



Taking the first step

The topic may be uncomfortable, unwelcomed or downright foreign to some, but to move forward we must start by being educated on the LGBTQ+ community

Landon Hudson / Editor in chief

Senior Natasha Jablonski writes out the names of different sexual orientations across a sheet lined paper. Phrases and genders colored in bright greens and highlighter pinks stand out amongst lists that look borderline overwhelming. She writes out abbreviations and helpful bullet points. Like studying notes for an exam, she memorizes multiple sexualities, sexes and gender variations.

That's a lot for the average person to learn. And even Jablonski, the secretary and an active member of the Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) club has trouble keeping track of all the identifications.

But here are the basics: sex is what you were born as. There are three sexes- male, female or intersex, a physical combination of the two. Gender is one's deeply held sense of identity. There can be multiple branches and combinations, but can be referenced as either gender binary or non-binary. Gender binary refers to the three sexes, other gender affiliations fall under the category gender non-binary. Attraction is who you are romantically interested in.

Sex, genders, attractions, it may take awhile to grasp the terminology, but according to GSA advisor Katy Walters, educating the student body is the best place to start.

"I think that the first step to understanding and acceptance is education," Walters said, who also teaches earth science and biology. "We need to educate our students and staff about this community and ways to help them feel safer and accepted."

A Bucs' Blade survey found 9.5 percent of students out of 475 identify as part of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning (LGBTQ+) community. The Brown Herald discovered the national number is about 12 percent as of 2010. Out of the 9.5 percent at GHHS, 40 percent of LGBTQ+ students report depression and self confidence issues in relation to their identification.

Social worker Emily Berry works closely with Walters to ensure all students feel safe in the school. Berry, along with other staff members, have attended trainings throughout the community to learn strategies to better assist the LGBTQ+ students.

"Education is key," Berry said. "Students and staff could benefit from learning about the difference between gender identity and sexuality. We hope to provide them with more learning opportunities in order to educate them on the current issues that LGBTQ students face so that as a GHHS community we can appropriately support and advocate for these students."

Walters emphasizes that the LGBTQ+ community needs to be treated the same as any other student, with respect. "These kids are just like you," Walters said. "They have insecurities like you, and they desperately want to fit in, just like you. If we make our school safe for 'these students' we will be making it safer for everyone."

Despite personal feelings some may hold, Berry stresses that tolerance of one another is essential in order for all students to feel safer within the school.

"Educating ourselves and offering kindness and respect to LGBTQ+ students does not necessarily mean that you are agreeing or disagreeing with a person's gender identity or sexuality," Berry said. "It does mean that you are contributing to a community of safety and where all students have the right to learn and be successful without feeling discriminated against or judged."

One way to respect these students' identities is to use the correct pronoun and call them by the name they chose to associate with.

"A lot of times they will usually give grace because they realize it's a change and that's hard for people," Berry said. "If you screw up, just apologize. Just be real and tell them, 'Hey, I'm sorry.'"

Berry does not belittle the fact that all students have their own battles that they go through, but she does underline that the issues LGBTQ+ students face need attention.

"Not only are LGBTQ+ students dealing with the everyday pressures that every adolescent faces, but in addition, many of them are working through figuring out their identity and what that means for their life, their role in society and the impact it has on family," Berry said. "LGBTQ+ students face complex challenges such as getting family support or lack thereof and having access to essential resources in the community."

Berry believes that the school has made great improvements in making sure these students feel they are in a safe environment, they are allowed to use gender neutral bathrooms and have the option of receiving individual help if needed. However Berry knows that there is still a very long way to go.

"A lot of times people are afraid of what they don't understand," Berry said. "I know sometimes it's uncomfortable to learn about those things or talk about those things, but that will give us a better understanding."

Walters wants students and staff members to be aware of the issues LGBTQ+ students face, and the secrets they may hide.

"Understand that they come to this building every day trying to hide a huge secret and some are desperate to not have that secret discovered," Walters said. "They live in fear every single day because they feel who they are is not good enough, according to some. Imagine what that would feel like, to be told that who you are is wrong and that there is something wrong with you for wanting to express who you are. Try to put yourself in their shoes before you judge them."

"Many of them are working through figuring out their identity and what that means for their life, their role in society and the impact it has on family"

-Emily Berry

YOUR TURN

Bucs' Blade recently surveyed 476 students about the LGBTQ+ community

9.5%

surveyed students identify as part of the community

77.2% of those who

do not identify with the community, support them

"Bisexuals exist, we aren't unicorns"

41.7%

report less than pleasant coming out experiences

of those who do not identify

with the community correctly understand the definition of sex, gender and sexuality

40%

of LGBTQ+ surveyed report depression and self confidence issues in relation to their identification

"This should NOT be an issue discussed in school"

Love vs. sin

Two Christians with two different beliefs of the Bible's view of LGBTQ+ relationships

Aliyah Austin / Life editor

The crimson T-shirt senior Ryan Montgomery wears hangs loose on his tall frame. "Jesus Christ" is plastered across the front in white Coca-Cola lettering. Underneath, it reads "Eternally re-freshed" in small capital letters.

Montgomery's fingers cling to the cross hanging from his neck as he discusses how his unwavering belief in the Bible and his title as a strong conservative Lutheran Christian shapes his views on the LGBTQ+ community.

"I feel for them, I feel really sympathetic for them because it's really tough what they have to deal with," Montgomery said. He scours the notes he prepared for the interview, speaking with hesitant conviction. "It definitely is a sin. In the Bible, there's six places where it's dealt with, and it's explicitly stated that it is a sin."

Junior Haley Lafrance is also a devoted Christian. While she believes in the Bible, she also believes in love.

"I'm kind of a go with the flow person, do what you love," Lafrance said. "I think some people just aren't that way, they are very firm to their religion and that's how it has to be. I also believe in the freedom of the people."

Montgomery says Christians who believe love is love have not read the Bible enough.

"It is time for them to revisit the Bible," Mont-

gomery said. "God clearly states that marriage is between a man and a woman, that is why he created Adam and Eve."

Montgomery inherited his religion from his parents. He explains that, though he hasn't read the entire Bible, he believes that everything in it is true and has been proven.

"Considering the Bible's been around for about 2,000 some years, it's not gonna change, so I'm not gonna change," Montgomery said.

Though Lafrance seems small compared to Montgomery, her opinions are just as large.

"I believe that love is love," Lafrance said. "Freedom of religion, freedom of marriage. I think that if you love somebody, do what you want with it. Love is good."

Montgomery explains that he does love members of the LGBTQ+ community, but refuses to accept what he believes qualifies as sin in the eyes of God.

"Every sin is terrible," Montgomery said.

"Whatever size, whatever scale it may be, every sin is the same in the eyes of God. And so, the person is not terrible. It's Satan that causes sin and it's terrible. I just, I want my friends to be out of Satan's grip. I want them to be back in God's hands where everything is great so we can all go to Heaven and have a big giant party up there."

Legal LGBTQ+ policies in Michigan

While advancements have been made, LGBTQ+ community is still not equal in terms of law

Emily Bruch / News editor

Same-sex marriage was legalized in all 50 states on June 26, 2015, however this did not mean the fight for equality was over. In Michigan, there is no state law that protects members of the LGBTQ+ community from discrimination, and many are working to change that.

The Elliot-Larsen Civil Rights Act bans discrimination based on height, weight, sex, age, religion, national origin, marital status, race, or color. This means that a person cannot be denied housing, employment or any civil right because of these factors.

Nowhere in the law does it state that people are protected from discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. In 2011 a law was passed forcing Michigan school districts to adopt anti-bullying policies. The state did not pass the enumerated bill banning bullying or harassment based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

The office manager at the LGBTQ+ Network of West Michigan, Larry DeShane Jr., is in the fight to include members of the LGBTQ+ community in the civil rights act for protection.

According to DeShane, the community almost reached their goal last year but lawmakers did not want to include transgender rights in the law.

"We're no longer taking the 'half a pizza' rule, which is half a pizza is better than no pizza at all," DeShane said. "It's either all of our community gets protection or we'll just continue fighting."

Although there is not a state law providing protection, individual cities are beginning to enact their own laws. In Grand Rapids, it is illegal to deny someone housing or employment based on their gender identity or sexual orientation.

For the city of Grand Haven, the Title VI Non-Discrimination Plan protects people no matter race, religion, age, sex, national origin, disability, persons with low income, minority populations, and the elderly.

DeShane believes that the best way to show support for the LGBTQ+ community is to have a Gay-Straight Alliance at school.

"Instead of always trying to change laws, what we need to do is we need to change hearts and minds, laws will follow," DeShane said.