

1290

Professor Bradford

Introduction to Writing

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Acceptance

I skipped into the living room, the strobe light above the snake's aquarium leaving a flash in my vision. That didn't stop me from landing directly across from the girl I'd been eyeing since the party began. A glass bottle slid past my leg and into the middle of teens circled in the living room. Shouts and yells of "Spin the bottle!" and "Seven minutes in heaven!" shot throughout the room and my heart began to race. No one knew me at this party, besides the guy I was dating. Kissing absolute strangers seemed terrifying, not thrilling by any means. Well, not until my eyes locked with the girl across from me. Feeling my cheeks flush with a give-away red, I lowered my chin. Regaining composure, I lifted my head. She was watching me closely, so I met her eye to eye. Suddenly, something locked in my gut. I wanted to play this silly game. I wanted the bottle to land on her when I spun it. I wanted to kiss a girl, to touch a girl, to be with a girl. My date turned to face me and gave me a grin, an impish grin. I smiled back, observing how oblivious he was to the realization I had just made. My observation made me pause; had I been oblivious for 16 years? Was I gay? Was I harboring same sex tendencies and never realized it? Does this make me an oddity or do other teenagers experience this? Surely I would have known by now if I were gay or not? This last thought brings me to my question: When does a person know they're gay?

Obviously, I had a lot of thinking to do. This realization made me pause in my steps and take time to think about things. I had always been attracted to boys, in the past at least. What was so different now? After this revealing moment, everything seemed so foreign and strange, as if I were looking at things from someone else's point of view; but everything made sense. Whenever I hit puberty I began having sexual dreams; there was never a single guy in these dreams. I was embarrassed about it and never told a soul. Not to mention, I didn't like the idea of sex or having a sexual experience with a guy, I dated guys in response to my friends dating; I didn't want to feel left out. Not wanting to have a sexual experience with a guy didn't exactly mean that I wanted to have one with a girl. However, I was certainly interested and intrigued. Being intrigued didn't mean I was comfortable with the idea; I was still accepting and adjusting.

I think I had subconsciously known I had this 'interest' all along; I had simply hid from it any time it came up. I couldn't hide from it any longer, nor could I ignore it. I was tired of pretending to be someone I wasn't merely to be accepted by my friends and my family. I talked to my mother about how I felt and about the night at the party. Surprisingly, she was very understanding and she said that these feelings didn't technically mean I was gay, but they weren't something to ignore and I shouldn't suppress them. I was relieved my mother took the situation seriously and I was happy I could be open about my feelings. This conversation with my mother was my 'break through' moment. I finally knew what I wanted, but I wasn't sure if I could accept it.

When do other teens know they're gay and accept it as their sexuality? With this question in mind, I interviewed a few gay friends of mine. Since Kenton Wunderlich was the person I went to during my 'what am I?' revelation, he was my first interviewee. I asked Kenton

when he knew he was gay. "Well, I had my first crush on a boy when I was 12, but I WAS only 12", he replied. He explained that most people couldn't be certain by that age and that he only had a strong inclination. "However, I knew for certain once the hormones kicked in", he joked.

Even though Kenton's last comment was meant to be joking, it struck home with me. Whenever I hit puberty I began having different feelings for girls; I think I was afraid to acknowledge them. I subconsciously suppressed these feelings, unlike Kenton. Perhaps that's why my 'revealing moment' came as such a surprise to me.

After thinking this over, I then asked Kenton when he accepted he was gay. "I probably accepted I was gay when I was 15 or 16," he said, "but I kind of put on a front until I was 19. I came out to a few people then and came out to everyone whenever I was 20." He said later that he wanted to wait to come out until after he was out of the 'high school' environment, he knew kids wouldn't accept him as he was and didn't want it affecting the way he accepted himself.

I thanked Kenton for the interview and went to my dorm to compare his experience to mine. It was a relief knowing it had taken Kenton some time to accept he was gay, since I had experienced so much confusion over my own situation. Even though Kenton's interview allowed me to have a little more insight to my question, I still felt I had so much more to answer. A little too shy to walk up and ask someone if they were gay, I decided to interview a few more of my homosexual friends. Since I had already interviewed a man, I decided to interview a woman, to see if it differed.

My first female interviewee was Rachel Glover. Rachel was also who I went to when I needed advice on my confusion. I knew she had experienced a rough past because of her

sexuality and I thought her view and experience with everything would be a good insight.

Whenever I asked Rachel when she began questioning her sexuality, she responded in a way I hadn't expected, "It was before I was eight, if I can remember right. But the question was more -- why would I be straight?" She explained that she had never had a crush on a boy, nor had she ever considered dating boys. "My first crush was on a girl who lived in my neighborhood and we always played together. One day our parents caught us kissing behind the house. My parents weren't very happy about it, but we were only eight and they figured it was some silly thing I would grow out of. I knew they were wrong."

I asked Rachel when she truly knew she was gay. She responded, "I truly knew I was gay in the 7th grade, that's when I came out." She explained that it was a simple transition because she had known for so long and was okay with it, it was who she was and had always been. "As far as accepting being gay," she added, "I never had an issue. I was just kind of 'ugh guys' from day one."

Rachel's interview had given me a completely new insight and I was very satisfied. She had known her sexuality from such a young age and didn't question it, quite opposite from myself. Whenever I was eight I wasn't thinking about girls or boys – I was more interested in playing in the creek or riding my bike. Rachel's view on everything made me begin to think I was making things too complicated; she made being gay seem so simple and normal. It struck me as odd but also intrigued me because I wanted to reach that sense of normality with my sexuality. Feeling like I could relate better with another female, I decided to interview another gay woman.

My next female interviewee was Ginna Trapp. Ginna graduated from my high school two

years prior to me and we had always been good friends; she is also a student at UCA. The first question I asked Ginna was when did she first begin questioning her sexuality and exploring the idea of homosexuality. Ginna replied, "It's complicated. I think I always knew. But my father was a southern Baptist preacher and my mother a teacher; I was expected and pretty much required to be a typical teenage girl, not a homosexual. So, I knew, but I repressed it."

I then asked Ginna if she would describe her first crush. "I was in the third grade" she said, "and I was sitting by my locker, looking around. A girl with blonde hair smiled and said hey to me; all I could do was watch her walk away. I liked her for weeks!" I decided to ask Ginna when she truly knew she was gay. She laughed a little and finally responded, "For the longest time I tried to deny my sexuality. Whenever we had to select a topic for a paper I would choose an anti-gay related topic. I dated a few guys, but I never felt comfortable with the idea of sex. The denial started to fade when my friends and I would goof off and have 'lesbian Tuesdays'; we would make fun of lesbians and homosexuals by pretending to date each other." By this time Ginna was laughing and pressed forward through her giggles, "Needless to say, Tuesdays became my favorite day of the week. I knew I was hiding the truth from myself." Being my nosy self, I asked Ginna what it was that finally triggered the truth. She replied, "The truth came hard and fast in the form of a kiss from my closest friend, Presley. It was the spring semester of my junior year, the day before prom and she just kissed me! I knew then, no doubts what so ever, that I was gay."

I noticed that Ginna was using 'knew' and not 'accepted', so I asked her when she accepted she was gay. After a few seconds she replied, "I don't think there was any one moment when I accepted it. I think it was a gradual acceptance- especially since I knew from a

young age." She explained that accepting it was what hindered her from realizing she was gay, "It was then that everything fell into place."

Ginna's interview made me wonder if a person could really know they were gay without accepting they were gay. In her case, knowing and accepting definitely influenced each other. I also felt like Ginna's interview was something I could connect with and relate to. She had tried dating guys, like I had, and neither of us felt comfortable with it. We both knew we had same sex tendencies, but due to environmental influences, we repressed it. Maybe if we had done less questioning and more accepting, like Rachel and Kenton, we wouldn't have had such turmoil over our sexuality.

I chose this topic because it has played such an influential role in my teenage years, including now. I sometimes feel as if I'm the only student in college still confused over their sexuality. Interviewing other college students and teenagers helped me to see that I'm not alone; it's a common transition and not always a smooth ride. These interviews also allowed me to see that acceptance and knowledge are hard to establish unless both are present, at least when it comes to sexuality. I know I am attracted to women. Still, I don't think I have come to an acceptance. Honestly, I've placed my confusion on the 'back burner' for the past year. I decided that letting my confusion continuously bother and unnerve me was silly; I wanted things to pan out over time. Each student I interviewed didn't simply wake up one morning shouting 'I'm a homosexual'. On the contrary, they went through periods of questioning, knowing, and accepting. Maybe the point isn't knowing whether I'm gay or not, but accepting the person I am.

Work Cited

Wunderlich, Kenton. Phone Interview. 15 September 2010

Trapp, Ginna. Personal Interview. 24 September 2010

Glover, Rachel. Phone Interview. 25 September 2010