Spring 2004

Fusion Spring 2004

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Be a part of the machine

While there have been many small victories in the LGBT community's fight for equality over the past year, there have also been stunning defeats. For each anti-sodomy law struck down, it seems another state is enacting a gay marriage ban.

The past few months have been so topsy-turvy for the sexual minority community that we in the media could hardly keep up. In fact, we tried to prepare a story about same-sex marriage and civil unions in America, but the news changed too frequently to get a story definitively "done."

And it's no wonder that LGBT issues are at the forefront of the Americans' minds. With equal rights cases making their way up through the court systems and "Queer Eye for the Straight Guy" on TV sets, even the staunchest critics can't hide from these issues anymore.

Not that they'd have a choice, now that one of the bigger LGBT issues, same-sex marriage, has somehow become an election hook. Despite the decisions of many cities nationwide to marry same-sex couples, the big bad wolf - the Defense of Marriage Amendment - is bearing down on sexual minorities nationwide.

This proposed amendment is a setback both for the sexual minority community and the nation at large. Gay or straight, this amendment will affect how you live the rest of your life in a democratic nation. There are people in this country willing to take America back to the dark ages, denying equal rights to an entire population.

As editor of this publication, I know there are people who don't want to see this happen... but are you just as willing to fight as they are?

We here at Fusion aim to discover and explain the trends, people and the issues within the sexual minority community for all readers - gay and straight - to gain better understanding of one another. Perhaps, with understanding, there wouldn't be so much misguided fear.

But that's as far as we can go. We can't march on the Capitol. We can't write letters to Congress. We can't stand up - so it's up to you.

If you are a member of the sexual minority community, a straight ally or even just a supporter of equality, you need to get yourself in gear. Read up on the issues, make yourself heard and, most importantly, go out and vote. Someday, this nation may look back on the rampant fear and mistrust during the early part of this century with regret. But until then, it's up to you, everyday citizens, to make sure it never comes to that.
Suicide. No one wants to talk about it.

In 1999, suicide was the third leading cause of death for young people aged 15 to 24 (Center for Disease Control and Prevention).

According to The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent Suicide (1999), "It has been widely reported that gay and lesbian youth are two to three times more likely to commit suicide than other youth and that 50 percent of all attempted or completed youth suicides are related to issues of sexual identity."

We don't always know how to deal with difficult situations by ourselves, and it's often hard to admit our weaknesses and ask for help.

I once made a horrible mistake, but until recently I never spoke about what I did. Some days I've told myself it didn't really happen. Overwhelmed by pain and anger during the fall of 1999, I picked up a gun for the first time. Pressing the barrel firmly to the side of my head, I cocked it without fear or hesitation. Years of bottled up shame, fear, pain and anger overwhelmed me completely. I could only think of one solution to all my problems.

Fortunately, my girlfriend, during this time, was able to kick in the locked door to our bedroom. She eventually managed to wrestle the gun out of my hands. Afterwards I spent several days in a psychiatric hospital, struggling to understand my overwhelming urge to die.

The hardest thing I've ever had to do is accept myself for who I truly am. For years, I was confused about my sexuality. When no one around you accepts you for who you really are, it is difficult to be yourself. It becomes even harder to discuss your feelings when you feel so alone. Homophobia and the fear of public humiliation constantly overshadowed and threatened my self-esteem and kept me from expressing myself. I was afraid to tell my own story.

Fusion was created to give a voice to the sexual minority community. The magazine is not just for sexual minorities, but also for those outside the community. Hopefully, by fostering increased awareness, we can prevent someone from feeling the way I used to. Hopefully, someone somewhere will know that there are outlets for their feelings. There are ways to not feel alone.
"Sex without emotions is just pretentious masturbation," Joe Carroll says. "Or is that sex without love?"

Carroll, a senior sociology major, borrowed the phrase from James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room*, and he says it is the most accurate way to describe virginity. More specifically, gay virginity.

There are as many definitions of gay virginity as there are sexual positions. Professors and gay men and women all have different opinions on the definition and only agree on one thing: It's not so easily defined.

**Step 1: Defining “virginity”**

Because virginity isn't discussed much in the gay community, defining it may be a difficult task - just ask Carroll.
"I think the best way to sum it up is that, for me personally, if a person engages in an activity or is in a situation with the sole purpose of getting off, that counts as losing their virginity," Carroll says. "But what they should strive for is to do that with a person they have an emotional connection with."

When Robert Johnson, a sociology professor who also teaches classes for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender studies minor, defines gay virginity, he doesn't mention emotions at all.

"I think it's the same question that's asked of heterosexual or gay virginity," Johnson says. "Penetration can occur. It's just a matter of when or how."

For men it's anal sex.

"For a lesbian, it's some sort of penetration with a dildo or something," he points out that the gay community doesn't focus on virginity as much as the straight community does.

"It's more focused on sexual behavior as first time: the first time with mutual masturbation, first time with oral sex," Johnson says.

Carroll has a bit of a problem with Johnson's definition of virginity.

"Personally speaking, that's not something that interests me at all," Carroll says. "There's a lot of people who never have anal sex at all, so are they always virgins?"

But many do associate virginity with penetration, says Amy, who asked that her real name not be used because her family doesn't know she's a lesbian.

"In that case, I'd be a virgin the rest of my life," she says. Amy has a slightly easier time defining gay virginity than Carroll did.

"With my Catholic education, it's just never having sex with anybody," she says. "It's that plain and simple to me — man or woman.

Her Catholic education also taught Amy to wait until she was married to have sex.

"My views on that have somewhat changed," she adds,
“I know it’s a stereotype to say the guy is pushier for sex. But when two guys get together, it just kind of follows.”

Step 2: Debunking the stigma

Straight people might abstain from having sex for fear of pregnancy or because they want to wait until they get married.

“That’s not exactly an option for us,” Amy says, and many of her friends have a “Why wait?” attitude.

Actually, there are a number of reasons anyone – gay or straight – would abstain from sex, says Rebecca Harvey, a couple and family therapist specializing in gay and lesbian couples and sex therapy in Syracuse, N.Y.

“Some of us have been hurt and need to take a break altogether from love,” Harvey says. “Some perceive sexuality as something so special and so powerful and complicated that they want to wait until they feel they’re up to the challenge of it.”

Despite these concerns, gays often are perceived as promiscuous, Amy says.

“It’s hard to find someone in the homosexual community who’s a virgin,” she says. “I don’t know much about the whole community because I haven’t been involved with it that long. Sex is viewed differently from what I’ve seen.”

Often, she says, women will sleep with other women they’d never before met.

This stigma extends much farther than simple promiscuity, Johnson says.

“The stigma’s not just from the stereotype of promiscuity but from the judgment of immorality and, up until recently, illegality,” Johnson says. “The issue of virginity carries with it all kinds of social and moral judgments, particularly with females.”

Historically, only a woman’s virginity mattered, and that tradition has carried over into today’s world, Harvey says.

“It had value in a heterosexual world,” she says. “Women who were virgins were more valuable, easier to marry off. A woman’s virginity was a form of power and wealth. And in a misogynistic world, often the only power she truly possessed on her own accord.”

More of the stereotypes could be perpetuated by people just coming to terms with their homosexuality.

“Coming out, you get animosity from the straight community, and you’re so eager to fit in with the gay community, so you follow the stereotypes,” Carroll says. “They’re gonna feel like, ‘Oh, this is what you have to do.’”

More of the stereotypes could be perpetuated by people just coming to terms with their homosexuality.
On the other end, this stigma of the "gay" stereotype is exactly what could keep some gays and lesbians from abstaining from sex.

"Having sex is the first way of coming out because you're admitting to yourself and one other person that you're gay," Johnson says.

Harvey recognizes this fear, too.

"Given the stigma, you could imagine how for some gay people the first time they simply kiss a same-sex partner can be an overwhelmingly freeing, frightening, exhilarating experience which confirms and validates their sexuality," she says. "Other gay people feel this way after making love for the first time."

"Some perceive sexuality as something so special and so powerful and complicated that they want to wait until they feel they're up to the challenge of it.

Rebecca Harvey
Couple and family therapist

Step 3: Recovering from the stereotypes

Perhaps the news event which best brought sex to the front of national conversation was the Monica Lewinsky scandal, Johnson says.

"When Clinton said, 'I did not have sexual relations with that woman,' he of course meant heterosexual penetration," Johnson says.

This poses a question – what constitutes "real" sex?

A January 1999 survey conducted by the Journal of the American Medical Association asked young people "Would you say you had sex if..." Of those interviewed, 59 percent said oral-genital contact did not constitute having sex, and 19 percent said penile-anal intercourse did not constitute having sex.

"The findings support the view that Americans hold widely divergent opinions about what behaviors do and do not constitute having 'had sex,'" the survey concludes.

Definitions vary, and Johnson says it might be because Americans are so silent on the subject.

"I think it should be talked about. I think it should be talked about in junior high school. If the first time we're talked about this is in college, then..." Johnson trails off, raising his eyebrows.

It is likely the silence results from the social and moral judgments placed on sex.

"Linking sex to procreation is tied to keeping your virginity up to when you get married and not having kids out of wedlock," Johnson says.

Before becoming candid for this article, Amy says she had never really discussed gay virginity.

"All gay issues really aren't addressed like they should be," she says. "Straight people don't bother us – we don't talk to them. If some people took a little more time to learn about the gay community, a lot of those stereotypes wouldn't be around."
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The Network is an organization whose membership is a diverse cross-section of the lesbian community. Our purpose is to increase lesbian networking opportunities, both personal and social; to strengthen lesbian economy, culture, and community; to promote lesbian-owned businesses within the greater Cleveland area; and to establish lesbians as a visible, active force within the gay community and the community at large.

For information about upcoming Network events, including how to join, call our voice mail or visit our website:

website: www.Clevelandwomennetwork.org  email: info@clevelandwomennetwork.org

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Carroll says the stereotype of the typical, sex-obsessed male crosses over into homosexuality as well. “It doesn’t matter too much, gay or straight, when you take the 18- to 24-year-old male,” Carroll says. “The basic impulse is the same. I know it’s a stereotype to say the guy is pushier for sex. But when two guys get together, it just kind of follows.”

But, as always, there’s always a way to prove a stereotype wrong — girls can be pushy, too. Amy’s first girlfriend dumped her because Amy wouldn’t sleep with her.

“Because I have never experienced sex, it’s not something I think about at all, and apparently that’s all she thought about,” Amy says. “I’m sorry, I’m better than that.”

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What makes a virgin?

Professors, lesbians, gay men, dictionaries, medical journals, TV sex therapists: All have vastly different definitions for the same word. Check out how each explains virginity:

- **For a gay man, it’s anal sex. For a lesbian, it’s penetration with a dildo.**
  - Robert Johnson, sociology professor who teaches classes for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender minor

- **It doesn’t matter if you’re gay or straight. Virginity is kept by just not having sex with anyone.**
  - Amy (whose name has been changed because her family does not know she’s a lesbian), Kent State student

- **Engaging in sexual activity with the sole purpose of getting off. Emotions are necessary. If you’re drunk, it doesn’t count.**
  - Joe Carroll, gay senior sociology major

- **Sex:** Anything connected with sexual gratification or reproduction or the urge for these, especially the attraction of individuals of one sex for those of the other.

  - **Virgin:** A woman, especially a young woman, who has not had sexual intercourse OR less commonly, a man, especially a youth, who has not had sexual intercourse.

  - **Intercourse:** The sexual joining of two individuals.

    - Webster’s New World Dictionary of the American Language, 1957

- **Sex is penis-and-vagina intercourse, so a lesbian who has never had sex with a man will die a virgin. Ditto for a gay man who hasn’t had sex with a woman.**

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“It’s hard to find someone in the homosexual community who’s a virgin.”
Violence in same-sex relationships

Story by Claudia Cortese
Photo illustrations by Tori Tedesco

It started like any story of young love.
Stephanie* was only 16 and Nicole* was 18 when they started dating. Nicole was head over heels in love with Stephanie, her first girlfriend. A little more than a year into their relationship, they decided to get married - beginning a four-year cycle of control, love and abuse.

“I was so young when I met her,” reminisces Nicole, now in her mid-20s. “I spent practically my entire adult life with her.”

Stephanie was pregnant when they got together, and Nicole eventually became the child’s other mom. Because Nicole couldn’t bear the thought of losing Stephanie, she did everything for her.

When Stephanie wanted another child, she told Nicole she would leave her if they did not. Nicole gave in, as always.

“I loved Stephanie more than life itself,” Nicole says.

“God, I loved her so much. I couldn’t say no to her.”

Stephanie was a stay-at-home mom as Nicole supported the family. But Stephanie insisted on controlling the finances, which, in turn, allowed her to control her partner.

“I paid for everything – day care, a maid to clean the house, all the bills, the house payments – but she controlled the money,” Nicole says. “She was beyond obsessive controlling. I couldn’t make a move. I worked three jobs and had no social life.

“I just wanted to provide for her.”

*The names have been changed to protect anonymity.
A cycle of violence

Stephanie’s tight control was domestic abuse, even if Nicole did not know it. The Ohio Domestic Violence Network describes abuse as “a pattern of physically and/or emotionally violent and coercive behaviors that one person uses to exercise power and control over another. Abusers use verbal assaults, emotional abuse, financial deprivation and/or physical and sexual violence as a way to dominate their partners and get their way.”

According to the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs, between 25 and 33 percent of relationships between lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered partners include abuse – a rate equal to that of heterosexual relationships. In 2001, there were 5,046 reported incidents of domestic violence involving sexual minorities.

Abuse in sexual minority relationships is, in many ways, the same as that found in heterosexual couples, according to Lambda GLBT Community Services. In all cases the abusers’ goal is to maintain control and power over their partners. Often the violence occurs in a cyclical fashion: Victims of abuse feel alone, isolated and afraid and are made to think the abuse is their fault.

Nicole says she stayed in the relationship because Stephanie would not let her leave.

“Stephanie was very conniving,” Nicole says. “She lied about so much stuff and made me believe things that weren’t true. Whenever we broke up, which never lasted more than a few days, she made me feel like I was breaking up the family.”

About a year into their marriage, Stephanie’s manipulative behavior climaxed into physical abuse.

“The first time it happened was when our daughter said to me, ‘Mommy’s cigarettes smell funny.’ So I asked her if she was smoking pot in front of our daughter, and she punched me twice in the face,” Nicole says.

The violence only got worse after the first time.

“Every time we fought, she hit me,” Nicole recalls. “Once, she even gave me a bloody nose. I eventually learned how to block the punches because I was so used to it.”

Domestic violence and sexual minorities

Although there are similarities between violence found in both straight and sexual minority couples, the Battered Women’s Advocacy Center says there are many issues particular to abusive same-sex relationships.

Because sexual minorities are already socially marginalized, it is easier to isolate the victim. The abuser can use homophobia to encourage shame and self-hatred in the victim. According to the center, victims are sometimes made to feel they’re betraying their community by reporting the abuse.

The threat of being “outed” to friends, family, co-workers, a boss or the larger community can be used by the abuser as a weapon of control, the center says. If the victim is not out, reporting the abuse might be difficult because it might mean outing oneself to friends, family, the police, a domestic violence hotline or a shelter.

If a straight couple has children and then separates, each parent usually has the opportunity to share custody, whereas many sexual minority couples do not have joint parenting rights.

If a same-gender couple has children and the abuser is the biological parent, the abuser can use the threat of losing the children to control the abused. Additionally, because most states don’t recognize same-gender marriages or partnerships, the abuser can use the absence of legal rights to shared property to reinforce power and control.

Nicole says Stephanie always used the kids to control her.

“I loved those kids so much, like I gave birth to them,” Nicole says. “And she would always threaten to take them away from me. She really could’ve taken them from me.”

Nicole says they had built a life together. Everything she had was with Stephanie – the cars, the house, the kids. She felt like she would lose all of that if they split up.
Underreported and overlooked

There are many reasons a large percentage of LGBT victims of domestic violence do not report it. Nicole says she never reported the abuse because she didn’t feel anyone would take her seriously.

"People would think it didn’t make any sense," Nicole explains. "I was the dominant one – I worked, paid the bills, was bigger, older, so how could she be abusing me?"

Nicole holds up a picture of her and Stephanie from when they were still together. In the photo, Stephanie is rail-thin, and Nicole weighs at least 20 to 30 pounds more than her.

Nicole adds that the very fact that she and Stephanie are lesbians made the abuse seem less likely.

“When you think of two girls – it’s two girls. You never think of girls as being abusive,” Nicole says. “I never thought of it as a seriously abusive relationship. It was just a fucked-up relationship.”

Lori Girshick, the author of Woman-to-Woman Sexual Violence, writes that many people perceive lesbian relationships to be equal and nonviolent, and if they are abusive, the more masculine partner is the abuser.

“The myth that within a violent relationship, it is the butch who is the aggressor obscures the fact that abuse is about power and control and not about roles,” Girshick writes. “This can result in the police arresting or domestic violence programs identifying a butch dyke as the primary aggressor.”

The National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs notes that is not uncommon for the police to arrest the victim because most police officers have not received the proper training to distinguish the actual abuser in incidents of violence in sexual minority relationships. Many police officers, as well as some domestic violence programs, believe that abuse in sexual minority relationships must be mutual.

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The myth that within a violent relationship it is the butch who is the aggressor obscures the fact that abuse is about power and control and not about roles.

Lori Girschick
Author of ‘Woman-to-Woman Sexual Violence’

Local outlets for help

Safer Futures, the Portage County battered women’s shelter, makes it a priority to understand domestic violence in sexual minority relationships. In October, Jessica Sabin, a Safer Futures coordinator and child advocate, gave a presentation to PRIDE! Kent about abuse in same-sex relationships.

“The most important point we wanted to get across with the presentation was that they can still come to us, regardless of sexual orientation,” Sabin explains.

Sabin says Safer Futures’ commitment, first and foremost, is to help victims of abuse – regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. The shelter welcomes male-to-female transgendered individuals as long as they live as women in their day-to-day life. Although men can’t stay at the shelter, the organization still will advocate for them, and they can call the hotline.

Ray Leone, chief medical officer of the DeWeese Health Center at Kent State, says he will do whatever he can to assist sexual minority survivors of abuse.

“I had an openly gay man come to the Health Center once, and we treated him and will treat all LGBT people the same way we treat everyone else,” Leone explains. “We can check for physical injuries, treat STDs and send them to Psychological Services, the police or the shelter. But, for men, unfortunately there isn’t a local shelter.”

Victims of abuse in a sexual minority relationship also can seek a protective order because Ohio is one of five states that has laws written in gender-neutral terms.

National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs says at least three Ohio courts have found that a member of a same-sex couple is a “person living as a spouse” for the purposes of the domestic violence laws.

Although Ohio has such services and laws for sexual minority survivors of domestic violence, Nicole says she never knew resources existed for victims of abuse in sexual minority relationships.

To this day, she has not sought psychiatric help, and most of her friends and family do not know Stephanie was abusive. She hasn’t even told her current girlfriend about the violence in her former marriage.

Trying to move on

Nicole is in a new, serious relationship, but it has been hard for her to move on because she is psychologically scarred from her abusive marriage to Stephanie. Nicole says her new girlfriend treats her wonderfully, but Nicole is still afraid she’ll try to control her. So whenever her partner asks her to do something, Nicole does the exact opposite.

Nicole also finds herself acting the same way Stephanie used to. She sometimes breaks up with her new partner for no reason or goes out and parties without calling her to say where she is.

“I just don’t care. I can’t even say ‘I love you’ anymore,” Nicole says. “I was with Stephanie for so long, I now can’t have a good relationship if my life depended on it.”
Obstacles minorities face

Sexual minorities of color who are survivors of abuse may face difficulties because they may be marginalized in both the sexual minority community and their respective ethnic or racial community. When reporting the abuse, they may have to confront both racism and homophobia. And for sexual minorities who do not speak English, it is hard to find resources that cater to both their language needs and are sensitive to sexual minority issues, says Jeanie Morrow, director of the Lesbian Domestic Violence Program in San Francisco.

Intersexed and transgendered survivors of domestic violence also face particular issues. An intersexed person is born with a body that has "external sexual characteristics typical of both male and female bodies. In our society, children who are born intersexed are nearly always (surgically) assigned a male or female gender," says Diane Courvant in a report published by the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence.

"Transgendered" is an umbrella term that refers to people whose gender identity is opposite the biological sex with which they were born or whose gender does not fit into society's two given roles of male and female, Courvant says.

"A fear trans and intersex survivors face... is the possibility their trans or intersex status, if previously hidden, might become known," Courvant says. "Very few jurisdictions provide employment discrimination protection to trans or intersex survivors.

Courvant says the gender segregation of survivor services is a barrier to treatment. Many trans survivors go through a period when they are in legal or medical transition or, in some cases, have a unique body that prevents identification with either male or female gender. Some trans individuals have a gender identity that is neither male nor female but mixes elements of both.

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Despite differences, this family is just trying to live a normal life

Story by Mandy Jenkins  
Photos by Samara Peddle

On a quiet Sunday evening, a little green wagon sits idle on an unassuming front porch on a tree-lined Cleveland Heights street. From the backyard swing set to the two cars in the driveway, it's the epitome of a mom, dad and 2.5 kids kind of home.

Except this family consists of a child, his mother and her female partner, which makes three.

Inside the house there's a smattering of toys and pictures of an adorable little boy with curly hair and huge, dark eyes. Downstairs in the playroom, 6-year-old Austin is seated at a tiny drum set, rocking out to his heart's content as his mother and her partner look on in bemusement.

Seven and Kristen have been together for eight months. The two met at a mutual friend's commitment ceremony and have been building a life together ever since. Of course, many people don't even realize they are together at all.
"We could be in line together right next to each other, and they would always have to ask us if we were ordering separate or together," Seven says.

That's not necessarily because they are two women. It could be because Seven, 38, is black, and Kristen, 27, is white.

"The interesting thing is, not only would they not think we were in a loving relationship with one another, but they wouldn't even think that we are friends," Seven says. "It's so much more than just lesbianism - it goes right to the deeper issue of what people's expectations are."

While a racial divide, differing lifestyles and a decade stand between them, Kristen and Seven are trying to build their relationship with the differences in mind.

"We know that you can't go to the library and find a book about us," Kristen says. "We realize that we have multiple issues."

"I wouldn't want anyone to see it as something that's negative," Seven chimes in. "It might be something that brings us together instead of an obstacle that keeps us apart."

On this particular Sunday, Kristen is visiting Seven and Austin after her day of work at a Cleveland homeless shelter. The two women rest on the couch as Austin bangs away on the little drum set Kristen just brought him.

"I've decided that he's musically gifted," Kristen comments as Austin moves from the drums to a piano upstairs.

"If we have friends over, Austin gets out the instruments, and he acts as the director. He tells us when to play," Seven says, laughing.
Although Kristen lives in Akron, she frequently spends nights at Seven’s. This has made for a bit of a lifestyle change for Kristen. Soon, she will be moving to an apartment in Cleveland Heights to be closer to Seven and Austin. Kristen has adapted to her relationship with Seven and Austin. Last-minute plans and late night parties now require a babysitter, so she sometimes has to choose between her friends and her partner.

“It comes up that I like to be here a lot,” Kristen explains. “My friends in Akron, their lives are a lot different than mine. They go dancing at Tuesday’s on weekends. I like to do that kind of thing too sometimes, but mostly, I am not ever as happy as I am when I’m here with them. And that’s new for me.”

The entire lifestyle of motherhood was an adjustment for Kristen. For the first time ever, she has a partner whose top priority is different from her own.

“I am a mom, and sometimes we’ve had to sacrifice some things,” Seven says. “I sometimes will say, 'I can't just not be a mom because I’m in love with you or because all of your friends are getting together to go somewhere.' I might be able to get a sitter, but I don’t want to. I’d much rather spend my time with Austin sometimes.”

Kristen admits the transition has been difficult at times. In her single life, she was used to being able to do what she wanted, whenever she wanted.

“I have felt disappointed,” Kristen says. “We’ve gone through some stuff where I’ve had to adjust to the fact that the person I’m dating always won’t be able to go to parties with me.”

On the weekends when Austin doesn’t stay with his mother’s ex-partner, Kristen, Seven and Austin usually spend time together eating out, roller-skating or making a visit to Chuck E. Cheese.

Austin, too, has adjusted to Kristen’s introduction to the family. Seven says while Austin at first seemed a bit jealous of the newcomer, he and Kristen soon became good friends.

“We have a wide range of friends and support people, so he’s very used to having his own relationships with my friends,” Seven explains. “My friends know that if they are coming here or if we’re doing something, then it has to involve all of us. I think that made it easier. I mean, I don’t just have friends over. We have friends over.”

“I love kids a lot,” Kristen says. “I’ve always wanted to have children of my own. The fact that she had Austin when I met her was a plus, an added bonus.”

She fondly remembers her early days of getting to know Seven and Austin.

“He called me his best friend back in the beginning. It was really exciting,” Kristen says. “And when I started spending a noticeable amount of time here, I was not just her friend. I was Austin’s friend.”

Austin, though, seems to remember a different set of events.


“Did not,” Austin giggles again.

But Kristen and Austin are getting close. When he starts sneezing in the living room, it is Kristen who takes him to blow his nose.

Although their lives were very different before they met, Seven says the age difference between her and Kristen hasn’t been a big issue. In fact, she thinks the differences in their lifestyles have made their relationship stronger.

“Where we are as women, whether it’s in our careers, what we want with our lives – we’re in different places,” Seven explains. “I mean, she might bring to me a fresher perspective, she helps edit some of my papers, she can do stuff with the computer that I can’t. I can help in terms of saying, ‘Well, I had this experience.’ So, it’s sort of complimentary as opposed to something that’s a challenge.”

Out of all of their differences, race has come up the most often. Kristen says her own parents had a harder time dealing with her relationship with Seven than with other women she’s dated.

“They told me, ‘Society is going to judge you. It’s going
to be a hard life for you to want to spend the rest of your life in a relationship like this. We grew up in a generation
where it wasn't acceptable to date outside your race.'

"But I say, 'Well, the hardest thing I've had to expe-
rience so far is you,'" Kristen explains. "The world
isn't giving me a hard time, society isn't giving me a
hard time, but you are.'"

Seven says that as an African-American woman, her
ethnicity is important to her and very much a part of
her life. Cultural issues related to race and ethnicity
come up all the time, she says, because these differ-
ences influence so much. While her family and friends
don't give her much trouble about her relationship,
she can't help but realize the differences.

"It's not like we don't see race," she explains. "There are
cultural issues around how we communicate, what we like
to eat, what type of music we listen to, everything."

So, she and Kristen try to learn from each other and find
new experiences together.

"She sings a mean Alicia Keys lyric," Seven jokes. "It's
about being open to new experiences. I mean, what's that
place we went? With the loud, screaming boys?"

"The Lime Spider?" Kristen offers with a grin.

So, Seven may not exactly like Kristen's punk rock, but
she says it's all a matter of education and negotiation,
like any relationship.

"It's not like I just love to go to some of it. I just love to
see her in a place where she is happy and has fun. So, I'll
go," she explains. "Of course, sometimes, when we're in a
car and one of her CDs is playing, I'll be like, 'Ew. We need
to change this.'"

On a day-to-day basis, though, Seven says their lives
are usually too hectic to worry much about what people
say outside their doors. Between she and Kristen both at-
tending graduate school, working full time and raising a
6-year-old, daily life is enough to keep them busy.

"We have our days when we have to get off to work and off
to school, but we have fun," Seven says. "We have to get up,
get lunches packed, get Austin dressed and off to school."

With the same busy daily schedule as any other family
in their neighborhood, Seven and Kristen say they rarely
get to spend the time they want together as a family. But
the two women have plans for the future, starting with
Kristen's move to Cleveland Heights.

They want to put an herb garden in the backyard.
They plan for a second summer with Austin. They talk
about the possibilities of future commitment.

"We talk about family a lot," Seven says, putting her
hand on Kristen's knee. "After a year, potentially, we'll
be together, living in the same space... having additional
children. We've discussed Kristen having a baby."

The two women know that they would not be able to
marry in Ohio if they should choose, but they want to
stay in Cleveland Heights, near their families and friends.
Like many other families in their position, Seven says,
they want to stay where they are comfortable, wherever
that may be.

All the three of them know for certain is that they
want to continue to build something together. Af-
fter all, Seven says, there are many different kinds of
families out there, and hers is no different from the
heterosexual standard.

"I think we're interesting, but we aren't all that
unique," Seven says. "I guess we are in the scheme
of what your average family looks like. We want the
same thing that any family would want. We just want
to be together."
High (school) tolerance

This local high school's gay/straight alliance leads by example

Story by Michael Collins
Photos by Samara Peddle

When the final bell rings at Firestone High School in Akron, students noisily make their way to their lockers, ready to head home for the day or off to the usual after-school activities.

While many high schools have sports, clubs or theater as after-school options, Firestone High has one student group that many other schools do not.

Gay, Lesbian and Straight Students has been an active student group at the school since the fall of 2000. The group, composed of LGBT students and supportive straight allies, seeks to create its own safe haven in the school.

Today, the group meets over doughnuts in one classroom in the school.

President Leora Rzepka, a junior, calls the meeting to order. As the first order of business, she asks for secretary Alex Limbach to read the group's mission statement: "The mission of GLASS, Firestone High School's gay/straight alliance, is to provide a safe and supportive environment for gay, bisexual, transgender, and straight students... by encouraging open and honest communication in discussing thoughts, feelings and experiences regarding homosexuality and the discrimination thereof. Our goal is to educate ourselves and those around..."
Members of Firestone High School group GLASS (Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Students) gather for a portrait. Center left (black jacket/white shirt), Secretary Alex Limbach. Center middle, Vice President Chelsea James. Center right, President Leora Rzepka.

us to promote a positive atmosphere for our school community.”

GLASS meetings usually involve a discussion of social issues relating to homosexuality. Today’s meeting is about hate crimes and how members should respond to harassment.

The students begin a discussion of the different levels of what the students think it means to be an LGBT ally. Rzepka explains a low level of alliance would be to speak on behalf of a LGBT person, a medium level of alliance would be to attend a LGBT event and a high level of alliance would be to actively work to create change.

From the beginning

GLASS was first created with a high level of alliance in mind. When former Firestone students Ellen Saal and Steven Singleton created the group in 2000, they saw it as a place for activism and education.

Saal and Singleton, who are both now psychology students at the University of Akron, got the idea for creating the group from attending the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network’s Creating Change conference in Chicago.

“My father is a teacher, and he had an ex-student who is gay,” Saal explains. “Steven and I went to a GLSEN lunch and met Kevin Jennings (the current executive director of GLSEN).”

Saal’s father’s former student paid for her to attend the Creating Change conference where she attended workshops on creating gay/straight alliances.

Although GLSEN does not organize the student alliances, they provide interested students with contact information, sample bylaws and sample fliers.

Because of GLSEN’s resources, Saal and Singleton were ready to try creating an organization at their own high school.

Bringing the alliance home

Singleton says he anticipated resistance from the faculty and had consulted the Lambda Legal Defense Fund as “the big gun” he and Saal could use, if needed, to get the group started. Instead, the administration embraced the idea, though they envisioned GLASS as having a different mission.

GLASS continued on page 28
**Hate hits home**

The last thing Mikell Nagy recalls one evening in late April 2001 was someone putting a hand on his chest in the middle of a Denny's restaurant.

"I hit the floor, and the next thing I remember, I'm back in my apartment," he says.

On that evening, Nagy had gone with several friends to Denny's on East Main Street in Kent after going out to the Interbelt Nite Club, a predominantly gay dance club in Akron. The friends were waiting for a table in the lobby area of the restaurant. Nagy heard a group of men from a nearby table refer to him as a "faggot." Nagy went over to confront the men about the slur, and words were exchanged.

Nagy said one of the men, Brian Lydick of Ravenna, punched him, bruised his face and chipped one of his teeth.

Shortly after the incident, Nagy transferred to Cleveland State University.

Nagy, a former president of PRIDE! Kent and vice president of Delta Lambda Phi, had been an active gay rights advocate during his time at Kent State.

Nagy moved to Cleveland after the incident and currently is employed as the program coordinator for ManHealth, a health-oriented program for gay men in the Cleveland area, run through the Cleveland AIDS TaskForce.

"The hate crime was a major deciding factor for me to leave," he explains. "For me, 'Kent' and 'gay-bashing' are synonymous."

Nagy says he is still an advocate for hate crime legislation that includes sexual orientation.

"The way the current system stands is that it's OK to beat up gay people because you won't face the same penalty as beating up an African American or a Latino," he says.

Lydick pleaded no contest to a misdemeanor assault charge. He was charged $200 and spent 10 days in county jail.
Lydick’s attorney, Jerry Goodwin, says witnesses testified that Nagy spent that evening at Denny’s taunting Lydick and his tablemates with obscenities.

Nagy filed a lawsuit asking for $25,000 in compensation from Denny’s a year after the incident because no security was present at the time of the incident. He was never awarded the money, but he says the situation is finally behind him.

“When my story first happened and it was getting a lot of media attention, I had a lot of people coming up to me, telling me their stories about being victims of hate crimes,” he says. “Legally, Cleveland isn’t all that friendly, but I can walk down the street and hold my lover’s hand.”

On the evening of Nov. 22, 2003, Kent resident Dana Widger, her girlfriend, sophomore criminal justice major Kristin Burge, and a friend, Kelly Yahner, went to visit their friend Jenna.

When they arrived, they realized Jenna’s brother was having a party in the backyard with a group of male friends. The women decided to stay inside and visit with Jenna. Widger explains that she had just opened a beer and leaned over to kiss her girlfriend when a man entered from outside.

“Why do you have to come in here disrespectin’?” Widger says the man said. The man then referred to the women as men.

A verbal argument ensued, and the women were called “faggots” and “dykes.”

The man threw full bottles of beer at the women shortly thereafter as the argument began to become even more heated.

Burge, Yahner and another man named Mason tried to escort the unruly man out the door, and he threw Burge to the ground and punched her in the face.

“She was lying on the ground trying to cover her face up,” Widger remembers. “And he was just pummeling her in the face. It was very disturbing. I’ve never been so distraught.”

Burge recalls the incident as being similarly traumatic.

“I was just screaming and crying because this guy was just beating me in the head for no reason,” she says.

Widger ran through the crowd of people, grabbed the man, pulled him up and hit him in the face.

Widger says the hardest part of the entire incident was watching her girlfriend of 2 ½ years get beat up.
Dana Widger is taking time off this semester after being the victim of a hate crime last fall. She feels she is now starting to heal emotionally from the incident.

and Burge immediately dialed the Kent Police Department.

"The Kent police were so awesome," Widger recalls. "But they told us we had to file statements with the Brimfield police."

Widger says she lost a lot of respect for the Brimfield police that evening and that the entire time she was in the police station, she felt like the officers were irritated with her being there.

"After being at the (Brimfield) police station, they were so rude to us, we didn’t even feel like going to the hospital," Burge says. "It was embarrassing that we got beat up by these guys and no one really cared."

Widger says the Brimfield police could not take action because a primary aggressor could not be identified – both parties exchanged blows and alcohol was involved.

"There’s no indication that this disturbance started because of any hate," Brimfield Police Chief Charles Garver said in an article published in the Daily Kent Stater. "It appears to me that alcohol and personal opinions started the incident. From what I’m reading – it was a mess."

The incident didn’t end there.

"I was so scared because we were just standing here on the phone (with the police)," Burge recalls. "And suddenly, there was banging on the windows."

"I had to watch my girlfriend get punched in the face by a fully grown man," Widger explains. "My girlfriend is 5 feet 2 and 115 pounds."

Widger says after hitting the man in the face, someone ripped off the back of her sweater and hit her in the side of the face, which swelled up to three times its normal size.

The next thing Widger remembers is finding Mason, the man who tried to escort the unruly man out, badly beaten on the floor. Widger found Yahner locked in the bathroom with a huge bump over her eye.

After the fight was broken up, the women left.

As they were leaving, Widger recalls hearing one of the men say that the fight happened because they had short hair and were "dykes."

Yahner, Widger and Burge went back to their homes in Kent. Widger

Hotlines for victims of hate crimes:

(208) 246-2292
National Hate Crime Hotline

(800) GAY-8761
Lesbian and Gay Community Center of Greater Cleveland

(888) THE-GLNH
National Gay and Lesbian Hotline

(773) 871-CARE
Horizons Anti-Violence Project
Hate: Not protected

Ohio does not include sexual orientation in its hate crime statutes. Some individual cities or counties do include it, but not all agencies are required to report it to the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

“The FBI report has significantly lower numbers than what we see,” says Tim Marshall, director of communications at the Lesbian and Gay Community Center of Greater Cleveland. “The media may say that hate crimes are down overall, when, in actuality, there is a significant jump.”

Hate crimes reported through the Cleveland center are not legally binding documents, but the data is used to prove that there is a problem with anti-gay violence.

“It’s easier to call the gay center and admit that you’ve been attacked because you’re queer than it is to admit it to the police,” Marshall explains.

Marshall says last year, the majority of the hate crimes reported through the center did not happen at gay bars or clubs like they have in the past.

“A lot of them are happening more in neighborhoods,” he says.

One instance involved a gay Cleveland couple that lived in a house for about 15 years. The couple awoke one morning to discover their porch spray-painted with anti-gay epithets. The couple went door-to-door to inquire who might have done it.

Word got out, and the teenage assailant who committed the vandalism returned to the home. Once there, the assailant verbally and physically assaulted the couple.
Hate: Not reported

Aaron Patterson, youth programs coordinator at the Cleveland center, explains the faults in reporting hate crimes as being attributed to four reasons:

1. The police department may not be required to report the hate crime because they are not trained to do so.
2. Hate crime legislation varies by state, city or county. Not all areas are required to report violent crimes based on sexual orientation as a hate crime.
3. It is up to individual officers to determine whether or not they view the assault as biased.
4. The victim of the hate crime may not be comfortable admitting that the crime was based on sexual orientation.

“We have had reported to us that officers have not reported hate crimes in cities that have hate crimes included in their statutes,” Patterson says.

PRIDE! Kent Executive Chair Bridgit McCafferty says another reason some sexual minorities may not report hate crimes is because they are used to it.

“LGBT people sometimes consider more minor incidents just a part of daily life,” she says. “They have to put up with harassment and have grown used to it and have become socialized to accept it as a part of their reality.”

Currently, hate crime legislation in the city of Kent does not protect hate crimes motivated by sexual orientation or physical disability.

PRIDE! Kent and Friends & Allies are working to pass hate crime legislation for these two minority groups in Kent.

“It’s important to remember that harassment still continues,” Friends & Allies Executive Director Shar Fish says. “If this issue does make it to the ballot, we’re going to need voter support. We’re planning on going door-to-door about the issue.”

National Gay and Lesbian Task Force
Hate Crime Laws in the U.S.
(Last updated February 2004)

- Hate crime laws include crimes based on sexual orientation and gender identity - 7 states and the District of Columbia
- Hate crime laws include crimes based on sexual orientation - 22 states
- Hate crime laws do not include crimes based on sexual orientation - 15 states
- Hate crime laws address crimes motivated by bias or prejudice and do not list categories - 2 states
- Do not have hate crime laws that include crimes based on any characteristics - 5 states

* Maryland, Michigan and Indiana hate crime data collection laws include sexual orientation, but hate crime penalty laws do not. Utah collects data including sexual orientation by practice, not by law.
* Utah hate crime law addresses crimes with intent to "intimidate or terrorize" and does not list specific categories. A Utah trial judge ruled the law unconstitutionally vague.

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Hate crimes at Kent State: How the university helps its students

If students are victims of a violent hate crime at Kent State, they should immediately phone the police. But there are other avenues that provide assistance that the student may consider as well.

Any complaint can be filed through the Office of the Student Ombuds or the Office of Affirmative Action.

Ann Penn, director of the Office of Affirmative Action, says the offices have differences. “The Student Ombuds Office provides students confidential consultation in assisting with the possible resolution of any university-related concern, grievance or appeal,” she says. “The Affirmative Action Office deals specifically with issues of discrimination and harassment.”

The Student Ombuds Office has a Safe Zone sticker. “The state of Ohio doesn’t have (sexual orientation) as a protected class,” Dean of Students Greg Jarvie says. “But we think any student is a protected class.”

Jarvie encourages students to file a complaint with the police department where the incident occurred first and then consult his office or the Office of Affirmative Action.

“We can then help the student get counseling and get through the law process,” Jarvie says.

Jarvie explains that the office does not have jurisdiction over off-campus hate crimes. But if the crime involves a student assaulting another student, even off-campus, the university has the option to pick that case up.

Bridgit McCafferty, executive chair of PRIDE! Kent, says students can also file a complaint in the PRIDE! Kent office in Room 237 of the Student Center.

“If a student is the victim of a hate crime against the LGBT community, they can come to our office and file a form so the proper authorities are identified,” she says.

Jarvie stresses the importance of the Safe Zone program to eliminate these hate crimes from occurring.

“It’s important to remind students of the Safe Zones,” Jarvie says. “I also think the heterosexual students need to know that, too. I believe there is a lot of advocacy, even from heterosexual students. There are people who understand what our gay students are going through and that they understand that they can report a crime as well.”
"The principal wanted it to be a support group, but the students didn’t want to go in that direction," Singleton says. "We were more focused toward empowerment and activism."

Despite the welcoming attitude of the administration, the other students presented a bigger problem. Saal says the founding members encountered some harassment.

"I didn’t get physically beat up, (but) I was called ‘fag’ and ‘dyke’ and stuff," Saal says. Fliers advertising the group and its meetings were frequently torn down, but "We just put them back up," Saal says.

Singleton adds that they would replace the missing flier with a postcard that read, "A gay-friendly poster was here and has been taken down. What do you think about that?"

Although there was opposition from some students, other straight students joined the group. According to Singleton, the group had about a 1-to-5 ratio of gay to straight members.

"It was one of the advantages of promoting awareness as opposed to being a support group," he says. "A support group was exclusionary."

Singleton says the group made a positive impact on the atmosphere at the school early on.

"The year after we graduated, we had four same-sex couples at prom," he relates.

**Continuing the tradition**

Today, GLASS members continue the themes their predecessors introduced.

Rzepka begins a hate crime discussion by distributing a booklet from the Anti-Defamation League titled *101 Ways to Combat Prejudice*.

She asks the group about the differences among a stereotype, discrimination and prejudice.

Some students have trouble explaining the difference, so Limbach gives some examples.

"A stereotype is when a sixth-grader says ‘All third graders are babies,’" she explains. "A prejudice would be, ‘We do not like to play with third graders because they are babies.’ Discrimination would be, ‘Let’s not let the third graders play with us because they are babies.’"

The group laughs at Limbach’s simplistic examples, calling them hokey.

Things get more serious when Rzepka asks the group to think more..."
"If something were to happen in our school or in our community, if someone were to be targeted and attacked as a hate crime, what can we as a community, what can we as individuals do?"

The responses are vague at first. One student answers, "Stand up for them?" Another exuberantly offers, "Have a rally in the streets?"

Though full of youthful exuberance, the students have the right idea of "alliance." And that, if nothing else, is a start.

While unique in the area, Firestone High's GLASS is merely one of an ever-growing number of high school gay/straight alliances across the country. While many are located in or near large cities, others, like GLASS, are located in smaller cities.

To find out more information about high school LGBT groups or GLSEN, go to www.glsen.org.

"The principal wanted it to be a support group, but the students didn't want to go in that direction. We were more focused toward empowerment and activism."

Steven Singleton
Co-creator of GLASS
You say "religion." We say "tolerance."

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A HOUSE DIVIDED

Local religious leaders discuss a split in their faiths over homosexuality

Story by Aaron Bobick  Photos by Sarah Thompson
After the Anglican Church ordained Gene Robinson, an openly gay man, as bishop of New Hampshire last year, the international denomination found itself torn between accepting homosexuality and adhering to traditional church beliefs.

Many religious communities are finding themselves at a similar crossroads.

Gary Mitchener, interim pastor at Christ Church in Kent, has dealt first-hand with the Anglican split.

"There is deep pain on both sides," Mitchener says. "One member said that she felt betrayed by the church because of this split."

Mitchener notes that members of his own community have left the parish for a more traditional religious community in Ravenna.

Mitchener explains that these traditional Anglicans interpret the Bible literally. The more liberal Anglicans, like those in his congregation, read the Bible and let the community decide what the passages mean for itself.

David Powers, an ordained rabbi at Temple B'na Abraham in Elyria and communications professor at Kent State University, notes that the Jewish faith, too, has been split about homosexuality. He separates Judaism into three general sects: liberal, conservative and Orthodox.

"On one side of the spectrum are the liberals who are open to everything," he explains. "In the middle stand the conservatives who are starting to open up to new ideas. On the far other side are the Orthodox Jews who remain closed to all new ideas and will not change."

The same could be said for the Anglican faith. Mitchener, who knew Robinson while he served as a Chaplin at Dartmouth, N.H., is a progressive who favors a more liberal view on homosexuality. He is a member of Soul Force, an organization that helps members of the gay community either form stronger bonds with their faith or create a new bond if it has been broken.

He says Soul Force implements the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. to "seek justice for God's lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender children."

Mitchener sees no reason to exclude anyone from religion, no matter what he or she believes. Even the interpretations from the Bible and other religious texts, he says,
don't necessarily make it right to denounce homosexuality.

"The Bible thumpers point to Leviticus 20:13 when they want to 'prove' that homosexuality is a sin," Mitchener says. The passage reads, "If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death; their blood is upon them."

Powers agrees that this sort of belief may be derived from a misinterpretation.

"Bible thumpers misunderstand the Bible because they don't speak Hebrew," he says. "There have been many misinterpretations of the Bible because of a loss in translation, (homosexuality) being only one of them."

Powers says religious texts can just as easily be interpreted to support the inclusion of homosexuals. On Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement in the Jewish faith, he used Isaiah 58:1-14 in his sermon, which says that one should "clothe the naked and set the oppressed free." In his sermon, Powers used homosexuals as an example of oppression.

"Is not this the fast I look for: to unlock the shackles of injustice, to undo the fetters of bondage, to let the oppressed go free and to break every cruel chain?" he said in his sermon. "Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and to bring the homeless in your house? When you see the naked to clothe them, and never to hide yourself from your own kin."

Powers drew from a midrash, an old sermon recorded in post-Biblical rabbinic literature, to interpret "When you see the naked, to clothe them," as "help solve their problems at once."

"It does not say, 'When you see the naked, you form a committee,'" Powers says. "It does not say, 'When you encounter the oppressed, you study the problem.' The commands are public obligations, not gratuitous, personal noblesse oblige."

Because he is open about his own homosexuality, Powers says his own community is more accepting of the liberal point of view. While the difference of opinion has shaken up his faith and that of the Anglican Church, such a change may be in order.

"Controversy is healthy. It needs to be had," Powers says. "If it breaks the church, then the church needs to be broken."

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'Families are about love, not who makes up the family'

Photos by Molly Corfman with additional reporting by Melissa Wood

Members of the Akron chapter of Parents, Friends and Family of Lesbians and Gays want to make life easier for their LGBT loved ones.
Visit Fusiononline www.fusion.kent.edu to read the full story
Sapphic, transgender, inverted, homoerotic, transexual, queer – there are so many terms to consider when talking about homosexuality. Knowing what to use when and how can be confusing for the gay and straight alike.

“Transgender” and “transexual” are two terms that have been used interchangeably by heterosexuals and by unknowing members of the gay community.

“People consider ‘transgender’ and ‘transexual’ interchangeable because people often use the words interchangeably,” says Sarah Wilcox, an assistant professor of sociology at Kent State. “The difference between them is subtle.”

Wilcox defines a transexual (also spelled “transsexual”) as “someone who identifies as male or female but whose gender identity conflicts with their biological sex – that is, they were born male or have XY chromosomes, but experience themselves as female.”

Wilcox explains that “transexual” is a more restrictive term that describes people who sometimes get medical treatment – for example, hormones or surgery to “align their internal gender identity with their physical self.”

The term “transgender,” though, applies to a wider range of gender alignment issues.

“Transgender refers to the spectrum of gender ambiguity – the various ways in which our gendered behavior, activities, dress and identities do not match up neatly with the assumption that there are two biological categories – ‘male’ and ‘female,’” Wilcox says.

She says ‘transgender’ is a broader term that can include transsexuals, cross-dressers, people who are intersexed (who have some of the biological characteristics of both sexes) and “anyone from across a spectrum of gender ambiguity or non-conformity.”

Wilcox explains that the two terms cannot be used interchangeably as most people use them. While ‘transexual’ is a medical term developed by psychiatrists and psychologists, ‘transgender’ describes a social movement.

“(Transgendered) is the political component – working to create a world where greater fluidity of gender expression is welcomed and valued,” Wilcox says.

Either way, both terms describe a section of the sexual minority population seeking only to feel comfortable in their own skin.

“Some people have a strong, internal, deeply felt sense of themselves as being either male or female, while some people feel themselves to be something other than or in between entirely male or female,” Wilcox explains. “Having both words allows people to express both kinds of identities.”
Transgendered is the broader of the two terms and describes people who, like cross-dressers and transsexuals, are ambiguous in gender.

"Transsexual" refers to the people who feel as if they are meant to be the opposite sex and sometimes undergo changes to become a member of the other sex. This term is used more often in a medical sense.

The two words are not interchangeable. Both of these terms are significant and imply different but necessary descriptions about human sexuality.
Scholarships support sexual minorities in need

Story by Sara Macho

Even before Aaron Shea came out to those close to him, his peers would verbally abuse him, throw items at his car and pitch eggs at his home in Medina.

“I had to sneak around with my first boyfriend and was confronted by his parents because they thought I was making their son gay,” says Shea, a freshman exploratory major who is bisexual.

Bruce Lindstrom understands Shea’s experience. Lindstrom grew up in a Baptist family in Southern California and endured harassment because he was gay.

As an adult, he and Carl Strickland formed a foundation to provide college scholarships for youths who may be estranged from their families and communities. Their organization, The Point Foundation, located in Lakewood, Colo., was founded in 2001.

“Once his family found out he was gay, they considered him evil, pulled any support for university, turned him out of the house and family, and did not speak to him for 15 years,” Strickland says.

Strickland had the exact opposite experience coming out—his friends and family embraced him, and he says he enjoyed freedom and happiness in his journey through discovering himself.

Whatever a student’s specific background, The Point Foundation can offer scholarships for a variety of needs and studies.

“We support undergraduate, graduate and post-graduate students attending an accredited United States university for a degree in any field of study, anywhere in the country,” Strickland says.

Outlets are available

The Point Foundation is not the only program looking out for sexual minority students.

The Pride Foundation, based in the Pacific Northwest, awards 16 different scholarships to sexual minorities living in and attending colleges in the Pacific Northwest region of the United States.

Zan McColloch-Lussier, the foundation’s campaign director, says the scholarship was created in 1993 by Brian Day, who is gay.

Randy Brians, the scholarships manager for the foundation, says the Pride Foundation gave out $102,000 in scholarships in 2003, and in the last 10 years has disbursed $517,696, making the foundation the nation’s largest provider of gay, lesbian and transgender scholarships.
The Parents, Family and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, or PFLAG, is another group that helps sexual minorities receive scholarships for higher education.

George Nevers, the vice president of the organization's board of trustees in the Houston-area chapter, says the group's mission is to provide educational scholarships to gay, lesbian and transgender youth.

"I hope most of the scholarship recipients can be open about their sexual orientation in order to provide positive role models for other youth who cannot be open," Nevers says, and he wants students to know that coming out is a process. "The Parents, Family and Friends of Lesbians and Gays organization respects wherever students are in their coming-out journey, and we assure them that the scholarship program is completely confidential."

Shea says he would have shied away from applying for such a scholarship because he was not yet ready to come out. He only told his mother when coming out and did not want his sexual preference to be publicized to other members of his family and community.

"The awards are based on academic achievement, extracurricular activities, leadership and financial need," Nevers says.

What scholarships?

There is a concern that students don't know about the scholarships that are available. Brian Guffey, junior musical theater major and president of Delta Lambda Phi, did not know about scholarships for sexual minorities until a friend told him about them.

"After I discovered the Point Foundation and the scholarships it offered to gay, lesbian and transgender students, I logged onto Fastweb.com to receive more information about it," he says.
Brians says he wishes more students knew about the scholarship programs.

The Pride Foundation advertises through press releases, sending materials to organizations, putting up flyers and distributing applications to schools in the Pacific Northwest.

Nevers, though, says the PFLAG scholarship in his area is well publicized.

"The material is presented primarily through guidance counselors, assistant principals and word of mouth," Nevers says.

**We can help you come out**

Many people across the country are afraid to come out to those around them, Brians says. "It is fine if students are afraid to come out," he says. "Their fear is reasonable. Many young people come out to their parents and then immediately lose their support. Our (The Pride Foundation's) hope is that they will find supportive people within their community who can help them as they deal with their isolation and questions."

But if students have to come out alone, Strickland tells them to have courage.

"Your courage will be an inspiration for others around you to take the leap and become a leader."
Enter the Zone
Though underused, Safe Zone allies provide an ear for sexual minority students

Story by Alaina Fahy
Photos by Tori Tedesco

Tim Allen has been openly bisexual for the last two semesters. When he first decided to tell people about his sexual orientation, he was nervous.

He didn’t know where to go, but now he thinks it would have been a good idea to go to a Safe Zone.

“It would have helped me to prepare for a bad reaction if I would have gotten one when I came out,” says Allen, senior English major.

Safe Zones, organized by PRIDE! Kent seven years ago, are intended to help educate the university about LGBT issues, says Bridgit McCafferty, sophomore English major and PRIDE! Kent’s executive chair of Safe Zone.

Where do I go?

Safe Zone allies – professors, residence assistants or other university leaders who have an office that can provide privacy – use pink upside-down triangle stickers to show that they are open to talking about LGBT issues. They do not judge or counsel – they are just there to listen and to be there for the student, McCafferty says.

“College is a place where a lot of people come out because they are no longer around their hometown, family or old friends,” says Krista Marsh, a social worker and Prentice Hall residence hall director. “A Safe Zone can be that influence that helps to positively influence the coming out experience for them (sexual minority students).”

There is no formal training to be a Safe Zone ally – all it takes is a private area where a person can talk to students in confidence. Safe Zone offices will have a list on hand of places to refer students for counseling, McCafferty says, such as Townhall II.

Other universities – such as Ohio State University, Ohio University, Penn State University and Indiana University – have similar programs for LGBT students. Yet, most of their programs require training before becoming an ally. These training seminars teach students, faculty and staff how to deal with traumatic situations, specific vocabulary to use and who to contact in the case of an emergency.

There are 75 Safe Zones across the Kent campus, but not all are frequently used.

“Even if a Safe Zone never gets used, it says there are at least places you could go if you are questioning or having problems with (LGBT) issues,” McCafferty says.

Other schools

Marsh, whose office has been a Safe Zone for two years, helped create Ohio University’s Safe Zone program, which required allies to attend training to become qualified.

“It taught vocabulary, what being an ally means, myths and stats,” she says. “It helped to make the residence halls more of a welcoming environment.”

McCafferty says this additional training is not necessary at Kent State because the program is a success.

But Marsh disagrees and says training should be required. She is trying to institute a new program at Kent State called Project Rainbow.

“Project Rainbow would have an educational component behind it,” she says, and the new program would have a seminar similar to Ohio University’s, consisting of lesson plans, resource packets, books and videos educating people on LGBT issues.

“The resource packet for Project Rainbow would consist of resources from not only Kent but Akron and Cleveland areas, too,” Marsh says.

How to become a Safe Zone

Applications to become a Safe Zone are available in the PRIDE! Kent office on the second floor of the Student Center. McCafferty says any organization is welcome to become a Safe Zone.

Though the program is aimed toward helping LGBT students, she says, anyone is welcome to visit a Safe Zone to learn more about the issues.

“Being a Safe Zone doesn’t mean you’re the only one who supports (LGBT) students,” she says. “The Safe Zones give factual information without stereotypes. That’s why the program is so important.”

McCafferty says she personally has never visited a Safe Zone before because she is comfortable with her sexuality.

“I think it’s a good thing,” she says. “If that one person on campus gets help through a Safe Zone, then it’s worth it to me.”
A Safe Zone’s story

Nadia Alamo, Terrace Hall director, says her office has been a Safe Zone since March 2002, but only two students have used it in that time.

“It’s definitely not a regular thing,” she says.

Alamo says her office is a Safe Zone because she knows how it feels to need to talk.

“I know how difficult it can be for students to find someone to talk to where they won’t be judged,” she says.

Residence hall directors are given the option to become a Safe Zone at the beginning of each academic year, Alamo says.

But, she says, anybody with an agenda should not sign up to offer a Safe Zone.

“Someone who is interested in expressing that they understand how the person feels, but that at the same time feel it’s wrong, should not be one,” she says.

It is important for allies to understand that they are not therapists.

“I don’t try to get into a counseling session or advise a student what to do,” Alamo says. “I just listen and refer them to someone who can do more than just listen.”

The counseling session is confidential, and Alamo says that encourages students to go to the Safe Zones.

“A lot of times there is a lot of fear that someone would find out, so I think it’s essential that it’s confidential,” Alamo says.

She says there was not a Safe Zone program at her college or high school.

“I went to a liberal arts college, and the class was almost perfectly split in half between LGBT and straight students,” Alamo says.

“A Safe Zone has to be accepting, empathetic, understanding and willing to listen,” Alamo says. “You can’t teach that.”
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The chosen title of the magazine best describes the magazine's purpose. According to Webster's Dictionary, "fusion is a merging of diverse elements into a unified whole." The founding editors believe that the university community is composed of people with varying sexual identities constantly interacting in classrooms, dorms or other settings. Fusion magazine addresses sexual minority issues within the general university population.

Fusion magazine's editors subscribe to the premises of social media and advocate content promoting social justice, democracy and a civil society. The magazine will strive to unify people of different backgrounds through education and awareness.