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The Trevor Project is a toll free telephone line and an online chat website for gay teens at risk of suicide. In response to the reporting of a series of teen suicides in the Fall of 2010, a new branch of the Trevor Project called the “It Gets Better” project was created to provide an online venue for thousands of video testimonials from gay individuals on how their lives have improved since middle and high school. YouTube’s “It Gets Better” channel has received millions of views and widespread acclaim.

The project’s wide reception warrants an inquiry into exactly what cultural phenomenon within the broader movement for LGBT equality means. From the concept and story of “It Gets Better” arises a wide swath of questions about its audience, its purpose, its end, and its means. This basic narrative plot of improvement, which begins with frustration and loneliness, and ends happily among loved ones, is told unconventionally by a great many voices who have borne witness to the arc of the story. Each author, though separate and unique, participates with each other author in a “mass collaboration” storytelling. In other words, the narrative is democratically told by celebrities, politicians, plumbers, and thousands of others. These qualities make the “It Gets Better” project an ideal representation of the burgeoning social narratives of the Internet age.

To inquire “How is the narrative ‘It Gets Better’ told?” generates several investigations. First, what types of media platforms are used to tell the “It Gets Better” story? How has emerging information technology made this project possible and potentially successful, both in telling and receiving its story? Secondly, what does each individual story mean in relation to the grand narrative of “It Gets Better”? Who are the individuals speaking through the project? And how can we determine the individual effect within the process of mass collaboration Thirdly, looking forward, are viral movements like this likely to change anything about politics, social norms, or even individuals? How can we assess the effects of this type of social activism?

At its core, this investigation will help discover what allows the “It Gets Better” narrative to be told today. One possibility is that information technology eliminates spatial distances, providing LGBT youth with friends and family outside of their potentially repressive immediate environments. Another is that “It Gets Better” opposes suicide, prejudice, bullying, and brutality; these are problems almost anyone can identify with, problems that threaten not just the LGBT community, but everyone. In this sense, barriers like race, class, gender, and sexuality bring people together. Differences in life experience become encouraged through discourse, and information technology allows easy and private access to the resources, bringing more people into the discussion. An opportunity to research “It Gets Better” would let me answer the questions I’ve posed, and understand how modern information technology facilitates civic discourse, especially in the LGBT realm.