rights community is to blame for cases of suicide among gay teenagers, rather than the people who condemn and attack them:

Some homosexuals may recognize intuitively that their same-sex attractions are abnormal—yet they have been told by the homosexual movement, and their allies in the media and the educational establishment, that they are 'born gay' and can never change. This—and not society's disapproval—may create a sense of despair that can lead to suicide.

Like Perkins, Barb Anderson of the Minnesota Family Council [suggested](#) that safe school organizations such as GLSEN "are creating an environment where these children that are sexually confused suddenly become affirmed as a

to allow students to bring awareness to the issue of bullying targeting gay and lesbian students. On the "Day of Dialogue," taking place on April 18, Focus encourages high school and college students to speak to their peers about their opposition to gay rights. According to Jim Daly, head of Focus on the Family, the Day of Dialogue is needed because students who oppose gay rights face a "[discouraging](#)" environment and "one-sided" views on sexual orientation.

The Day of Dialogue is the successor to the "[Day of Truth](#)," which was founded by the Alliance Defense Fund and then led by the "ex-gay" ministry Exodus International. One of the Day of Dialogue's top coordinators is Jeff Johnston, a prominent "ex-gay" activist and [past director of Exodus](#), who sees the Day of Dialogue as an opportunity to encourage students to help those who are "[messed up](#)

[sexually](#)” and for gay students to take “[the road out of homosexuality](#).”

CONCLUSION

Identifying, addressing, and tackling the problem of anti-gay bullying is an essential part of any bullying prevention program. The Religious Right’s staunch opposition to comprehensive anti-bullying programs is symptomatic of the movement’s opposition to any recognition of the rights and dignity of LGBT people. The movement’s efforts to block anti-bullying programs by perpetuating groundless myths of indoctrination, special rights, and reparative therapy should be rejected by school officials and other policymakers.

Ignoring the clear signs of bullying directed towards gay and gay-perceived students does more than perpetuate the problem and lend undeserved credibility to Religious Right attacks on LGBT people and their allies. It undermines the creation of safe and welcoming schools and puts the well-being and the very lives of American students at risk.



The Right Wing's **Anti-Anti-Bullying** Strategies

"LET'S BE CLEAR ABOUT WHAT THIS IS, THIS IS A GOD-DISHONORING DAY THAT HONORS SIN, SINFUL, IMMORAL BEHAVIOR THAT MOST PARENTS DON'T WANT THEIR CHILDREN INVOLVED IN." — *Linda Harvey (Mission America) on the Day of Silence*

"THEY HAVE SOMETHING CALLED THE DAY OF SILENCE. NOW THEY CHOSE APRIL 20 OF ALL DAYS TO BE THE DAY OF SILENCE, I LOOKED THAT UP, I WAS LIKE, 'ISN'T THAT ADOLF HITLER'S BIRTHDAY?' I LOOKED IT UP AND SURE ENOUGH IT IS ADOLF HITLER'S BIRTHDAY. I DON'T THINK THERE'S A LINK THERE BUT HOW IRONIC." — *Jerry Newcombe (Truth in Action Ministries) on Day of Silence*

"WE SHOULDN'T JUST SURRENDER OUR SCHOOLS TO LEFT-WING, CASUAL-SEX ACTIVIST GROUPS." — *Candi Cushman (Focus on the Family)*

"THIS IS NOT ABOUT TOLERATING ANY ISSUE OR PERSON, IT IS ABOUT A RADICAL AND FORCED AGENDA OF HOMOSEXUALITY THAT THESE [DAYS] OF SILENCE ARE PROMOTING." — *Mathew Staver (Liberty Counsel)*

"WE CANNOT ALLOW THESE PROGRAMS LIKE THE DAY OF SILENCE TO COME INTO OUR SCHOOLS AS A COVER FOR THE PROMOTION OF HOMOSEXUALITY."
— *Tony Perkins (Family Research Council)*

"WHY IN THE WORLD WOULD YOU LET TWO WRONGS TO BE DONE? MURDER IS WRONG, BUT ALLOWING REVERSE HARASSMENT TO BE DONE AND ALLOWING TEACHERS TO ACTUALLY DRESS UP BOYS AS GIRLS, THIS IS CAUSING TENSION."
— *Randy Thomasson (Save California) on murder of Lawrence King*

"WHAT'S HAPPENING IS THEY'RE USING THIS SPECTER OF SOME KIND OF NOTION OF 'MASS VIOLENCE' COMMITTED AGAINST HOMOSEXUALS, THEY DO THE SAME THING HERE IN THE UNITED STATES, 'MASS DISCRIMINATION,' SOMETHING WHERE THERE IS NO EVIDENCE OF COURSE AGAINST PEOPLE WHO ARE ENGAGED IN THESE BEHAVIORS."
— *Matt Barber (Liberty Counsel)*