

## The Topic of LGBT in the Youth Media of the United States and Russia

Anastasiia Lyzhenkova

Saint Petersburg State University

School of Journalism and Mass Communications

St. Petersburg, 199004, Russia

### Abstract

Currently, much attention is paid to sexuality education, an important topic for teenagers and young adults is the issue of gender identity. Many young people are looking for answers on the Internet and in the media. Therefore, in many magazines for the youth audience there are sections specifically about the problems and life of the LGBTQ+ community. The purpose of the study: to identify features and similarities in the coverage of the LGBTQ+ topic in publications for young girls in Russia and the United States. The empirical base was publications on the websites of the magazines *ELLE Girl* (Russia) and *Seventeen* (USA). The study identified the key forms and features of the presentation of materials on the topic of the LGBT community.

*Key words:* LGBTQ+, media, media studies, Russia, USA.

### 1. Introduction

Currently, much attention is paid to sexuality education, an important topic for teenagers and young adults is the issue of gender identity. Many young people are looking for answers on the Internet and in the media. Therefore, in many magazines for the youth audience there are sections specifically about the problems and life of the LGBTQ+ community. However, in the scientific community, the number of studies of the forms of presentation, as well as the specifics of topics and materials on the interaction of media for teenagers with LGBT.

E. Turevskaya in the book *Age Psychology* says that adolescence is characterized by cardinal changes in the way of thinking and psychology that occur against the background of biological changes. This period in life is the transition from the dependent positions of the child to the independence of the adult. At this moment, teenagers are most interested in communicating with their peers, parents and teachers lose their authority. Therefore, the media for teenagers, first of all, faces the task not to frighten off their reader, not to become a new mentor, but to turn into a friend who unobtrusively and in a friendly manner explains to the reader what he can no longer ask the elders.

### 2. Methodological Framework

The purpose of the study: to identify features and similarities in the coverage of the LGBTQ+ topic in publications for young girls in Russia and the United States. The empirical base was publications on the websites of the magazines *ELLE Girl* (Russia) and *Seventeen* (USA). Timeline of the study from June 2015 to February 2022.

A search was made for the following keywords: LGBT, coming out, homosexuality. Due to this, texts dedicated to LGBTQ+ were selected. Also, a content analysis was carried out, during which key topics and methods of influencing the audience in publications on the topic of LGBTQ+ were identified.

As part of the study, a focus group was conducted, which consisted of ten girls aged 19 to 21, who determined the age audience of magazines based on the proposed topics of the texts. The focus group showed that the audience of *ELLE Girl* can be girls from 14 to 20 years old, the audience of *Seventeen* can be young girls of 14-18 years old.

### 3. Research results

The editors of *ELLE Girl* give the following definition to this media: "The magazine for girls ElleGirl.ru is your guide to the world of fashion, beauty and drive. If you are interested in current wardrobe, fashionable make-up, movie news, show business, the life of stars, personal relationships and their prospects – your virtual magazine for girls is always at hand" (Translation done by us). The magazine was chosen as the most popular media for teenagers in Russia. Despite the fact that the editors position the publication as a "magazine for girls", the site currently has a *#Boys* section with tips for young guys.

The focus group showed that the readership can be girls from 14 to 20 years old. At the same time, the publication itself has an age limit of 16+.

*Seventeen* magazine positions itself as: «As a voice of Gen Z, *Seventeen* reaches an audience of 21M during their most pivotal teenage years». Although the site does not provide precise information about the age of the audience, the results of the focus group showed that the average age of the audience could be 14-18 years old.

The main difficulty in covering the topic of the LGBT community by the Russian-language media is that Russian legislation prohibits the promotion of homosexual relations in the media: “CAO RF Article 6.21. Promotion of non-traditional sexual relations among minors”. The inaccurate wording of the article makes it difficult to create and disseminate journalistic texts that in any way affect the topic of LGBT. Especially in magazines aimed at youth and teenage audiences. Despite this, *ELLE Girl* regularly publishes LGBTQ+ related content.

The first publication on the topic of the LGBT community in *ELLE Girl* was made in 2015. In *Seventeen* – 2014.

In *ELLE Girl*, there are three keywords for marking texts on this topic: LGBT, coming out and homosexuality. Note that these keywords are determined directly by the publication. Texts on this topic are published in sections: *#Fandom* (section about celebrities, TV shows and movies), *#Love* (section about love, friendship and family relationships), *#Trendy* (news from the trend area) and *#Tests*. Table 1 shows the number of keywords used in certain sections over the entire existence of the media.

Table 1: keywords for LGBTQ+ content

Section	Keywords		
	LGBT (total 63)	Coming out (total 17)	Homosexuality (total 24)
<i>#Fandom</i>	36 out of 63	16 out of 17	13 out of 24
<i>#Love</i>	5 out of 63	1 out of 17	6 out of 24
<i>#Trendy</i>	21 out of 63		4 out of 24
<i>#Tests</i>	1 out of 63		1 out of 24

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Most of the publications are news in nature - news and news articles - and are posted in the *#Fandom* and *#Trendy* sections. At the same time, the texts can be divided according to the tone of presentation into positive (neutral) and negative.

Negatively colored materials include materials that indirectly demonstrate the negative consequences of involvement in the LGBT community. For example, in the text under the heading “Teen Wolf’s Colton Haynes Explains Why He Rarely Acts in Movies and TV Shows” the actor’s statement that his career went into decline after his coming out is highlighted: “There are almost no jobs left. When I was in the closet, I got the roles of regular guys, and they came out pretty good for me. Now the only offers I get are gay characters, which are few and far between” – that is, negative consequences.

The positive and negative attitude of the authors to the topic of the text reflects the use of emoji. For example, in the news about the series based on the Harry Potter universe: “Transgender as Lily Potter and Other Surprises From the Creators of the New Series About Harry Potter 🍌” has a stylistically neutral color, but the presence of a large number of emoji forms in the reader a certain attitude towards the phenomenon described in the text.

However, there is no direct condemnation of the LGBT community in this publication; on the contrary, it is clear that the editors are supporters of tolerant views. Most of the publications are entertainment news, one way or another related to the LGBT community. The headlines will be typical: “Kim So Hyun on 'My': 'I Wanted to Do a Project about Gay People 🍌” и “Now We Know Loki’s Sexual Orientation! 🍌”.

Most of the publications are somehow related to celebrities: media people comment on something or report something about them. In total, there are 29 texts about LGBT celebrities on the site, of which 6 are about movie news (“And DC to the Same Place: Transgender Actress to Co-Star in 'Batgirl' 🍌”), 4 about artists coming out (“Demi Lovato Admits She’s Not Attracted to Men Anymore”),

9 headlines about what celebrities think about LGBT (“What Danya Milokhin thinks about the attacks on his dress-suit and LGBT propaganda □”) and 10 texts about LGBT celebrities (“Gossip Girl Luna: Everything You Need to Know About Transgender Actress Zion Moreno”).

In texts about celebrities, interactive polls are often made to find out the opinion of the audience. It is noteworthy that the audience reacts ambiguously to surveys related to LGBT topics. For example, in the text in the text under the heading: “Not ‘She’, But ‘They’: Demi Lovato no Longer Identifies Herself as Either Female or Male” there is a poll “Do you feel comfortable using the pronoun ‘they’ in relation to one person?”, where 78% of those who voted answered in the negative. Of course, this survey cannot be considered uncompromising because: firstly, we do not see how many people took part in the survey, and secondly, we do not see how many people read the text and responded to the question or did not respond. However, it is significant that active readers have not yet adopted the new trends.

Things are different with the reader surveys at *Seventeen*, where the surveys are offered in articles with tips and answers on sensitive topics. For example, in the text “What is Asexuality?”. Here the audience answers the question «Do you think you might be asexual?». 86% of readers answered positively.

In *Seventeen*, the editors don't show search keywords, but a site search for "LGBT" shows 196 all-time texts. In this media, all materials on LGBT topics are mainly placed in the *HERE* section, all materials on this topic are marked “BEING AN LGBTQ TEEN”. The main page of the section displays 44 materials of which: 24 texts about celebrities, 10 articles answering the “questions” of readers, and 11 texts about the culture of the community (cinema, fashion, etc.).

As in *ELLE Girl* magazine, most of the material is in the form of news and is somehow related to celebrities. Most often, texts are published about the coming-outs of certain public figures. Typical headings would be: «12 Celebrities Who Have Come Out as Bisexual», «Elliot Page is Kicking Off Summer by Showing Off His Abs in “Trans BB's First Swim Trunks” Photos» и «Demi Lovato Opens Up About Revealing to Their Parents that They're Bisexual».

In both editions, the smallest amount of materials has practical and educational content. There are five such texts in *ELLE Girl*: “What to Do If You Fell in Love With a Girl □”, “What to Do If You Fell in Love With a Gay Man? □”, “How to know if you're really bisexual”, “You Are a Lady: How to Talk to People About Their Sexual Orientation So As Not to Embarrass Anyone” and “Why You Shouldn't Immediately Switch to Girls If You Don't Get Along With Guys”.

It is noteworthy that the texts from the *#Love* section, which describe experiences about sexual orientation, are accompanied by the tags “unrequited love” and “relationship with a guy”, the tag “sex” often appears.

It should be noted that in the texts that answer the questions and doubts of the reader, special attention is paid to supporting readers and creating a comfortable trusting atmosphere. It does not matter for the audience in which country the text was created: they all have similar means of interaction with the audience that help to establish contact with the reader:

1. Questions to the reader with a clear answer: “Are you a girl and fell in love with your best friend, a dorm roommate, or a girl from a parallel class? Frightened by a new feeling and don't know what to do? Calm down, girl, in this article you will find answers to all your questions” (*ELLE Girl*) и «I have no desire to have sex, but I see that people are attractive? Am I still asexual? Yes, most likely, you are asexual» (*Seventeen*).
2. “Sounding” the thoughts of readers: “Maybe you've used it to describe yourself or maybe you've heard a friend use it and secretly been like, ‘Wait. WTF does that mean?’” (*Seventeen*)
3. Use of the pronoun “we”: “In adolescence, we question everything around us – including our sexual orientation” (*ELLE Girl*) and “As we all know, it's so hard to describe what you're feeling when you don't have the language to capture it” (*Seventeen*).
4. Appeal to authorities (psychologists, media persons). For example, in the text “What to Do If You Fell in Love With a Gay Man? □” the main part of the text was created by two psychologists.
5. Calming down the reader: “You're not alone” (*Seventeen*), “So wipe your snot, raise your nose higher (but not much) and charge yourself for a successful rehabilitation from such a confusing and heavy love story for your heart” (*ELLE Girl*).
6. Instruction “What to do” with imperatives: in the text “What to do if you fell in love with a girl □” there is a separate questionnaire “Ask yourself a few questions to check: ..” (*ELLE Girl*) or in *Seventeen*'s “Am I Gay?”: “Bring queer voices into your life” and “Know where you can go to get support”.

#### 4. Conclusions

Despite the fact that the state policy towards the LGBTQ+ community in Russia and the United States is fundamentally different, the coverage of this topic by magazines for the youth audience has the same trends and forms of presenting information about LGBTQ+.

Firstly, the main layer of materials on this topic is presented in the form of news and news articles. Special attention is paid to texts about celebrities belonging to the LGBTQ+ community and texts in which celebrities speak positively about LGBT people.

Secondly, articles that help readers better understand themselves and their sexuality have similar techniques for interacting with the audience, which helps to establish contact with the reader: questions to the reader, "sounding" the reader's thoughts, using the pronoun "We", appealing to authorities, calming down readers, instruction "What to do".

Thirdly, a comparative analysis showed that, in order to present information in a Russian magazine, there is a skeptical and wary attitude towards certain aspects of LGBT culture (for example, the introduction of transgender actors for roles that were given to heterosexual actors in the original source), at the same time for texts in the publication *Seventeen* is characterized by the complete acceptance of all sides of this issue.

The study showed that despite the possibility of publishing texts on the topic of the LGBTQ+ community, there are relatively few in youth magazines. It is necessary to continue the development of this study in order to determine whether there is an audience demand for material on the LGBTQ+ topic, as well as to determine the attitude of the audience in Russia and the United States towards this topic.

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