Spring 2007

Fusion Spring 2007

Elise Franco
Rachel Abbey
Adam Griffiths
Tim Magaw
Caroline Lauterbacher

See next page for additional authors

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More than skin deep
According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary, “fusion is a merging of diverse, distinct, or separate elements into a unified whole.” The founding editors believe that the university community is composed of people with varying sexual identities who are constantly interacting in classrooms, dorms and other settings.

Fusion Magazine is produced by students at Kent State University twice per academic year. No part of Fusion may be reprinted without permission.

Fusion Magazine thanks the Gay Community Endowment Fund of the Akron Community Foundation for its participation in funding this project.

The staff of the Fall 2006 issue of Fusion Magazine has been selected to receive an SPJ Region 4 Mark of Excellence Award for Best Student Magazine.
‘I’d stay up all night thinking about who I am.’

Transgender students try to find comfort within themselves and the rest of the world.

You Should Know ...

**Scholarships**
05 Did you know your sexual orientation could pay off? For several students, it’s a possibility.

**In Memory**
14 She helped change the world. Activist Barbara Gittings’ lifetime achievements are remembered.

**The Truth**
32 Stereotypes exist — and Kent State students voice their opinions on the matter.

Features

‘It was just a downward spiral ...’
06 When the glitz and glitter surrounding the LGBT community fade, the truths of suicide and depression are revealed.

“I didn’t mind kissing him ... nothing else felt right.”
22 For some, lack of commitment or taste in music is a deal breaker. For others, before they came out, it was something else entirely.

“... it is a respectable thing to just say, ‘Yes, I am gay...’”
26 LGBT student leaders discuss gay and lesbian celebrities and how they influence today’s culture.
Editor’s Letter

“...They are all hard-working, devoted and completely genuine people who are trying to achieve something almost everyone else has at birth: acceptance.”

It’s not an easy subject to understand. I fit in with the majority of society, so I’ve had to work a little harder during the past couple years to make sure I got it. Here’s my revelation.

I’m never going to understand it — at least, not fully.

I started out almost two years ago as the minority affairs reporter for the Daily Kent Stater. I held that beat for a year and also began writing for Fusion. During that time, I really got to know the students in PRIDE! Kent and what became the Queer Liberation Front. They are all hard-working, devoted and completely genuine people who are trying to achieve something almost everyone else has at birth: acceptance.

I wanted this issue to show the struggles gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender students have every day to just feel comfortable within their own skin as well as the rest of society. It is my hope, that through this magazine, people will have a better understanding of the LGBT community and its individual members.

The purpose of Fusion is to increase awareness and understanding about the LGBT community to everyone, not just one part of society. Through a grant by the Akron Community Foundation’s Gay Community Fund, Fusion can increase its circulation and, therefore, reach out to more areas, such as Akron and Cleveland. I want to thank the fund for this opportunity to help spread understanding beyond Kent and Kent State.

This magazine has taken a considerable amount of effort to produce, and I’ve enjoyed every minute of it. Through countless hours of work and many sleepless nights, the writers, photographers, copy editors, ad manager, designer and adviser have really put together a publication we can all feel proud to call our own. I want to thank each of them for their hard work. I would also like to especially thank Kate Bigam, my managing editor, for helping me stay sane at each deadline.

At the end of the day, we’re all people. It seems that sometimes we all have trouble remembering that simple fact. I’m not going to stand on top of a soapbox and pretend to know why we are on this planet, but I’m fairly sure we are not here to hate.

Bryan Wroten
EDITOR
Someone once told me, “Allies are so weird. Do they just want to see gays in their natural habitat, or what?”

I was astounded – was I fighting for the rights of a group of people who didn’t want my help? Briefly, I considered backing off and letting the LGBT world fight its own fight.

But here’s the thing: If it weren’t for the help of allies, the otherwise-unaffiliated majority, very few minorities would ever achieve the goals for which they fight. Think about how many more Jewish lives would have been lost during the Holocaust were it not for the kind Germans who hid them, or all the African Americans who escaped slavery only with the help of caring whites and the Underground Railroad. And women could never have gained the right to vote without the help of the men who passed legislation allowing it.

Gay, straight or otherwise, the LGBT struggle for equality is a topic that affects all of us. Until the playing field is leveled and every person is recognized as equal, we are all at a disadvantage. By letting intolerance, discrimination and a general lack of acceptance permeate our culture, we hinder social progress and distort human decency.

This issue of Fusion is for everyone who cares about the fight for equal rights, both LGBTs and allies alike. It is one small piece of a much bigger picture, a greater struggle, a larger issue – in the hopes that one day, magazines such as Fusion won’t need to exist.
don’t stay in your room

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LGBT students can look to minority scholarships to help pay for college

Finding funding

Many unique financial aid opportunities exist for LGBT students — if they know where to look for them. FinAid.org, a free financial aid tip Web site, lists national scholarships for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students, as well as more regional and campus-specific ones. The scholarship requirements range from ethnic backgrounds to specific areas of study, such as aviation.

Some scholarships simply relate to LGBT issues, requiring students to do academic research based in gay or lesbian studies. Others open the financial aid to straight allies, as long as they can show they have made significant strides to support the gay community. One scholarship listed on the site is the Point Foundation’s National LGBT Scholarship Fund.

“What the Point Foundation is looking for is leadership within the community,” said program associate Ginger Voelker. This can range from students involved in LGBT clubs as allies to students with LGBT siblings or parents to those involved with AIDS research, Voelker said, as well as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender students.

LGBT-focused scholarships are important, Voelker said. Most of the Point Foundation’s financial aid recipients have been turned away from their families, she added. “They have no support.”

Although it’s true that LGBT students have scholarship opportunities, the majority never applies or even knows they exist.

Christopher Taylor, senior nursing major, says its probably because they are scarce.

“I’ve personally heard of them, but there aren’t as many scholarships for LGBT students as there are for other minority groups, which is why a lot of people probably don’t know about them,” he said.

Katy King, former technical communications major at University of Wisconsin-Stout, says she’s torn about whether having scholarships based on a minority is even a good idea. “On one hand, if we lived in a perfect world I’d want all scholarships to be merit-based or even need-based,” she says. “On the other hand, our world is obviously not perfect.”

It’s for this reason, King says, she feels all minority scholarships are valid although she wishes they weren’t necessary.

FinAid also suggests students call the colleges they are interested in and ask if they have an LGBT Resource Center. Kent State does not have such a center.

For more information, visit www.finaid.org/otheraid/gay.phtml.
BEHIND
It’s sometimes hard to see the dark side of the LGBT community. From the outside looking in, the glitter and glam seem to radiate a message of a content and alive population that enjoys everything about being itself.

Hard to believe for a lot of people that the world that seems like one big party is jolted back to reality. The glitter falls, the lights come down and things fall apart.

It’s AIDS wiping out a generation of gay men in New York. It’s hate crimes based on sexual orientation and gender expression. It’s suicide — because a segment of the population feels it has nowhere and no one to turn to for support.

Hidden behind smiles and laughter is a great deal of desperation for some LGBT youth.
“She told me she had just got out of the hospital because she tried to kill herself.”

For Lynn*, a junior exercise science major, it was a conservative town and an abusive mother. “I ended up locking myself in my room, and I remember sitting there and just being like, ‘I can’t deal with this,’” she says. “Then the next thing I remember was waking up to my dad shaking me to try and wake me up.”

For Amy Lennon’s ex-girlfriend, it was also an abusive mother and a Southern Baptist upbringing. “She called me three weeks after we stopped talking,” says Lennon, a sophomore sociology and philosophy major. “She told me that she had just got out of the hospital because she tried to kill herself.”

Out of the limelight

A search for “LGBT suicide” on Google News yields an article from Ireland about gay suicide rates. A piece from the *UCLA Daily Bruin* about the loss of an LGBT mentor. A report on the anti-gay legislation in Nigeria. No stories. No faces. No resolution. But suicide is the third leading cause of death among people ages 15 to 24, according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention’s National Center for Injury Prevention and Control.

And Jaime Bishop, youth support advocate at the LGBT community center of Greater Cleveland, says the situation within the LGBT community is getting worse.

“There is a direct connection to the lack of environmental support and validation and how an individual views themselves,” he said in an e-mail. “If we are supported and affirmed, we will have a stronger sense of self and empowerment. When we are dismissed, ignored and abused and we can’t find help or support for that, we will view ourselves as ‘less than.’”

An article in the November 2001 *American Psychologist* reported higher rates of major depression, generalized anxiety disorder and substance use among lesbian and gay youth, based on large population-based public health

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* For personal reasons, Lynn has asked her real name not be used.

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**PFLAG Cleveland**

2332 Delaware Drive
Cleveland Heights, OH 44106
Information Line: (216) 556-1701
www.pflagcleveland.org
Monthly meetings, 7:30 pm
2nd Tuesday, Trinity Cathedral, Cleveland
Monthly Support Group,
The Next Step Group &
Straight Spouse Network

**PFLAG Akron**

PO Box 5471
Akron, OH 44313
(330) 342-5825
Monthly meetings, 7:00 pm
3rd Thursday, North Springfield Presbyterian Church
671 Canton Road

**PFLAG National**

1101 14th Street NW, Suite 1030
Washington, DC 20005
(202) 638-4200
www.pflag.org
E-mail: info@pflag.org

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surveys. It also discussed higher rates of recurrent major depression among gay men and higher rates of anxiety and suicidal thoughts among people ages 15 to 54.

“LGBT youth are two to three times more likely to attempt suicide than other youth,” Bishop says, citing figures provided by the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services. “Thirty percent of the estimated 5,000 completed suicides each year by youth may be by LGBT kids. This is a vulnerable and disenfranchised population.”

Being a statistic

Lynn grew up in Canton, where softball was her life.

“I had softball and we pretty much either played or practice all year,” she says. “It was my escape. I wouldn’t go home after school — I’d go lift or I’d go throw.”

Lynn was involved with another girl on her softball team, but they didn’t want anyone else to know.

“There were a lot of nights when the two of us would just sit and cry on the phone, and it was terrible because that was the only way we could talk outside of practice,” she says. “We couldn’t be any more than friends because then people would find out, and it would be a huge, awful thing.”

Lynn’s life at home was bad — her mother was an alcoholic who had a tendency to beat Lynn, and her father was as unable as she was to stop her mother’s actions. After her brother went away to college the summer between middle school and high school, things got worse.

“It was just really hard,” Lynn says. “At least when my brother was home, he would stand up for me against my mom, and then that was gone. I had no one to protect me.”

When Lynn’s mom found her ex-girlfriend’s softball jersey in her room, she beat Lynn.

Lynn washed down three prescription sleeping pills with about half a bottle of vodka stolen from her parents’ liquor cabinet.

A lack of family support and acceptance can make LGBT youth feel as if they have no one to turn to and nowhere to go.
“I ended up having to get my stomach pumped,” she says. “My lips were black for like three days. I ended up spending a weekend in the psych ward. They sent me to this therapist and he was terrible. He made it really feel like it was my fault — that everything was my fault.”

Living with a statistic

Lennon got the call about her ex-girlfriend the Friday morning after her 20th birthday. She was getting ready to ride with a friend to the Ohio State-Indiana football game. She was waiting in her room.

She met her ex-girlfriend at a drag show in November 2005, and they hit it off instantly.

“She was a wonderful actress — until you got to know her,” Lennon says.

Lennon says her ex-girlfriend was a cutter, diagnosed with bipolar disorder and had “a lot of family problems.” She was an alcoholic and also had problems with cocaine.

“Research is showing that many youth who make suicide gestures or complete a suicide do so as a result of substance abuse and impaired decision making and control abilities,” Bishop says.

The first time Lennon’s ex-girlfriend tried to commit suicide, she was drunk. Her roommate wanted to move out of their apartment because she couldn’t handle the ex-girlfriend’s issues, Lennon says.

“She slit her wrists,” she says. “(She) tried to run away down the stairs. She passed out, so they called an ambulance. She was bleeding all over the place.”

The lack of acceptance of the LGBT community is seen in the scratched out graffiti art boasting gay pride and same-sex relationships on a train heading through downtown Kent. Jaime Bishop, youth support advocate at the LGBT community center of Greater Cleveland, says the lack of environmental support and validation youth in the LGBT community receive is a big factor in high depression and suicide rates.

What to deal with

“A lot of it has to do with equilibration (an LGBT person is at) with their environment,” says David Brent, professor of psychiatry at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine.

Brent says that someone who has come out and been accepted by his or her family doesn’t have as many issues as someone who hasn’t come out or is being teased or bullied.

“For example, they may come from a religious family where they have very traditional views,” he says. “They may experience more dissidence.”

Brent has never lost a patient who was
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For more info: www.pridekent.tk
Email: pride@kent.edu
struggling with suicide, but he says the kids who are the most at risk and may be in the most trouble are those who are not open.

“A lot of studies that show a relationship between being gay or bisexual and suicidal behavior suggest it has something to do with being rejected at home and at school,” he says. “I don’t think people know what the relationships are exactly, but they know the variables and they don’t understand it.”

Bishop says substance use and abuse are also precursors to suicide in youth. Unsafe sex, homelessness and the strength of a person’s support system, resource options and coping skills can also be factors.

“Research is showing that many youth who make suicidal gestures or complete a suicide do so as a result of substance use and impaired decision making and control abilities,” he says.

“It was just a downward spiral where she would say she was done,” Lennon says of dealing with her ex-girlfriend’s suicidal tendencies. “And I would never criticize anyone for it, but it’s very all-consuming.”

Lennon said there needs to be increased awareness of suicide, especially in members of the LGBT community. She felt she was in a relationship with both her girlfriend and the things she was dealing with.

“It was the worst thing I ever had to endure,” she says, starting to tear up. “I’m still kind of damaged because of it. I eventually learned a lot. I learned how not to get involved. It was a matter of self-preservation.”

Lynn was a cutter, she says. “That was my best way. Instead of it hurting inside that I can’t figure out how to deal with, I can be like, ‘It hurts right here. I can make it hurt. I can make it stop.’ It was the easiest way I could find to deal with it.”

Lennon says cutting was a way for her ex-girlfriend to cope, too.

“She liked pain,” Lennon says. “I think part of it is a pleasure thing. She liked to suffer. I think she was so used to a dysfunctional life. She wasn’t healthy at all. She just wanted love that she could never get from her family.”

The love that others take for granted — the ability to be open and express oneself, and the freedom to live as the person you truly are, not just one you’re pretending to be.

It’s not the first thing that registers in the mind when you personally search “LGBT.”

“Especially in a place when you can’t be out and open, where you have to keep all of that inside and deal with it yourself — you don’t know how to deal with it,” Lennon says. “I’m sure for a lot of people, it looks like there’s no light at the end of the tunnel.”

Adam Griffiths is a freshman magazine journalism major. Contact him at agriffi8@kent.edu.
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4pm till 2:30am
In Memory

REPORTING BY Adam Griffiths PHOTO COURTESY OF Kay Tobin Lahusen

In the beginning ...

BARBARA GITTINGS WAS PRESENT AT THE FIRST GAY RIGHTS demonstration on Independence Day in 1965. She was one of few who openly fought for the removal of homosexuality from the American Psychiatric Association’s list of mental disorders.

Born in Austria in 1932, Gittings eventually attended Northwestern University, where her interest in LGBT-related medical and law studies was sparked when her parents sent her to a psychoanalyst to be “cured” of her homosexuality. She became involved in the Daughters of Bilitis, the first lesbian rights organization, and eventually formed the group’s New York chapter.

When Gittings became interested in more vocal tactics, she joined activist Frank Kameny’s effort to encourage the APA to remove homosexuality from its list of mental disorders. She spent most of the rest of her life working to promote gay and lesbian writings and pushing issues surrounding the liberation movement to the forefront of political and social discussion.

Barbara Gittings lost her battle with breast cancer on Feb. 18, 2007. She is survived by fellow activist Kay Lahusen, her partner of 46 years.

She will be remembered as a pioneer in the battles that LGBT people still fight today — battles made easier by a lifetime of dedication and passion for equality among all people. Gittings laid the foundation for publications like Fusion, and her influence will not soon be forgotten.


The activism of Barbara Gittings

1955
Gittings was an early member of Daughters of Bilitis, one of the first lesbian rights organizations.

1956
The Ladder, a 16-page, lesbian newsletter, was first published and printed with the help of Gittings and several other activists.

1965
Gittings and the rest of the Daughters of Bilitis led the first gay rights demonstration outside the White House.

1973
A campaign Gittings worked on with the American Psychiatric Association had ‘homosexuality’ dropped from a list of mental disorders.

2003
The American Library Association Gay Task Force recognized Gittings for her work with including gay content in libraries.
Kent State University’s most diverse magazine takes an award-winning approach to cover KSU’s most hard-hitting and controversial topics.

Winner of Society of Professional Journalists Mark of Excellence Region Four Awards:

2003  |  Honorable Mention: Best Student Magazine
Published once a year

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

Second Place: Best Online Magazine
http://fusion.kent.edu

First Place: Photo Illustration, Scott R. Galvin, "Silent Shadows" (Cover Story)

2005  |  First Place: Best Student Magazine
(published more than once a year)

First Place: Best All-Around Online Student Magazine

2006  |  First Place: Photo Illustration, Pat Jarrett, “It Was All a Blur”
More than skin deep

STORY BY Tim Magaw  PHOTOS BY Michele Roehrig

When Trae Ruscin left his house to return to campus after Thanksgiving break, he left a letter to his parents in his bedroom.

But when he returned home for winter break, the letter was still unopened.

Ruscin, sophomore photojournalism major, says he’s written his parents several letters, but he hasn’t sent or given them a single one.

Although each letter has been slightly different, they all contain one message that may surprise his parents:

Ruscin is a female-to-male transgender individual.
He is disappointed his parents didn’t find the last note.

“I was sad because I wanted to come out to them,” Ruscin says. “But I thought it was funny because they go through my room when I’m not home. And the one time I want them to, they don’t see the letter.”

Ruscin’s birth name is Amy, which is what his parents still call him. When he’s at home, Ruscin says, he has to pay attention to the pronouns or the name he uses for himself.

“I’ve written letters and redid them,” he says. “I just want to tell them I’m not different than who I was — just a different name and a different gender.”

Elaine J. Hall, an assistant professor of sociology who teaches a course on changing gender roles, says she thinks “transgender” is a relatively new term.

“Transgender refers to a category of people who have a different relationship between sex and gender,” she says.

Hall says sex refers to body type, which is determined at birth, while gender identity refers to whether people identify themselves as male or female.

“In our society, we have a view that sex category is primarily determinant of gender,” Hall says.

Theodore Trimm, a female-to-male transgender individual and junior education major, says being transgender is when one’s perspective gender identity and expression conflict with society’s gender identity and expression for one’s anatomical body.

Realizing your true identity

Trimm, whose birth name is Ashlei, realized he was transgender in April 2005. The breaking point for him was when all women were required to wear dresses or skirts to the Kent Interhall Council’s annual Golden Flash Awards.

“That was the point I realized this was real, and I had to do something,” he says.

Trimm borrowed a skirt, heels and a blouse from various women around his residence hall.

“I felt really awkward,” he says. “I hadn’t worn heels since a couple years before that. I felt like a guy in drag, and I probably looked like it, too.”

Ruscin says he’s always felt different, but it was only about a year ago that he figured out his true gender identity.

“It was really confusing at first,” he says.
“But it takes a lot to figure it out. I’d lose sleep over it. I’d stay up all night thinking about who I am.”

Before coming to Kent State, Ruscin took classes at Cleveland State, including a gender studies course, where he realized why he felt different.

Trimm attempted to tell his family about being transgender, and by the time he told his father and stepmother, he had read about others’ transgender experiences. He says he got the typical parental reaction: They thought it was just a phase their daughter was going through. Trimm says his mother’s response was mostly negative, telling him “This isn’t right,” and “This isn’t how God made you.”

“It definitely sucked,” he says. “I definitely cried about it a lot because it’s always hard to hear somebody you’ve been pretty close to reject a part of you.”

To this day, his father is the only one of his parents who calls him Theodore.

“To see him come around gives me hope that sometime the rest of my parents will come around,” Trimm says.

Although Ruscin hasn’t told his parents, he thinks they might suspect he is transgender, considering he has been cutting his hair shorter and hasn’t worn a skirt in years.

“It’s really hard,” he says. “I pretty much have to hide a big part of who I am.”

But apart from his family, Ruscin says, everyone else is aware of his gender identity. Ruscin told everyone in his residence hall he was transgender and told his professors he would like to go by Trae. Everyone has respected his wishes.

“It’s really good because that’s one of the reasons I came to Kent,” Ruscin says. “Because it’s really LGBT-friendly.”

At first, one of Ruscin’s best friends says she would always see him as a girl. But she slowly grew to understand what it means to be transgender, and now she corrects people when they use the wrong name or pronoun referring to Ruscin.

“It’s a big part of who I am,” Ruscin says.

“So I have to tell all my friends.”

Trimm says he told his friends he was transgender at about the same time he began sharing it with his family. His friends’ reactions were positive, he says, and they don’t see him as any different.

“Most of my friends don’t care,” Trimm says. “They call me Ted for the most part.”

After coming out to his friends and family, Trimm took the next step and legally changed his name to Theodore. The name change was official on Jan. 23, 2006, a date embedded in Trimm’s memory. With the help of Student Legal Services, he filled out the application for a legal name change and eventually went to court. When asked why he wanted to change his name, Trimm told the court it was the first step he needed to take in getting a sex-change operation.

The court approved the change.

“I was shocked,” Trimm says. “I thought there was going to be more to it.”

He says he chose the name Theodore because his friends have always said he was like a teddy bear, which is why he goes by Ted.

But Ruscin’s legal name is still Amy. He has gradually told people as he encounters them that he would like to go by Trae. Occasionally his friends will slip and call him Amy or use the wrong pronoun, but he says they are starting to catch on.

Ruscin says he chose the name Trae because he liked the way it sounded, and he changed the spelling from Trey to make it more interesting.

“I like spelling things differently because it’s more creative,” Ruscin says. “I’m a creative person. I enjoy being an individual.”

Considering the final change

Ruscin is still unsure about undergoing a full sex-change operation. He says the results for female-to-male operations aren’t too promising, and he would like to wait until a better surgery is perfected. But that doesn’t matter much to him because he already considers himself a male.

“Some people say if you don’t have a penis, you’re not a guy,” he says. “Some people say whatever you see yourself as, that’s what you are.”

But Trimm has already started taking testosterone in the hopes of undergoing a sex change. The most important aspect of the physical change, he says, is getting double mastectomy because fully developed breasts are a distinctly female characteristic.

“I want to be able to play a game of one-on-one on the basketball court. Because now, Theodore Trimm, junior education major and a female-to-male transgender individual, and Marina Bach, junior integrated language arts major, are engaged after meeting on the United for Biloxi alternative spring break less than a year ago. The couple describes their relationship as “defying all labels.”
Making the Final Change

Sex reassignment surgery is the means by which an individual transitions to another gender through surgery. About 80 percent of sex-reassignment patients are satisfied with the results.

Female to Male Surgery:

**Elective bilateral mastectomy:**
Removal or reduction of the breasts; involves making an incision near the nipple and removing tissue and fat from under the skin

**Metoidioplasty:**
Creation of a penis by extending the clitoris that has been enlarged by testosterone hormone use

**Phalloplasty:**
Involves constructing a penis from forearm skin and vaginal tissue and attaching it to the vaginal area

Male to Female Surgery:

**Elective bilateral orchiectomy**
Removal of the testicles through an incision in the scrotum; significantly reduces testosterone production

**Tracheal shave:**
Surgical reduction of the tracheal cartilage, also know as the Adam’s apple. An incision is made at the front of the throat and cartilage is carved until it is flat.

**Vaginoplasty:**
Surgical construction of the vagina through a skin inversion, involving the removal of organs and erectile tissue of the penis. Skin and tissue is used to create a vaginal opening.


Trimm injects testosterone into his leg as a part of his physical transition.
if someone calls shirts or skins, I have to go, ‘Oh! I’m shirts,’” Trimm says.

In order to pay for the mastectomy, which can cost up to $6,000, Trimm throws his spare change into an empty applesauce jar every time he breaks a dollar. He would like to undergo the full sexual reassignment surgery, he says, but it is the riskiest of all the surgeries and he has heard the price can reach up to $100,000.

“I’m going to need two jars for that,” Trimm says, laughing.

Getting Comfortable In His Skin

Trimm says it was an emotionally trying experience to come out as a transgender individual.

“It was a nerve-wracking and really frightening experience,” he says. “But it was a really positive one.”

But being transgender isn’t always welcomed by everyone at Kent State.

After last year’s Chingy concert, Trimm was walking to Taco Bell when a few men threatened him and told him he was a freak.

“It was kind of scary because the numbers of transsexual and transgender people being assaulted, attacked, raped and murdered is high,” he says. “But it does make me want to educate more. People don’t know. People are afraid of what they don’t know.”

Trimm says he is comfortable where he’s at in life, although some people might not agree with his life choices. In public, he might see somebody stare, wondering whether he is a male or female. But it doesn’t come up as often as people might think, he says, adding that most of the public is happy about his decision.

Ruscin says he’s experienced the same staring or questioning in public.

“I just smile when it happens,” he says, “and I laugh afterward so I don’t make them more uncomfortable than they already are.”

Ruscin says his decision to live as a man is not a phase, like some people might think.

“I finally feel like who I’m supposed to, I belong somewhere, and I’ve been looking for that my whole life.”
Carrie Wicks was still dating her boyfriend of three years when her older sister Angela came out to her that she was gay, and it got her thinking.

At the young age of 13, a time when most girls are love happy and boyfriend crazy, Wicks was more into having fun, eating pizza and enjoying her life than worrying about dating. Boyfriends weren’t something she thought much about.

Her girlfriends gave her a hard time because they thought she was never going to start dating and a rumor traveled around school that she was a lesbian.

Quickly her life of fun and pizza changed to searching for a missing link story by Caroline Lautenbacher

Before coming out, gay and lesbian young adults try finding love, but were left with uncertainty boys and, at 14 years old, Wicks began her first serious relationship and put the rumors to rest.

“I eventually got hooked up on a blind date and started dating him,” she says. “I was very young and naive and my friends thought he was cute. Even if he was a jackass, he was like a trophy to me.”

Growing up, Wicks, senior sociology and women’s studies major, wasn’t exposed to a lot of gay people, and it wasn’t until her sister came out that she became educated about the LGBT community. “It didn’t bother me or phase me that she came out,” she says. “At the same time
Carrie Wicks, senior sociology and women’s studies major, had several boyfriends while she was growing up, despite rumors in school that she was a lesbian. “I eventually got hooked up on a blind date. Even if he was a jackass, he was like a trophy to me,” she says of her first serious relationship with a guy.

that she came out to me, my best friend also came out, and I was the only one who knew.”

The connection and happiness that her sister and her girlfriend shared had Wicks envious and searching for a missing link in her life. It wasn’t that she always knew she was gay; it was more like an ongoing realization that she wasn’t happy within her relationships.

“I just was never really comfortable with guys — physically it didn’t flow with me as well. Some guys I dated were like, ‘It’s her personal morals’ when it came to being physical, and since my sister was a lesbian, they would
just assume I was too because of this choice,” she says.

After she came to college, Wicks still felt unhappy. She felt like all the guys she dated, were more like companions. She loved all of them, but as people.

But with her last boyfriend, she found she was in denial about her sexuality. She says she may have felt this way because of her relationship with him. He was trustworthy, comfortable and felt safe, she says.

“I had been attracted to women for a while when I was with him, but ignored it because of the fact that I was with him,” she says. “He didn’t take it hard that I was a lesbian. He took it hard that he still loved me and couldn’t believe that we were never going to be together again.”

The unhappiness took its toll on Wicks, and her relationship with her boyfriend ended.

“I didn’t have to tell him I was gay when we broke up. He said he already had the intuition,” she says. “I knew it hurt him, but he was very supportive of me coming out. He had received a lot of backlash from some of his friends, but he was very quick to stand up for me. He still held anger toward me at times because of the breakup, but it was never about the fact of my sexuality.”

Even though he took it roughly, she was content and ready to move on. He wasn’t. It eventually became uncomfortable for the two to be friends.

After the relationship ended, she found herself becoming more independent, but the fears of being alone, of coming out and also a fear of what people would say about her being a lesbian stayed.

But soon happiness made its way into Wicks’ life in the form of a pen-pal.

“We talked for three to four months on MySpace. Allison and I became pen-pals and we wrote back and forth. The relationship just kind of happened,” Wicks says. “We clicked well.”

Wicks and Allison Contreras have been together for almost a year.

“Her dating a guy wasn’t an issue, because

I liked her as a person,” Contreras says. “When we were pen-pals, I didn’t know her sexual orientation.”

Just for show

Shawn Szymecki, senior biology major, grew up in a small town like Wicks, but for him, dating someone of the opposite sex was for show. “When I dated a girl, I asked her out to a dance and we hung out, but it was after I already knew I was gay,” he says. “She had told me a few years before that she was a lesbian, so I thought it would work out well. We could pretend to date each other, but then she started acting like we were actually dating.”

The relationship quickly got complicated, and she tried to push Szymecki away from his friends. The couple broke up and his girlfriend, who was two years older than him, never found out or knew that he was gay.

“Back then, I was kind of afraid to come out to people. It wasn’t until after one of my friends came out the next year that I came out then too,” he says. “I knew I was different from other guys, and I think in my first year of high school is when I knew I was gay.”

It’s not that Szymecki can’t stand girls.

“I get along with girls,” he says. “Almost all of my friends are girls. I probably get along better with girls.”

But Szymecki realizes the biggest problem for him with dating girls was that he wouldn’t want to get married and live his life not being truly happy. He also acknowledged that they wouldn’t have a normal life; sexually it just wouldn’t work between the two, he says.
Finding a connection

To Amber Felter, dating a guy left a piece of her longing for something else.

Felter, freshman exploratory major, never felt like dating a guy was naive or stupid; she was attracted to them, so she tried it. Her longest relationship lasted for 11 months, and ended when he moved to Texas.

“I would make out with guys. I would make out with one today,” she says. “It is not that I am grossed out by a guy — it’s just how everyone thinks it should be.”

But Felter knew it wasn’t how she felt. She didn’t believe that just because she was a girl, she had to be with a guy. “With a guy, it felt like there was a barrier between us,” she says. “We have different junk, but with a girl you have the same junk. You know when things are wrong at certain times of the month, and you can be more sensitive to one another.”

With a girl, she says, there is a lot more babying and more of a connection.

“I always had little girl crushes like, for example, on my best friend Stephanie,” she says. “But it didn’t come to my mind about being gay until last year.”

Brooke Livezey, junior criminology major, never felt the connection with a man that she felt with a woman.

“I dated guys because my family is Catholic and also because it is what was expected of me to do,” Livezey says. “Guys never understood me. I just didn’t like it. I didn’t mind kissing him, but just nothing else felt right.”

Neither Livezey’s or Felter’s ex-boyfriends know they are gay.

“Maybe one would care, but it is because we grew up together and went to Catholic school all the way to high school together,” Livezey says. “He would probably ask me a lot of questions, like why and how I could do this.”

Felter and Livezey met at PRIDE!*Kent meeting and have been dating for four months.

“I’m still new at this so I still have a lot of the inner struggles,” Felter says. “I think it’s right, and then I think it’s wrong, but all I know is it is what I feel right now.”

Caroline Lautenbacher is a senior magazine major. Contact her at clautenb@kent.edu.

“I dated guys because my family is Catholic and also because it is what was expected of me to do.”
The good, the bad, the awful

Today's red carpet spotlights a variety of celebrity role models for gay youth
From Ellen DeGeneres to Ted Haggard, LGBT individuals in the media cover a wide spectrum when it comes to being a representative of the gay community.

No matter how well or how badly a celebrity stands up to the idea of a role model, once they are out in the public’s eye, they are considered one. This is a list of today’s most popular gay role models covering the spectrum from the good to the bad to the awful.

Some believe gay celebrities are role models just for being in the public eye.

“They are all good in some way because some of them might be extremely flamboyant, some of them might be extremely conservative, but it shows the entire perspective,” says Katherine Rybski, former programming director for PRIDE!Kent.

Others disagree.

Daniel Nadon, co-coordinator of LGBT studies, says it is unfortunate gay youth have to look to celebrities as role models. “It should be all around us,” he says. “But the people that are out there now are sort of there reluctantly.”

Celebrities are too different from students and youth, says Carey McDougall, assistant professor of art and affiliate instructor for LGBT studies.

“They are so privileged and have so much money, so I have a hard time viewing them as role models because their choice process is different from anybody else’s,” she says. “Students have to worry about their physical safety on college campuses when they come out.”

But being privileged does not make celebrities bad role models, McDougall says.

“In order for a gay person to be a bad role model, they have to be extremely homophobic,” she says.
When they came out ...

**Lance Bass:** 2006, “I’m Gay” on the cover of the July *People* magazine

**Carson Kressley:** 2003, says he told his mother two weeks before “Queer Eye for the Straight Guy” aired but knew at age four

**Rosie O’Donnell:** 2002, in an interview with Diane Sawyer on “Primetime”

**George Michael:** 1998, during a CNN interview on April 10

**Ellen DeGeneres:** 1997, the same time her sitcom character, Ellen Morgan came out on the TV show “Ellen”

**Rupert Everett:** 1989, it “was neither a conscious decision by him nor a significant moment”

**Elton John:** 1976, in an interview in *Rolling Stone*, in which he said he was bisexual

“When people come out and they are still allowed to be famous and respected in that realm, it’s always a good thing because then one more closeted gay person can think ‘I can come out.’”

Good role models have a desire to help the gay community, says Christopher Taylor, former president of PRIDE!Kent. “They have to possess a very strong voice. We need someone out there saying ‘we will not take this anymore,’” he says.

The good

Talk-show host DeGeneres tops the list for good celebrity role models, Nadon says, because her career is an important factor. “She’s out, and people see her every day, and it’s not an issue for her,” he says. “I think that is one of the most positive things to indicate that LGBT people have everyday lives and do all sorts of jobs.”

McDougall says DeGeneres’ values are what make her a good role model because they go beyond LGBT values to more humane values.

But Taylor thinks she could do more. “She has been criticized for not being as proactive with the gay community as she can possibly be,” he says. “I have not heard anything from her.”

One celebrity Taylor sees as a respected role model for the gay community is pop star Elton John. “His AIDS activism is what I admire about him,” says Taylor, referring to the money John raises and donates. “He also formally married his partner in London, and that’s good — we need more of that,” Taylor says.

John is known for being extremely outspoken about the gay community.

“I think it is a respectable thing to just say, ‘Yes, I am gay,’” Rybski says. “I think it’s very important to say what you actually are and not to hide it.”

But others think he can take it too far.

James Lerer, executive assistant for PRIDE!Kent, says John needs to pick his battles, and that talk-show host Rosie O’Donnell should do the same. “Rosie is very congenial, but she is also very controversial,” he says. “She likes controversy. She swims in it.”

Nadon says O’Donnell can be both a positive and negative role model, because she picks specific issues and works diligently at them, such as adoption for gay couples. But she also likes to cause controversy. “She says things about people that make them upset, and it brings ratings in,” he says. “People who are fairly conservative are not going to like her.”

Although Taylor likes O’Donnell’s outspokenness, he says she helps perpetuate a “butch” stereotype for lesbians.

“When people see Portia de Rossi, who is very feminine, that’s uncharacteristic,” he says.

Massachusetts Congressman Barney Frank is openly gay and fights for gay rights, which is why Lerer says he likes Frank. “He came out and has been re-elected by his district,” he says. “That’s important to show that gay men can be in politics. It’s okay to be out and in politics. From a political standpoint, he has proved that an LGBT person, good or bad, can be a politician.”

Nadon says he also thinks Frank is a good role model and mentor. “He is trying, as a profession, to make it better for all people in his district, and also at the same time, represent the LGBT community at that high level,” he says.

However, Taylor says he isn’t doing enough. “He got into office based on what his constituency wanted, but he needs to remember who he is,” he says. “And he needs to be out there speaking for this community. He is one of us.”
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A Message from the President

Dear Students,

It has been an action- and achievement-packed spring semester, filled with reasons to be proud of your membership in Kent State’s student body. Here are just a few recent examples of student excellence in action:

- Visual journalism major David Foster was named Student Photographer of the Year by the Ohio News Photographers Association.

- Jill Kowalski earned two Mid-American Conference Gymnast of the Week awards and went undefeated in MAC all-around competition.

- The pass rate for recent Kent State graduates who took the professional licensure exam for architects ranked among the top 15 nationwide and was on par with graduates of Harvard and MIT.

- Kristin Tassone, a theatre major who is the first woman to complete a minor in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Studies, received the 2007 Akron Women’s History Project’s “Woman to Watch” award.

- Textile arts students helped create the beautiful shawl worn by Frances Strickland at her husband’s inauguration as Ohio governor.

- And dozens of Kent State students devoted their winter and spring breaks to rebuilding homes ravaged by Hurricane Katrina.

I applaud these outstanding Kent State ambassadors, and all of you who are working diligently to complete the semester to the best of your abilities. I extend special congratulations and best wishes to those of you who are about to graduate. You can be confident that your Kent State diploma will be a passport to exciting opportunities. I hope you will stay connected to your alma mater through our great Alumni Association, and through the unforgettable faculty and staff members who have been in your corner.

Whether you continue your studies, take a job or internship, or enjoy some R&R, have a great summer.

Lester A. Lefton
President
The bad

Shows such as “Queer Eye,” “Queer as Folk,” and “Will & Grace” are also good and bad, says Katie Troha, PRIDE!Kent member.

“It’s out there and it’s better than being ignored like they have been for so long,” she says. “But it makes people think that’s how they are supposed to be and that’s how all gay people are.”

Lerer says gay fashion designers have also become a stereotype.

“They are playing off the gay stereotype of being campy,” he says. “Their campiness is what the public’s idea is of a fashion designer. They see a really feminine, flamboyant man who is prissing and prancing around, and we like that.”

While some may want this type of behavior to stop, Nadon disagrees. “I think the diversity of the LGBT community doesn’t need to devalue feminine men or masculine women,” he says. “We need to embrace all of them.”

Lerer says some celebrities do not lead lives that should be envied.

“They glamorize everything wrong with the gay community. They almost become a satire about, ‘Look how silly gay people are,’ ‘Look how precarious emotionally gay people are’ and, ‘Look at how they sleep with everyone, look at the drugs they do, look at their abuses,’” he says. “When that’s the role model they’re showing to a 16-year-old who is just coming out, that 16-year-old is going to think that is part of the lifestyle, that is part of the community, that is part of the culture, ‘that’s what I have to do.’”

Although George Michael has made a name for himself in the gay community, he needs to stop speaking as if he were a gay role, Lerer says, referring to Michael’s drug use.

Nadon puts the situation into perspective.

“I think he has issues with problems that are personal but have nothing to do with his LGBT status,” he says. “And while I don’t think he represents the LGBT community well by doing this behavior, I don’t think Britney Spears represents heterosexuals well by doing what she is doing.”

The Awful

There are the bad, but then there are the awful. Pastor Ted Haggard and Congressman Mark Foley have disgraced the gay community, Taylor says.

“He (Haggard) had a three year relationship with a man outside of his marriage. He went to therapy for three weeks and claimed he was healed of his sins,” he says. “Bullshit! He is a gay man trying to persuade his constituency, which is a conservative base, that he is normal (straight) now. He is not normal (straight). He needs to come out.”

Nadon says Haggard is a terrible role model who lives in denial. “I just don’t think that is what I would want young people to look at and emulate,” he says.

He adds that Foley was not a positive representative of the gay community. “(He used) his job as a springboard to meet young men. And being closeted to boot, lying about his sexual- ity,” he says.

McDougall says there is a lesson to be learned from Foley. “He got caught in a tough spot. He was being really naughty,” she says. “As a role model, we all make mistakes, and maybe he was a good role model for what to do after you make a mistake.”

Being a role model gives celebrities power, Lerer says. “It is incredibly important and powerful to have that effect on someone who might still be unsure, who might feel alone in the world,” he says. “But to be able to go and see somebody who is just like them and hear that person’s story about how they overcame and how they dealt with it and how things got better can say volumes to people.”

Brianne Carlon is a senior magazine journalism major. Contact her at bcarlon@kent.edu.
STEREOTYPES AND MISCONCEPTIONS about minorities are common and present everywhere.

Stereotypes and misconceptions about the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community are even more common, especially on a large college campus like Kent State.

I’m more familiar with the LGBT community than I used to be, but even so, it would be hard for me, as it would be for anyone who isn’t living the experience, to say how LGBT people feel about the stereotypes and experiences they face on a daily basis.

Because of this, Fusion decided to ask the most reliable sources, Kent State’s LGBT students, their thoughts on the general public’s most common misconceptions about them.

They also share some of the hardships they face by coming out and publicly joining the LGBT community.

Although many of these students’ good experiences outweigh their bad ones, each of them has different things to say about how people perceive them and what the reality is.

“"A lot of people think that because you’re gay, you like every girl or every guy, and that’s definitely not true. Also, you can lose friends just by telling them who you are and who you like and things like that. It’s just hard dealing with it. We kind of sacrifice some things sometimes just because of who we are,”

Cassandra McClelland, sophomore nursing major and programming director of PRIDE!Kent

“I’ve heard that gay people hate God, and they are non-religious Atheists. I’m actually a very religious person, as well as being openly gay. I’ve managed to balance both aspects of my life together, and it’s been a relatively challenging thing for me because you don’t think gay people and religious people go in the same category. In high school I sat in my church and listened to my pastor say that he would build up the walls higher against ‘sinful homosexual,’ that he would build up the walls against them, and he would not let them in the church. And since then, I’ve encouraged gay people to go to church and be open.”

Christopher Taylor, senior nursing major

“I don’t think anybody has the power to hurt me the way my family and the way they feel about me does. That whole time when I started coming out and started being an activist, my mom refers to as my ‘craziness,’ and she is always saying, ‘I’m so happy you’re over your craziness,’ and I’m thinking, ‘Just because I don’t come home and talk to you about this stuff anymore doesn’t mean it went away.’”

Clare Ford, freshman undecided major

“One big misconception is that there’s no international perspective amongst LGBT activists or LGBT people in general. For the most part, we do have an internationalist perspective on our movement and on our global community, and I think that’s often not highlighted in the mainstream media. I think that’s what perpetuates a lot of perceptions overseas, is that homosexuality, bisexuality and transgender is a white man’s illness or an export from the west or post-industrialist countries.”

John Barham, senior applied conflict management major

“I think one of the biggest misconceptions is that homosexuality and bisexuality are completely about sexual behavior. I think really, a lot of people who aren’t exposed to it don’t understand that people who identify with LGBT base it on emotions and feelings more than their desires for sexual relationships, or in the case of transgender people, their actual gender identity.”

Kevin Casimer, freshman history major, PRIDE!Kent president
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