Fall 2005

Fusion Fall 2005

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Blurring the lines
The changing face of androgyny
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The fringe factor

“Where are all the gay men at?” the host asked a drag show crowd last year. “Lesbians, let me hear you! Straight people, make some noise!”

I waited for her to call out a group I fit into and was disappointed. I wanted to feel validated, and for the first time, I was too straight for the gays and too gay for the straights. Would I have to compromise a part of my identity to belong somewhere?

This issue of Fusion magazine focuses on often overlooked groups in the gay community — the minorities within a minority. Bisexuals, “pomo-sexuals,” androgynes — each group challenges our old definitions of sexuality and begs us to reconsider our conception of gender roles.

Individuals not fitting neatly within the gay/straight dichotomy too often become objects of harassment, discrimination and other negative treatment. The socialization and institutionalization of strict gender and sexuality norms has created a hostile environment for those wishing to express themselves in terms other than gay or straight, masculine or feminine.

Only when society no longer limits what is acceptable for individuals based on their gender and sexual preferences will all Americans be free to express their whole selves without fear. It is our responsibility to show the world that gender and sex stereotypes hurt everyone, not just gays, by forcing each of us into a box and lopping off the parts that stick out.

The issues at the heart of current LGBT rights movements are not only gay people’s issues. Marriage, adoption, partner benefits, child custody — these are important to many Americans and will be voted on by Americans. Justice cannot triumph without equality.

Gay, straight or somewhere in between, our freedom hinges on our ability to recognize the power of labels and to use them with caution.

Jessica Rothschnuh
Leaving it all behind

I feel like I’m abandoning a 2 year old in the street.

Or, to be less dramatic, I’m leaving Fusion with a new babysitter. Typically, a campus magazine will have a lower editor in the wings waiting to take charge when the editor-in-chief graduates. But this fall, Fusion editor Jessie, visuals editor Morgan, photo editor Emily and I, the managing editor, will all graduate and leave Fusion with what could be an all-new staff.

It’s a scary prospect for a magazine barely out of its infancy. Morgan and I are the only staffers left from the first issue in the fall of 2003. Mandy Jenkins, the co-founder and first editor, recruited me for the magazine when she started it up. I was a shy sophomore with a penchant for copy editing, and she hired me as her copy chief.

Fusion has always had great people working for it, but as with any start-up magazine, it takes a lot of hard work to get it off the ground and keep it solvent. Now, two years later, the weird square magazine has won numerous awards, including the Society of Professional Journalists’ prize for best biannual college magazine in our region for 2004.

As I begin to look for jobs and hug a tight curve on the winding road that is my life, I can’t help but feel sad and scared to leave Fusion behind. I’ve learned so much about other people (I will always remember the difference between intersex and transgender) and myself. I still don’t know all the things this girl wants or what might become of this magazine in a few years, but I’m grateful for having been here.

Grace Dobush

Fusion
Margaret Cho has come a long way since bel-lowing lines such as “Hel-looo, my name is Gwen, and I’m here to waaash your vagina!” six years ago in her first performance film, *I’m the One That I Want*.

The 36-year-old, bisexual Korean-American comedian has a lot on her mind these days other than the sexually charged humor that made her concert trilogy of *I’m the One That I Want*, *Notorious C.H.O.* and *Revolution* so memorable.

To begin with, there’s President Bush’s recent appointment of John Roberts as chief justice of the United States, a decision Cho calls “horrible … typical and unconscionable.”

Then there’s the next presidential election, for which Cho has no early faves.

“I don’t know … I like Hillary (Clinton). I think she’s great,” she says.

And there’s her recent appearance in October during Coming Out Week at Kent State, where she spoke to students about political issues like President Bush’s handling of Hurricane Katrina and gay issues like marriage laws.

“I don’t do too many (college) shows during Coming Out Week,” she says. “I do some universities when I’m not doing a bigger tour, so it’s a wonderful thing.”

Talking to Cho these days, one would get the impression that her overtly sexual, mother-impersonating days of stand-up are gone, replaced by a rigid political agenda. But Cho is not without entertaining comments when discussing everything from movies to racism to sexual labels in a recent phone interview.

This September, she appeared at the Toronto Film Festival for the premiere of *Bam Bam and Celeste*, an independent film Cho wrote and co-stars in alongside long-time friend and touring partner Emily Rasinski.

**SHOWING OFF** Margaret Cho takes no prisoners in her politically charged act.
Fusion

partner Bruce Daniels. “It’s a classic fag-and-fag-hag love story,” Cho says. The film’s premiere was “tremendous,” but it has yet to receive a distribution deal.

The highly anticipated Brokeback Mountain, a film starring Heath Ledger and Jake Gyllenhaal as gay cowboys, also appeared at the festival. Although Cho has yet to see it, she said the stars’ pairing was a little too good to be true for her taste. “They’re sort of too pretty to be boyfriends,” she says. “Two people who are really cute don’t belong together. One needs to be really cute and the other one not so cute.”

The film is expected to promote acceptance of gay couples to a more mainstream audience, the kind approval Cho tried to achieve with her short-lived ’90s ABC sitcom, “All-American Girl.” While it seemed for a few brief moments Cho was going to be the new face of Asian-American women, not to mention Asian comics, she has yet to achieve widespread fame.

CHO YOUR STUFF Cho is an active blogger and writes about everything from experiences on her book tour to what ticks her off in the news.
“I don’t know if I could,” she says of going mainstream. “I can’t really escape my politics very easily because I’m still interested and involved in it. (During ‘All-American Girl’) I was so young that I didn’t know what I was doing, and I still don’t know. I’ve been around for so long, so (fans) wouldn’t really buy it.”

The outspoken, bisexual minority comic, an anomaly in Hollywood, received mass amounts of hate mail following a 2004 MoveOn.org event where she spoke out against President Bush.

“It’s not shocking,” Cho says of receiving hate mail. “There have been so many things like that. We live in a really racist, ignorant country. And when you’re made aware of it so many times, it seems like it can never be redeemable. It’s getting better, but it can still be improved.”

Cho has also learned not to pay attention to gender and sexual labels. After describing her bisexuality as being “just slutty” in I’m The One That I Want, people are bound to make judgments.

“I think some people make them, some people don’t,” Cho says of sexual labels. “Some people make them in order to find their identity politically and want to work within that, and other people will know where they wanna be personally.

“There shouldn’t be a (stigma). There probably is, but I don’t think there should be. I’ve always been such an outcast anyway it’s hard to tell what’s unfair.”

As for acceptance from other comedians, Cho receives some but could care less about what few praises she receives from her peers. She counts Whoopi Goldberg and Bobcat Goldthwait among her comedic idols, but they’re not the people for whom she’s performing.

“I do it for myself, really, and for all the fans. People who come see me years over and over,” she says. “They really kind of count on me for a good show ’cause they know I’ve delivered in the past.”

As for her parents — whom Cho has impersonated to hilarious effect in her stand-up, particularly her mother — Cho could care less.

“I don’t give a shit about them,” she said, tongue planted firmly in cheek. “They’re proud of me anyway.”

Margaret Cho | Comedian

LOUD & PROUD Cho is not afraid to pick on herself or, well, anybody.
Religious groups say gays can change
One of the most heated debates about sexual orientation is what causes it. Some speculate that sexual orientation is congenital, with people having as much choice of being gay or straight as they do of being black or white. Others believe that sexual orientation is a choice and that people can control who they are attracted to.

On the choice side of that debate are many organizations that not only believe change is possible but also go to great lengths to facilitate the process. People Can Change (PCC) is one such organization, founded with the intent of helping gay people, mostly men, fight unwanted homosexual desires and change their sexual identities.

Founded in January 2002, PCC holds weekend sessions around the country for men dealing with their sexual orientation who express a desire to change. Since its founding almost four years ago, 400 men have participated in the sessions.

Ben Newman, PCC’s founder, has been married for 17 years. He first discovered his sexual desires at 15, although he says he felt “emotional conflict” in earlier years.

“My homosexuality was about unmet emotional needs and a conflict with my identity,” Newman says. “I felt like I didn’t belong. I feel like a different breed. As I was able to con-
nect with men in different ways, my sexual desires [for men] diminished. Living a double life was horrible. I could never go back to that.”

Newman entered therapy sessions after his wife found out about one of his affairs with another man. Newman says he desperately wanted to change in order to save his marriage. He began having therapy sessions with “Matt,” a man who previously struggled with the same feelings Newman did. Newman says the process would have been more difficult and frustrating if he didn’t have a therapist like Matt, who personally understood what he was going through.

Newman says it bothers him that there are so many misconceptions about reorientation therapy, including the assumption the therapist controls it. Newman believes reparative therapy “should be client-driven.”

Newman says he felt motivated to form PCC because he found other services lacking. He felt Christian ministries strive for a spiritual conversion of their clients and that the National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality was the voice of the therapists. He wanted PCC to be “a voice of the clients.”

“With People Can Change, we’re not out trying to convince gays not to be gay, to change,” Newman says. “That’s not my agenda. We are a ser-
Living a double life was horrible. I could never go back to that.

Ben Newman | PCC founder

vice for those who want to change.

“A lot of times people will express a desire to change to someone — a pastor, rabbi, therapist — and they hear, ‘It’s not possible. Accept how you are,’” Newman says. “They tell them they have to live a gay life in order to be true to themselves.”

Conversion therapy has been making headlines as the ex-gay movement gains more visibility in mainstream avenues. Newspapers such as the Washington Post and The New York Times have written about the topic in recent months.

A teenager known only as Zach made headlines in The New York Times last summer after writing in his blog that his parents signed him up for conversion therapy, also known as rehabilitation or reparative therapy. Zach’s readers were outraged.
Zach was sent to Love in Action International, a Christian organization in Memphis, Tenn. Love in Action is a smaller branch of the behemoth Exodus International, a Christian information clearinghouse on homosexuality.

“Well today, my mother, father and I had a very long ‘talk’ in my room where they let me know I am to apply for a fundamentalist Christian program for gays,” Zach wrote in his blog. “They tell me that there is something psychologically wrong with me, and they ‘raised me wrong.’ I wish I had never told them. It’s better than them crying and depressed ’cause they will have no grandchildren from me. It’s bet-

**SOME SAY** Christian therapists strive for a spiritual conversion of their clients.
ter than them telling me that there’s something wrong with me. It’s better than them explaining to me that they ‘raised me wrong.’"

The Rev. John J. Smid, executive director of Love in Action, wrote an article dismissing homosexuality, calling it a “myth.”

“There is no such creation as a ‘gay’ or ‘homosexual’ person,” Smid wrote on the organization’s Web site. “There is only homosexual attraction and behavior. Accordingly, there can be no change from a sexual identity that never existed in the first place.”

Christopher Taylor, president of PRIDE! Kent, signed up for conversion therapy sessions with Love in Action to get more information about the process.

“I wanted to go as an experiment so I could tell PRIDE! and the LGBT community,” Taylor says. “I wanted to see if they were abiding by the laws of the land. If they were abusive, if they were abiding by the laws of confidentiality.”

The admissions process is extensive, with a 35-page application. Questions regarding spiritual involvement and sexual abuse need to be answered. A personal biography and references from a spouse or parents must also accompany the application.

*SOME SAY* sexual orientation is in-born, but others argue it is a choice.
MANY ARE concerned about the psychological well-being of people forced into conversion therapy by their parents.
After Taylor signed up for the sessions, Love in Action sent him more information about the process. The cost for three months of conversion therapy is $7,000.

One of Taylor’s main concerns regarding conversion therapy is when parents or legal guardians force their sons and daughters to attend.

“What is the legality of sending these children to these sessions where they’re told that homosexuality is immoral, sinful and wrong?” Taylor says. “They’re told they need to change. What is the psychological effect on these children when they grow up and become adults? That’s something that I disagree with as a Christian and a member of the LGBT community.”

Taylor believes this can be harmful on many levels. “These people can be potentially led into destruction,” he says, mentioning depression and suicide as possible outcomes of being forced into conversion therapy.

PCC’s Newman believes only willing participants should attend conversion therapy sessions.

“I tell parents that it’s really important to accept their sons and daughters,” Newman says. “They are the experts in their feelings. Forcing them to go to therapy seems counterproductive. The idea that ‘You’re broken, and you need to go to this,’ can be emotionally damaging.”

Taylor believes many people who claim to have changed their homosexuality are simply suppressing their true feelings and living a lie.

“You find out later that these people are having affairs with people of the same sex,” Taylor says. “How happy are these people?”

One of the most outspoken opponents of conversion therapy is Wayne Besen. In his book Anything But Straight he criticizes those organizations and individuals who promoted conversion therapy, arguing that it simply doesn’t work.

“An ex-gay individual is an actor
frustrated with the things going on in my life now, but everyone has their issues. Homosexuality is still a factor in my life — it’s not who I am, it never has been. Those of you who really know me, know that homosexuality was always there but it didn’t run my life, and it will not now.”

Zach, the teenager whose blog made it into The New York Times, posted more about Love in Action after he returned.

“Currently I feel annoyed towards a lot of things,” Zach wrote. “I’m very frustrated with the things going on in my life now, but everyone has their issues. Homosexuality is still a factor in my life — it’s not who I am, it never has been. Those of you who really know me, know that homosexuality was always there but it didn’t run my life, and it will not now.”

Zach continues, “I understand the concern, and I so appreciate everyone caring as much as they seemed to have. I REALLY do. But, I’m still alive. I don’t believe I’ve been brainwashed. It’s almost insulting, thinking about it, to be brainwashed. I think that I’m going to be OK.”

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- **Third Place:** Feature Photography, Pat Jarrett,
  “My (Gay) Fraternity Life”

Check out the latest issue of FUSION magazine online:
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Blurring the lines

The changing face of androgyny

Story Jackie Mantey | Photos Alliey Bender

Perhaps you have seen it in styles on the runways of New York City and Paris. You might have even seen it in the music videos of bands such as Van Halen, AC/DC and David Bowie. Chances are you have even seen it at Kent State University.

Androgyny — having both male and female characteristics — has been evolving in American culture and is becoming more common in today’s society, but ignorance still exists.

Defining a movement

Angela Wicks was about to watch a movie when she noticed an assembly of teen girls giggling and smiling at her. The giddy, hormonal teens asked Wicks for her picture. With a red face, Wicks politely told them she was a girl — much to their surprise.

“They still wanted my picture,” Wicks says. “But they thought I was a hot 14-year-old boy.”

This wasn’t the first time Wicks had experienced a misidentification of her gender.

“I got into the Canfield county fair for $2 because they thought I was younger than 14,” she says. “They even called me son.”

Wicks, a senior integrated social studies major, is androgynous, like many on campus and around the world. Awareness of androgyny is growing, changing society’s view of male and female gender roles.

With a clean face and a pixie haircut, Wicks is clad in red and black gym pants and a baggy black sweatshirt, and it is easy to see where confusion in her gender could lie.

“When I got my haircut, my mom called me Peter Pan,” she says with a laugh.

But what makes her androgynous? Wicks says she believes androgyny is best summed up in the song “Androgynous,” an ‘80s classic by rock-and-roll lover Joan Jett, in which “Dick wears a dress and Jane wears a chain.”

A person who is androgynous has both male and female characteristics in how they act and dress, Wicks explains. “It is when people look at someone, and they can’t tell if they are male or female,” she says.

Human sexuality professor Mel Thompson says there is more than one definition of androgyny.

“It is an ambiguous phenomenon and depends on which perspective you take,” she says.

Those perspectives can be psychological, such as transgender individuals, who feel their biological sex doesn’t match their gender identifica-
Fusion

IN THE DARK

People can still feel threatened by ambiguity of gender.
number of men. Even the Boy Scouts of America now allows women to be troop leaders.

“There is more freedom in gender roles now, and androgyny is starting to become more acceptable,” Wagner says.

But to Wicks, acceptance has yet to be grasped.

First-day jitters

The first day of college classes is always nerve-wracking and exciting. Students pile into classrooms anticipating tough coursework and tougher professors.

Wicks has a bigger concern, something she calls “first-day jitters.”

“I always worry about who will be in my classes. Will I be able to share who I
Fusion

am? What will be my professors’ reactions?” she says.

Fighting stigma is more common for individuals who like Wicks decide to dress or act outside the gender norms. Society is more sympathetic to those born with medical androgyny than to people who chose rigid roles. We look to define someone by looking at them. For people that don’t conform, we put them into categories,” Wagner says. “I think there will always be a movement in androgynous behavior, but a large portion of America finds (male and female) distinctions important.”

Wicks. “This is just me,” she says. She used to dress femininely in high school, but she knew she wanted to dress more like she does today.

“I went to high school in a small town. I knew who I was, but I felt like I had to mask it,” Wicks says. “I was overly conscious and felt like I had to fit into

There is more freedom in gender roles now, and androgyny is starting to become more acceptable.

Laurie Wagner | Human Sexuality professor

to live as socially or psychologically androgynous, Thompson says.

The psychology behind androgyny can be as difficult to measure as society’s acceptance of it. The first person to define the characteristics behind androgyny was Sandra Bem, who in 1971 created the Bem Sex Role Inventory. The inventory has 20 feminine characteristics, 20 masculine characteristics and 20 neutral characteristics.

Bem’s test was groundbreaking because previous tests had only centered on neutral gender characteristics. A person is seen as androgynous if they score high on both the feminine and masculine scales, which are scored separately. Bem also believed those who possessed both characteristics were able to function well — a belief not shared by all.

“There are some people who want

Hollywood picked up on this, and Pat was born. This “Saturday Night Live” character who wore button-down shirts, hiked-up pants and black-rimmed glasses with curly short black hair and a high-pitched, squeaky voice, was made famous by America’s inability to define his or her gender.

“Pat elicited confusion. The public needed to know for certain,” Wagner says. “But the bigger question is, why does it matter?”

That question is the hardest part about being androgynous, Wicks says.

“I get frustrated when people automatically think I am a boy,” she remarks. “It just gets old. Just because I don’t look feminine doesn’t mean I am a boy.”

Dressing in loose clothing and tennis shoes is just more comfortable for

With a new dose of confidence and a long-awaited unveiling of her true self, Wicks says happiness comes in the form of self-acceptance.

Wicks is not alone in her choice to define herself as androgynous. Musicians have been reforming the way androgyny is viewed for generations.

Glitter, glam and guitars

Androgyny has influenced music, and music, androgyny. And when the world began to shake off the terror of the Vietnam War and the acidic hopes of the hippie generation, androgyny began flirting with mainstream culture.

When glam rock was born in the 1970s, popular culture was bombard- ed by spandex pants, bulging crotches, lots of hairspray — and heavily masculine lyrics.
“It is really fascinating to me that people so decidedly heterosexual were so androgynous,” says Deborah Wilson, assistant professor of music at the Ohio State University at Marion, who teaches a class on the history of rock and roll.

Glam rock was defined by the bands’ extravagant costumes and stage acts. The phenomenon began in Great Britain and made its way to American audiences in the early ’70s. This new style of rock was a revolt against art rock bands such as Pink Floyd and Genesis.

In addition to glitz and recognizable guitar riffs, society began to see in glam rock an approachable side of androgyny.

Take for example the metal band KISS. Gene Simmons and his bandmates struck a balance between masculinity and femininity. The group is famous for their on-stage antics and stage makeup, but the effeminate look didn’t hinder their completely heterosexual and “macho-manly” actions, Wilson says.

“Gene Simmons was so aggressively heterosexual. There are chronicles of the some 4,000 women he has slept with. Then look at the figure he displays onstage,” she says. “He is the textbook sketch of androgyny.”

Another example is the man behind the songs “Rebel, Rebel” and “Space Oddity.” David Bowie impacted a whole generation with his release of the key glam rock album *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars*.

This 1972 release was a turn from Bowie’s earlier works. He no longer performed as a man but as Ziggy Stardust, an androgynous, electric alien who played with a band, the Spiders from Mars.

Bowie’s androgynous appearance influenced the popularity of the movement and the glam rock music to follow. Ziggy Stardust was sexually promiscuous and his gender was indistinguishable. Ziggy’s androgyny became a way to market albums.

“David Bowie was one of the first rock musicians to admit that he was bisexual,” Wilson says. “However, I think it was purely intentional for marketing purposes. If you look at someone like Michael Jackson though, you have an example of someone who was androgynous because that was just the way he is.”

Another musician whose an-
drogyny was not a musical act but an everyday style was Boy George, whose real name is George O’Dowd. He is famous for his overtly feminine look.

Boy George teamed up with Adam and the Ants drummer Jon Moss and guitarist Roy Hay to form Culture Club. The band pumped out hits in the ’80s such as “Karma Chameleon” and “Do You Really Want to Hurt Me?” and continued the androgyny trend in American culture.

Female musicians such as Sinead O’Connor, k.d. lang, Annie Lennox and Phranc are also influential androgynous artists.

“Recognizable androgynous women musicians tend to be more political in their messages,” Wilson says.

For example, O’Connor ripped apart a picture of the pope during a performance on “Saturday Night Live” in the early ’90s — a move that nearly got her booed off the charts.

Although musicians in the last 35 years made androgyny more acceptable, Wilson says the androgyny card has been played for a long time in musical history.

“Just look at Elvis with his white suits or Little Richard in the 1950s,” she says. “Here was a black man wearing makeup who was openly androgynous.”

“Elvis the Pelvis,” as Elvis Presley was often called, is a strong example of how youth culture used androgyny to rebel against parents and the public.

“I think each generation has used more androgyny to shock and alienate outsiders,” Wilson says. The trend of outdoing the previous generation may continue in the future, but without the pressure. Androgyny is becoming more accepted, and in a couple of years we could look at what Bowie or other musicians did and think, ‘What was so wrong with that?’ like we do about Elvis and his dancing.”

Androgyny hits the runway

Stilettos aren’t just for women anymore, and suits aren’t just for men.

I think each generation has used more androgyny to shock and alienate outsiders.

Deborah Wilson | Assistant professor of music, the Ohio State University at Marion

Androgyny and fashion have been working together for centuries, making political and sexual statements. French novelist George Sand is an example of a woman who publicly dressed like a man.

Sand was born in 1804 and was named Amandine-Aurore-Lucile Dupin, which she later changed to Baroness Dudevant. George Sand became her pen name. She was a feminist before there was a word for it.

Story continued on Page 46
IT WAS ALL A BLUR

Androgyny in fashion | Photos Pat Jarrett

Model: Dave Burrington.
Clothing by Ben Levy and Kayce Cummings of Id Clothing.
Model: Brit Spano.
Styling by Brit Spano.
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Odd ones

STANDING OUT Glynn Ward is a 19-year-old bisexual who feels as if he is caught between communities.
Glynn Ward sometimes feels like he lives in a “sexual purgatory.”

The 19-year-old is bisexual — and when both gay and straight people try to force him to pick a side, it’s frustrating.

“You feel caught between communities,” Ward says. “I’ve certainly been criticized by gay people before for liking women.”

And that’s a criticism that’s almost sexist, he says. While he hopes society would be more open today, people still have misconceptions about bisexual life.

Ward has been in several relationships with both men and women during his life, and at times he’s even felt the desire to shift one way or the other.
He’s not promiscuous, and he’s not just on his way to admitting he’s gay. He has felt pressured to do by both gay and straight people.

A lot of people construe bisexuals as being extremely promiscuous. Ward says he’s not overt about his sexuality; he just wants people to understand his choice to enjoy relationships with men and women. Instead, people often just assume that if someone is bisexual, he or she can’t choose which end of the sexual spectrum they wish to side with, so they pick both.

“We still have a very 19th-century, romantic view of sexuality,” says Richard Berrong, co-coordinator of Kent State’s LGBT interdisciplinary minor. “We are attracted to whoever we are attracted to, and that’s who I am. But that attraction is so much determined by how you’re raised and the world around you.”

Americans are so obsessed with what goes on in other peoples’ bedrooms, it becomes an overwhelmingly important part of their lives, Berrong says. From that obsession stems the misconception that bisexuality equals promiscuity.
“That’s also a misconception about gays,” Berrong says. “That’s an accusation that’s made about many minority groups. Because we are at the same time obsessed with (sex) and condemn it, we assign promiscuity to people of whom we think lowly.”

Tied to that is the lack of understanding bisexual society, says Christopher Taylor, president of PRIDE! Kent. While the “B” in “LGBT” stands for “bisexual,” it often seems skipped over, he says, and gay society specifically lacks an understanding of bisexuality. Bisexuals are frequently left out of arguments over domestic partnership, gay and lesbian rights and other LGBT issues.

“They’re kind of caught up in this little battle,” Taylor says. “We have to heighten awareness about bisexual issues. It’s something that society should not just throw off as being temporary or being a trend. We need to think of it as a legitimate sexual preference.”

Gay and straight society are both guilty of viewing bisexuals as indecisive, or simply on their way to coming out of the closet, Taylor says.

“They think it’s just a trip down to Gayville,” he says. “It’s just a
period of time until they decide to be gay or straight.”

According to some in straight society, a person is either straight or gay, Berrong says. There is no middle ground. Among some in gay society, bisexuality touches a more political nerve, he says.

“Some gay people see strength in numbers,” Berrong says. “And if they’ve come to terms with their sexuality, they resent what they perceive as a lack of commitment by others.

“In the straight community you will find a very different stand because there’s no political investment in it.”

Misconceptions about bisexuality can become especially frustrating even when dealing with friends and family, Liz Talaba says.

“I’ve tried to explain to my parents,” she says. “They just think I’m confused. A lot of people keep telling me that I’m confused.”

Talaba hates when her friends ask her if they can watch her kiss other girls. Such is the myth suffered specifically by women bisexuals — that they are using their sexuality to attract men, says Talaba. She’s also aggravated by the misconception of her sexual preference as a trend.

It didn’t used to bother her as much, she says, but since the 19-year-old sophomore theater design and technology major came to college, she expects her friends to grow up with her.

“If I’m kissing a girl, it’s cause it means something, not cause I’m doing it to attract a guy,” Talaba says. “Does every girl like every guy they see? Does every guy like every girl they see? It’s not like that.”

And Talaba also agrees with Taylor, she’s felt the pressure to choose a side and stick with it.

“Gay people don’t think you’re gay enough, and straight people don’t think you’re straight enough. And the truth is, I’m in the middle,” she says. “People are forcing on you to choose a side, but I’m right where I want to be.”

And when people allow their misconceptions of bisexuality to continue, they’re refusing to communicate questions.

Myths are perpetuated because people assume things, Talaba says. Communication is the key to ending any misconceptions.

“Ask me about it,” Talaba says. “Don’t do the high school ‘let’s tell secrets about it.’ If you ask, you’ll understand more.”
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Chrystal and Laura* met in high school during basketball conditioning.

“She claimed she liked me from the start,” says Laura, junior art history major.

“I thought she was cute!” junior psychology major Chrystal exclaims.

While Laura knew she liked Chrystal, she wasn’t quite sure how she liked her. The feeling was new for her, something she hadn’t experienced before.

And although the feeling was new for Chrystal too, she always knew she wanted to be more than just a friend to Laura. What that was, however, she wasn’t too sure.

Welcome to the new generation of sexuality, where no label is necessary. But if there were one, it would probably be “pomosexuality,” a combination of postmodern and sexuality.

A term coined by editors Carol Queen and Lawrence Schimel in their 1997 book, Pomosexuals: Challenging Assumptions about Gender and Sexuality, pomosexuality is a reaction to the longer moniker “lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and friends” in much the same way the postmodern attitude of accepting progress as the status quo is a reaction to the modernist ideal of constant change.

Queen and Schimel tell readers that “pomosexuality lives in the space in which all other non-binary forms of sexual and gender identity reside — a boundary-free zone in which
A PHOTO IS WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS

An old photo of Chrystal and Laura sits on the kitchen counter in their apartment. The couple has been dating since high school and doesn’t like putting labels on their relationship.
LIVING WITH DISAPPROVAL Chrystal (left) and Laura look through old photos in their bedroom. Laura doesn’t have very many photos of herself and Chrystal because her parents don’t approve of their relationship.

PERSONAL TRANSITIONS Chrystal says since dating Laura she has had to learn to adjust her personal space boundaries. The couple cuddles together while watching a movie.
fences are crossed for the fun of it, or simply because some of us can’t be fenced in.”

And as sexuality in general is increasingly at the forefront of international and local politics more people are rejecting the traditional LGBT labels and embracing self-created sexual identities.

“I have always felt that labels are quite unnecessary,” says Lori McGee, a professor at the Kent State Stark campus who has been “out” since her late 20s.

“When we start labeling people based on something so private and personal, what are we saying about ourselves as a society?” she asks.

Akron resident John Rosado refuses to submit to the “gay” designation.

Rosado, an occasional volunteer for the Akron Pride center and supporter of local charities promoting LGBT issues, feels there is really no need for labels in today’s society.

“Labels are for clothing, not for people,” Rosado says. “Who wants to be fingered as a label anyway? We’re all just people and should be free to be known as people.”

Rosado first came out in his early teens and now usually dates men, but does not define himself as gay or straight.

“I’m just me,” Rosado says. “People get hung up on labels, and that’s when people who aren’t straight have to deal with teasing and rejection from the rest of society.”

Chrystal and Laura had to deal with animosity when they first became more than friends, even though they didn’t come out to anyone who wasn’t close to them.

“I think the school figured it out before we did, actually,” Laura says.

“We only knew one kid, Jeremy, who was out (in high school), and he was treated like absolute shit,” Chrystal says.

The other major obstacle to Chrystal and Laura’s relationship was the reaction from Laura’s parents about her burgeoning homosexuality.

“My parents were okay with someone
else being gay, as long as it wasn’t their daughter,” Laura says.

In fact, Laura described how supportive her parents were of Jeremy when he sent around a petition asking to be allowed to bring his partner to senior prom.

“(My mom) was even going to take the petition out into the community to get support for him. It was really bizarre,” Laura says.

As Laura’s parents became more suspicious of the true nature of her relationship with Chrystal, even going to the extent of having other students spy on them, the two chose to express their true feelings at the same place the feelings started — the basketball court.

“We would run laps up and down the court, trying to talk to one another while we were running,” Chrystal says. “One day, we were running and I said to Laura, ‘Pant, pant, do you like me?’ and she said, ‘Pant, pant, no, I love you.’”

Even though the two have been together for close to four years and neither could imagine being with someone else at this point, they do not consider themselves lesbians.

“I’m just hers,” Chrystal says. “I may like someone else, even boys, in the future, but for right now, I’m happy being hers.”

Laura also expresses uncertainty over what would happen in the future.

“If we ever broke up, I can’t say I’d be with a guy or a girl,” Laura says. “We consider ourselves a couple, and I do call her my girlfriend when introducing her to people, but we don’t really give ourselves a label because we don’t need one.”

McGee says she feels that if people have tried to understand themselves, they should be fully aware of their sexual orientation and identity. But that doesn’t necessarily mean they have to give themselves a label to define it.

“I hope that soon we will reach a point where labels are used less, but I don’t see them ever disappearing completely,” McGee says.

Chrystal and Laura agree.

“I think for some people it’s a comfort to have a title to put them in a group,” Chrystal says. “I can see how it would make them feel good to belong to something.”

Laura understands how some people would need labels to make them feel less alone but stands behind her reasoning for not using one.

“We agree on how we view each other, and that’s enough,” she says.
TOGETHER TIME “I’m just hers,” Chrystal says. The couple relaxes together on a Saturday afternoon.
CHO-ING OFF

“If you don’t like me, I will make you hate me!” Margaret Cho growled during her 90-minute set at the M.A.C. Center on Oct. 22.

This quote couldn’t have been more appropriate coming from a woman who delivered one ruthless quip after another about every hotbed topic from abortion to the taste of Laura Bush’s bush. But of the 1,500 fans who came out to see the outspoken comedian, very few seemed to exhibit any of the hatred Cho spoke of.

“She was the funniest thing ever!” enthused freshman Spanish major Chris Holovacs. “I wanted to see more! I loved when she bashed the Bush administration. I’m going to tell all my friends they suck, and they should have come.”

Those who did come were treated to Cho’s thoughts on feminism, among many other topics. “You don’t have to be a woman to be a feminist. But if you’re not a feminist, kill yourself,” she said. “Respect the vagina — validate it whether you want to eat it or not.”

Later in her performance, Cho discussed her Korean heritage, admitting she intentionally refuses to inform herself too much about the events happening in North Korea for fear of becoming “that disembodied voice on CNN.” In high school, she was asked to join the Asian students club, to which she replied, “I’m Asian enough. Why don’t you just print (the invitation) on yellow paper?”

She even touched on Vice President Dick Cheney, who was apparently offended when someone casually referred to his daughter Mary as a lesbian. “(The man) called her a lesbian,” Cho joked. “He didn’t call her the Rug Doctor!”

The show went over well with fans such as Akron resident Aaron Henry, who previously saw Cho at her performance in Lakewood three years ago.

“This (show) was far more intimate than the last one — it was in a high school,” Henry said. “She was funny. She didn’t hold back this time.”

Christopher Taylor, president of PRIDE! Kent, was also pleased with the event’s quality and turnout. “We worked really hard in getting the event together,” he said. “We felt tonight that there’s definitely a large amount of people who are very active in the LGBT community (here). It was extremely encouraging to the PRIDE! group and its members.”

— Andrew Hampp

PACKED M.A.C. Students crowded into the M.A.C. Center in October to see Cho perform her over-the-top brand of comedy.
When she separated from her husband, Sand made it less of a secret that petticoats and jewels weren’t for her. Sand’s disguise in men’s clothing allowed her to freely move around Paris and increased her access to places and events where women were not welcome.

“Women have constantly been trying to copy men’s styles for equality,” says Noel Palomo-Lovinski, an assistant fashion design professor at Kent State. “Women have always wanted to co-opt men’s looks.”

Business suits are a prime example of androgyny being used to promote equality for women. Women’s suit sales for women have increased dramatically since the women’s liberation movement of the 1960s. The effect of suits on women’s bodies imitates the masculine by creating big shoulders, narrow hips and a flat chest, Palomo-Lovinski says. “After women won equal rights, women and men really crossed over in gender and dress.”

In a 2004 *Time* magazine article titled “The New Androgyny,” writer Michele Orecklin pointed to designs in July 2005 menswear shows “where blazing colors drenched the runways in pinks, yellows and greens.” Androgyny was making a new fashion statement.

Hedi Slimane designed floor length kilts for Dior Homme’s 2004 winter line, and Jean Paul Gaultier, who is most famous for his design of Madonna’s cone-breasted dress, continues to push androgyny in his designs.

“He pushes boundaries of androgyny and sexual exploration,” Palomo-Lovinski says. “He has men in dresses and simple makeup.”

The “metrosexual” look also has taken effeminate male fashion to a new level of acceptance. British journalist Mark Simpson coined the term “metrosexual” to mean a man with a well-developed fashion sense who spends a good amount of time and money on his appearance.

While more feminine clothing is dazzling the fashion world, it is not a sure sign those fashion trends will become acceptable in rural America.

“Drag queens push it too far. Metrosexuals are much more accepted,” Palomo-Lovinski says. “Skirts are becoming a little more usual for men, but I think the one thing we as a culture have not accepted is men in makeup.”

Whatever the skirt’s future, fashion will always play an important role in the social and political movements of society, Palomo-Lovinski says. “The
ability for people to use androgyny in their dress is very important in expressing their sexuality.”

**What’s in store**

Although androgyny has had many champions throughout history, the future of androgyny is difficult to predict.

Men still face pressure to be conventionally masculine, angry and strong — but that could change as awareness of androgyny grows, Wagner says.

“Men who are androgynous get more attention than women,” Thompson says. “We don’t think to look twice at a tomboy. Although it is getting more forgiving (for men), women get more license to dress that way.”

Americans’ acceptance of androgyny may have come a long way since Elvis, but it still varies greatly from region to region.

“Walking down the streets of San Francisco, the ‘ground zero’ for gay rights, is completely different than walking down the streets of Kent,” Thompson says.

Young people’s views vary from student to student.

“It’s weird when you see a person like that,” says Elizabeth Smith, sophomore psychology major. “It’s like, is that a boy or a girl? But to each his own I guess. It’s just a preference.”

Junior aeronautics major Chris Murphy thinks androgyny is funny.

“I usually laugh to myself when I see it but try not to embarrass the person,” he says. “I think it is silly for them to get upset at anyone’s reaction, being that it is the reason they do it. Sometimes I’ll laugh or giggle with a buddy of mine and rudely ask what sex the person is to my friend.”

Will Wicks ever see the kind of acceptance she wants? No one can be sure, but for now, Pat’s sexuality will still be a favorite mystery, men’s skirts will grace the catalogues of high-end fashion, and Wicks could still be mistaken for Leonardo DiCaprio.

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Lights, camera, androgyny

Fashion and music aren’t the only cultural arenas within which androgyny entertains. Check out the following movies for different views of androgyny.

Title: Sylvia Scarlett
Year: 1935
Key Players: Katharine Hepburn, Cary Grant, Brian Aherne
Synopsis: As Scarlett, Hepburn embraced the project that, at the time, was unconventional because of its subject matter. She meets Cary Grant’s character, and the two start working con games in England. The androgynous Hepburn is unable to follow through on the cons because of her sensitivity to the human existence. In this movie, the audience found the independence of the character honorable, not intimidating. “It is the rare film like Sylvia Scarlett that allows the heroine to have a man and still maintain her androgynous behavior and clothing in the end,” says Rebecca Bell-Metereau, author of Hollywood Androgyny.

Title: Some Like it Hot
Year: 1959
Key Players: Marilyn Monroe, Jack Lemmon and Tony Curtis
Synopsis: Monroe bounces around in her usual blonde fashion as Lemmon and Curtis play two musicians running from mobsters looking to kill them after their witnessing of the St. Valentine’s Day Massacre. Lemmon and Curtis dress as women and join a women’s band to hide from their pursuers. Some saw the cross-dressing in the movie, set in the 1920s, as blatant perversion, but some, such as critic Parker Tyler, saw it as a “positive cinematic contribution.
to the struggle against social restrictions and repressive sexual stereotypes.”

Title: Homicidal  
Year: 1961  
Key Players: Jean Arless  
Synopsis: The use of gender disguise to evoke suspense and surprise is employed in this William Castle film. Working around the trend of Hitchcock’s ‘60s twist-at-the-end trend as seen in Psycho, Jean Arless stars in Homicidal as Emily for his/her movie debut. At the end of the film, the actor/actress appears as male and female in a split screen.

Title: Fast Break  
Year: 1978  
Key Players: Marvis Washington, Gabe Kaplan  
Synopsis: Kaplan is hired by a university to create a winning basketball team. During his search he finds Bobby, Washington’s character. Kaplan is confused by Bobby’s skills and the fact that no other team has picked him up yet. Soon, the audience and Kaplan realize Bobby is a woman who is trying to get an athletic scholarship. The film shows Bobby taping down her breasts and her inability to really fit in with the men because of her feminine walk and lack of male mannerisms.

Title: The World According to Garp  
Year: 1982  
Key Players: John Lithgow, Glenn Close and Robin Williams  
Synopsis: Based on John Irving’s novel of the same title, George Roy Hill uses its controversial issues to create a film version. Lithgow plays Roberta Muldoon, a transsexual ex-football player. He meets up with Jenny, played by Close, and William’s character Garp who is Jenny’s son. Jenny takes in Roberta. Reversals of sex roles meet assassins: this movie delivers a humorous look at androgyny.

“Nearly everything Lithgow does is funny – the slight hip-swaying roll he adds to his big-lug walk, the way his round face puckers when he is worried — and his humor has resonance,” says Michael Sargow, a critic for Rolling Stone.


‘THE L WORD’ and an Ani Difranco DVD are just some of Wicks’ favorite DVDs. The L Word is a show in which all the main characters are lesbians.

Androgynous musicians are ready to rock

New York Dolls  
Prince  
Grace Jones  
Morrissey  
Freddie Mercury and Queen  
KISS  
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Decline of Western Civilization Part 1