October 11th was National Coming Out Day. For nearly 20 years, this day has been a pseudo-holiday in LGBTQA communities, both nationally and internationally. We bond as we share our stories: how we broke the news to Mom, Grandma, or the conservative best friend from childhood. It's more than just a day for people deep in the closet to finally breathe fresh air—it's quickly becoming an integral part of LGBTQA culture.

If only every queer person at BGSU felt safe and comfortable sharing their sexual orientation and sexual identity with those around them. But, alas, that is still a pipedream for many of us. This issue of the Queer Query is dedicated to supporting and encouraging those people who are considering coming out to a loved one, a group, a community, or who are striving to live out and proud.

Having a supportive, attentive community to talk to about your questions and concerns can be a vital part of coming out to family, friends, roommates, and others. BGSU and the surrounding community have several resources available to students who are questioning their sexual orientation or gender identity:

Looking for a student group? Check out VISON. VISON meets on Tuesdays at 9:00 pm. VISON is BGSU’s GLBTQIQSS Organization. Their meetings are in the Women’s Center located in 107 Hanna Hall.

Another student organization to consider is Transcendence. Transcendence is dedicated to serving the transgender community at BGSU. They meet the last Friday of every month in the Women’s Center.

BGSU also has an LGBT-AQ resource center which is located on the 4th floor of the Saddlemire Student Services building. In the resource center, you will find movies, books, magazines, and other forms of media to educate and encourage members of the LGBT-AQ community, along with a friendly group of people who can answer any of your questions.

Be sure to check out their website which provides a panoply of additional resources:

http://www.bgsu.edu/offices/sa/cmai/lgbtaq_resource_center/ page18990.html

Group settings are not for everyone. Perhaps you would like to talk to someone one-on-one. The BGSU Counseling Center is located in the Saddlemire Student Services building, room 320. The Counseling Center is committed to creating a safe and confidential environment for students of all varieties. Appointments can be made by calling 419-372-2081.

Coming Out: The Vocabulary

In the Closet: Keeping one’s sexual orientation and/or gender or sex identity a secret. There are varying degrees of being “in the closet”; for example, a person can be out in their social life, but in the closet at work, or with their family. A person may be “in the closet” at their job or with their family in order to avoid discrimination or rejection.

Coming Out – The process in which a person first acknowledges, accepts and appreciates his or her sexual orientation or gender identity and begins to share that with others. “Coming out of the closet” is a metaphor for telling people about one’s LGBT identity.

Living Openly – A state in which GLBT people are open with others about being GLBT how and when they choose to be.

Outing – Exposing someone’s sexual orientation or gender identity as being gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender to others, usually without their permission; in essence “outing” them from the closet.
God and Gays and Bears, Oh My!

By Randy

I attended a fundamentalist college. Even in that conservative atmosphere, though, I started to have questions, especially when I realized that I found the company of burly bearded types enjoyable. I started wondering what it would be like if, in a different universe, of course, I could go home and live with one of those teddy bearish men. Wouldn't that be cool? But the thought of men living together as partners was something I also thought was ridiculous.

But, how could I be gay? I surfed some gay websites, but nothing about those men seemed to be like me. Young-looking, well-coiffed men didn't appeal to me, I didn't want to go clubbing every night and I didn't secretly want to be Cher. How could I really be gay?

Then one night, I discovered "bears" -- gay men who embraced their masculinity. Guys who just happened to find other guys -- even the chunky, teddy bearish ones -- attractive. I had finally discovered that being gay wasn't all about embracing a stereotype. There are as many different types of gay people as straight people.

The day I came out...

By Ramon Johnson

... to my mother turned out to be the most terrifying and anti-climatic day of my life. Even though her and I are extremely close, I'd played the dramatic scenario of eternal rejection over and over in my head. I just knew once I told her, it was going to be the last conversation her and I would ever have. But it was important for me to share that new and exciting part of my life. I decided the night before Thanksgiving would be the day. I was freshly 18 and figured she wouldn't dare cause a scene on the eve of a large family gathering. In my head it was the biggest gamble I would ever take.

So, while baking a cake (go figure) I concocted this brilliant plan of bringing up very emotional family memories in an effort to soften the blow. I brought up things that made us both cry regularly, usually during an episode of Matlock and the weekly pedicure I gave her. I saw her eyes start to water. Now was my chance. I put the mixing bowl down, washed the mud mask off my face and led into the announcement.

Having ‘The Talk’ With Mom

By Kayla Burch, Grand Rapids, Mich.

My girlfriend and I recently had “the talk” with my mother. She is a strong-willed, fiercely independent single mother. I was raised to value the importance of acceptance, tolerance and most of all a social awareness. But even knowing her forward-thinking, liberal views, I had some fear that she would be disappointed.

Much to my surprise, she was ecstatic. That night she got online and signed HRC’s Million for Marriage petition and wrote to our member of Congress about the Federal Marriage Amendment.

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Coming Out Stories: Transgender

Teenage, Trans, and Out

"I was starting my senior year. I went to a convention for GLSEN in Washington D.C. it was the greatest time I’d had in a long time. I was able to be myself around strangers and be Christopher. I even had a nametag with that name on it. I was the majority for once and I was me, actually me, not what everyone wanted me to be.

When I went home from D.C. it was like a smack in the face. I was back to being Megan and Christopher was locked up deep inside again. I decided right then I was going to be who I felt I was. I wanted Christopher in the yearbook instead of Megan. I wanted Christopher to be the one sitting in class, not Megan.

I went shopping and bought more boxers and started binding my chest. If anyone had met me, they’d never have guessed that I was biologically female. I loved it. I dropped little hints to let people know but most didn’t catch on.

So I started deciding whom to tell first. I thought I’d tell my best friend first, she knew me since fifth grade. I thought she’d at least be ok with my decision. Boy, was I wrong. She yelled at me in the hall and told me she would never call me Christopher or Chriss, I wasn’t a guy and I should just get over it or be locked up. Needless to say that stung real bad and I was scared to tell others. To my surprise, others were ok with it. Most had known me since third grade or before. They were all ok. They said as long as I was happy, they’d be fine with it.

I started telling teachers by putting a letter in their mailboxes. They were all ok with it. They changed my name in the gradebook and they call me Chriss in class. I am having a lot of problems with the administration at my school right now, but it’s normal, I guess. I know I at least have friends who will stand by me.

Coming Out Stories: Bisexuals

Lydia’s Story

Coming out, not something I’d planned to do for a very long time. I’d been kind of dim and only realized that I was actually bi when I was 13 despite having been attracted to girls and guys for as long as I can remember. I basically freaked.

Then I got on the web and started doing a lot of research. I signed up for a bisexual teen newsletter which came pretty much daily.

One day I was at Ellie’s house and she was looking through my email inbox on my phone. Suddenly it announced I had a new message and Ellie flipped up to read it. I didn’t think anything of it. Then she turned to me and asked why I had a bisexual news letter. I said because I’m bi and started crying and shaking. Ellie started talking to me about it, all the time hugging me and telling me it was ok. I couldn’t believe she cared that much and still touched me after she found out how disgusting I was.

I still wasn’t happy with being bi but then with Ellie’s encouragement I told a teacher because I was feeling really depressed. I wrote her a letter telling her what was wrong and how bad I was feeling.

She told me it didn’t matter and that she’d be there to help me. She told me that she knew what I was going through and has been helping me to the point where I’m happy I’m bi.

Adapted from OutProud.org

http://witango.outpath.com/outpath.taf?function=detail&rowid=1294

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BG SU’s LG BTA-Q Resource Center
404 Saddleire rainbow@bgnet.bgsu.edu 419.372.3244
Coming Out: The Role of LGBT Music, Film, and Literature

By Bethany Nanaemaker, Queer Query Editor

Why would I EVER want to come out when I see all these LGBT stereotypes when I turn on the TV? I don't match these stereotypes. I don't even like these stereotypes!

Why would I EVER want to come out when I see all these films with LGBT characters that experience horrible tragedies? I don't want to be another Brandon Teena (Boys Don't Cry) or Jack Twist (Brokeback Mountain).

Coming out can be especially nerve-wracking if a person feels as though she is the only LGBT person in her family, her group of friends, her hometown, or her other communities. A person may turn on the TV or watch a movie with a LGBT character and feel even more apprehensive; the images of LGBT people in popular culture are frequently one-dimensional stereotypes, such as the neurotic fairy or the masculine bulldyke. Even more apprehension arises when a person sees the abundance of queer tragedies on the silver screen, such as films about hate-crimes committed against members of the LGBT community or LGBT suicide and depression.

Simply put, a questioning youth or a youth who is considering coming out may be apprehensive about coming out as he does not want to be labeled a stereotype nor does he want to be victims of the queer tragedies he sees on the silver screen. What is important to remember is that popular culture and media CAN be very positive resources to a person who is considering coming out or questioning their sexual identity or sexual orientation.

If you are a person who wants to come out or is considering coming out to a loved one or loved ones, or if you know a person who is struggling to come out, this list of artists and authors may encourage you to embrace the LGBT aspect of your identity through non-threatening, non-tragic voices and stories.

Film
But I'm a Cheerleader
Latter Days
In & Out

TV
Coming Out Stories—Available through the iTunes Store and on LOGO
TransGeneration—Available on the Sundance Channel
In the Life—Available online at www.inthelifetv.org

Music
Ani Difranco—Check out the song “In and Out”
Rufus Wainwright—Check out the song “One Man Guy
Bitch and Animal—Check out the song “Best Cock On The Block”
Jill Sobule—Check out the song “I Kissed a Girl”

Books—Fiction
The Perks of Being A Wallflower by Stephen Chbosky
Dress Codes by Noelle Howey
Around the House by Amanda Boulter
Max and Sven by Tom Bouden

Books—Nonfiction
Transgender Warriors by Leslie Feinberg
Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and the Rest of Us by Kate Bornstein
A Woman Like That: Lesbian and Bisexual Writers Tell Their Coming Out Stories by Joan Larkin
Bi Lives: Bisexual Women Tell Their Stories by Kata Omdorff
Coming Out of Shame: Transforming Gay and Lesbian Lives by Gershen Kaufman and Lev Raphael
Outing Yourself: How to Come Out as Lesbian or Gay to Your Family, Friends, and Coworkers by Michelangelo Signorile
Coming-out Process still Complicated for Gay Youths

In time for National Coming Out Day, a new four-year study of LGBT youths shows that the average age a teenager comes out is now 13, reports the Fort Lauderdale, Fla., Sun-Sentinel newspaper.

The study, conducted by clinical social worker Caitlin Ryan of San Francisco State University, highlights how LGBT youths are feeling more comfortable coming out at earlier ages than their older peers did.

With a variety of books, magazines, and Internet sites geared toward gay teens, along with television programs like "Degrassi: The Next Generation" that feature honest portrayals of queer youths, and gay-straight alliances in nearly 10 percent of high schools nationwide, there are more options than ever for young gay people to express themselves.

However, studies have also found that one out of every four teens who comes out faces family rejection. The Safe Schools Coalition Web site notes that research done for the FBI in 1998 found that these LGBT teenagers make up 30 percent to 40 percent of the nation's homeless youths and that usually the gay youths' coming-out conflicts with their families' moral and religious beliefs.

Even LGBT youths who don't face rejection at home usually face some at school. According to the National Mental Health Institute, the average secondary school student hears an anti-gay slur 26 times a day. And 31 percent of kids who are gay or are perceived as gay were physically harassed or assaulted last year at school.

7 of 10 Americans Know Someone Gay

As gay men and lesbians celebrate another National Coming Out Day on Wednesday, a new survey reports seven out of 10 straight adults in the United States say they know someone who is lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender.

The nationwide Harris Interactive online survey of 2,932 U.S. adults also found that 83 percent of those who self-identify as gay or lesbian consider themselves out.

When LGBT respondents were asked if they considered themselves open about their sexual orientation, 92 percent said they are out to their close friends, and 78 percent said they are out to their parents.

A majority also indicated they are out to other people in their lives, including grandparents, cousins, acquaintances and casual friends, and coworkers and colleagues.

"If seven out of 10 heterosexuals know someone who is GLBT, then many gays and lesbians are making their identity apparent as a natural part of their lives -- just like their age, height, hair color, or personality," said Mark Shields, director of the Human Rights Campaign's National Coming Out Project.

"For most people, coming out or opening up to someone starts with a conversation. And for those interested in fostering strong, deep relationships with their friends and family, living openly often allows for closer relationships with the people they care about most."

Anatomy' Star T.R. Knight Says He's Gay

NEW YORK - "Grey's Anatomy" star T.R. Knight says he's gay, but hopes people don't consider that "the most interesting part of me." The 33-year-old actor addressed rumors of his sexuality in a statement to People magazine Thursday.

"I guess there have been a few questions about my sexuality, and I'd like to quiet any unnecessary rumors that may be out there," Knight's statement read. "While I prefer to keep my personal life private, I hope the fact that I'm gay isn't the most interesting part of me."
Coming Out Day makes Heterosexuality the Norm

By Hanna Ricketson

National Coming Out Day celebrated its 18th anniversary on Wednesday, but I'm not so sure that's a good thing.

In fact, I'd like to make a suggestion that will probably be as unpopular with the community I want to support as it will be popular with the people I disagree with: the LGBTQ community should stop celebrating National Coming Out Day.

While I'm wildly supportive of all people feeling comfortable enough with their sexuality to share it, and while I would never want to encourage a reversion to a culture of secrecy and silence among the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning community, I have to wonder if National Coming Out Day is helping or hurting the situation.

It seems to me that naming a day of the year when society expects anyone who's not heterosexual to profess their sexuality does two primary things. First, it encourages the LGBTQ community to not be silent, and that's good.

Second, it normalizes heterosexuality. Here's my problem. In asking the LGBTQ community to speak out, National Coming Out Day assumes that there's something different or unusual about being gay, bisexual or transgendered.

It implies in its very existence that if you don't announce to the world that you're not heterosexual, then you must be heterosexual. On Wednesday night, I went to a National Coming Out Day event on campus. I watched a presentation called "Hate," which was comprised mostly of the photos and stories of victims of hate crimes based on sexuality and of members of the community who had committed suicide because of the societal difficulties that accompany nonheterosexuality.

I was also handed a questionnaire for heterosexuals, featuring questions like: "What do you think caused your heterosexuality?" "When and how did you decide you were a heterosexual?" "Is it possible that your heterosexuality is just a phase that you may grow out of?"

The questionnaire also asked, "Do your parents know you are straight? Do you friends, co-workers and/or your roommates know?"

I was struck at the time by how clearly this questionnaire illustrates the way society normalizes heterosexuality. Straight people aren't ever asked to rethink their straightness. They never have to tell their family or friends that they are straight.

It seems like creating a day where nonheterosexuals announce their sexuality does more to contribute to the normalization of heterosexuality than it does to erase bias against homosexuality.

National Coming Out Day is caught up in a kind of catch-22. It tries to erase the bias against the LGBTQ community by having the community speak out, but in doing so, it also reinforces some of the negative aspects that the community struggles against.

So what's an LGBTQ community supposed to do when it's caught between a rock and hard place?

Still, more than half of those who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender said that concern about being the victim of a hate crime remains a deterrent to coming out. Other concerns that LGBT adults cite as to why a person might not come out include rejection by their families and friends and the threat of losing their jobs.

The survey was conducted Sept. 7-14 by Harris Interactive in conjunction with Witeck-Combs Communications Inc., a strategic public relations and marketing communications firm with special expertise in the LGBT market.

"7 out of 10" Continued from page 6

Taken From Gay.com 10/10/06
Musical Theatre Major Comes Out, Shocks No One

by Sara Magid

NEW YORK, NY - Musical theatre major Trey Stevenson stunned absolutely no one when he declared his homosexuality to family and friends earlier this month. The 19-year-old Stevenson is a BFA student in the musical theatre program at New York University’s prestigious Tisch School of the Arts. Tisch, which is located in Greenwich Village, is not known for its high percentage of heterosexual male students.

Stevenson broke up with his high school girlfriend soon after arriving in New York City for college and found himself drawn to his male friends and co-workers before realizing he was gay. Although he was initially nervous about revealing his sexuality to others, his revelations were greeted with nonchalance.

“My roommate took it so well!” recalled Stevenson. “It must have been a big shock for him, but he did a really good job of hiding it. He just acted like me being gay was the most normal thing in the world.”

Said Stevenson’s roommate, “Have you met Trey? He’s a musical theatre major, he works at Prada, and he TiVos Anderson Cooper 360. I mean, hello!”

Stevenson’s therapist was similarly unsurprised by the news. “This kid has been sitting in my office for six months talking about how wonderful his friend Jamal is, and how all he wants to do is hang out with Jamal and sing showtunes, and wondering why he can’t find a girl he connects with as well as he connects with Jamal. I haven’t seen a gay person in this much denial since the softball-playing Melissa Etheridge fan of 1997.”

Even Stevenson’s ex-girlfriend was supportive. “I read this journal entry on her blog where she called me her ‘fabulous gay ex-boyfriend,’” said Stevenson. “But I think there must be something wrong with LiveJournal, because the entry was dated from last year.”

While Stevenson’s therapist, roommate, and ex-girlfriend greeted his news with a calm acceptance, he was met with hostility when he came out to his father, who rolled his eyes and stormed off in disgust.

“Does he think I’m an idiot?” demanded Stevenson’s father, Phil. “He sits me down, and tells me that he has some news that might be hard for me to hear… I thought he was dying, or God forbid, voting Republican. I mean, the highlight of my son’s life was auditioning for the touring company of Rent. I wasn’t exactly expecting him to run around looking up girls’ dresses.”

“I’m not sure exactly how this is news,” added Stevenson’s mother, Kathy. “We joined P-FLAG right after he got the lead in Brigadoon and took his cousin Susie to the junior prom. I’ve been driving a minivan with rainbow flags for the last three years, so I don’t know where he gets off with this whole ‘coming out’ business. But of course, we just want him to be happy.”

Stevenson’s parents warned him not to tell his grandmother, however, worried that his lack of self-awareness would kill the poor woman.

Over the next few months, Stevenson plans to continue the process of coming out to his extended group of friends and family, as well as his professors, co-workers, and anyone else who will listen.

Taken from Fakegaynews.com, 06/06
Living Openly on Your Terms...

As you continue to live openly, here are some other points to consider:

- It’s important to remember that the journey from “Coming Out” to “Living Openly” is ongoing, and unfolds at your own pace.
- Living openly is something that becomes easier with time, it will often take a little energy when you tell someone new even after you’ve been open for years — but it gets exponentially easier with time.
- Living openly as a gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender or straight-supportive person can help to make it easier for young GLBT people who will follow this generation.
- Living openly can be a passive expression of who you are — such as not hiding a rainbow or equality sticker or a loved one’s photograph — or it can be a deliberate process involving a planned conversation or the decision to always be ready to affirm your sexual orientation or gender identity should a situation arise.
- Living openly doesn’t mean that the sole, or even primary, aspect of your identity is being GLBT. It means making this part of your life a natural piece of you — just like your age, height, hair color or personality.
- Living openly lets other people know, especially those who are judgmental or biased, that their attitudes are theirs alone.
- On a daily basis, you will face decisions about where, when and how to come out — or where, when and why not to. Always remember, this is your journey. You get to decide how to take it.

The benefits of coming out:

- Living an open and whole life.
- Developing closer, more genuine relationships.
- Building self-esteem from being known and loved for who we really are.
- Reducing the stress of hiding our identity.
- Connecting with others who are GLBT.
- Being part of a strong and vibrant community.
- Helping to dispel myths and stereotypes about who GLBT people are and what our lives are like.
- Becoming a role model for others.
- Making it easier for younger GLBT people who will follow in our footsteps.

The risks of coming out:

- Not everyone will be understanding or accepting.
- Family, friends or co-workers may be shocked, confused or even hostile.
- Some relationships may permanently change.
- We may experience harassment or discrimination.
- Some young people, especially those under age 18, may be thrown out of their homes or lose financial support from parents.

You’re in charge:

When you weigh the benefits and risks of being open about who you are, it’s important to remember that the person in charge of your coming out journey is you. You decide who to confide in, when to do it and how. You also decide when coming out just may not be right, necessary or advisable.

Keep in mind that:

There is no one right or wrong way to come out or live openly. Choosing to come out or to be open does not mean you have to be out at all times or in all places — you decide how, where and when based on what’s right for you.

Your sexual orientation and gender identity are important pieces of you, but they do not have to define you. Living openly doesn’t change all the many unique things that make you, you.

Taken from the Human Rights Campaign.com

http://www.hrc.org/Template.cfm?Section=Coming_Out3&Template=/ContentManagement/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=32380