

Stereotypes

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mates, teachers, co-workers and friends. Many gay Aggies feel they can be gay and still love the traditions of A&M. They do that best by telling their stories themselves.

Jimmy
Jimmy is a tenured professor in the Department of Geology. While his accent betrays that he is a New Yorker, it doesn't suggest that he is gay. His office doesn't either, with the exception of the obscene messages left on his answering machine. Jimmy is one of the first two openly gay faculty advisers to GLSS, and he says putting up with obscene phone calls is just another part of the job.

Jimmy is more tolerant of such calls because he feels they only reflect the insecurities of 18- and 19-year-old boys.

"Young boys especially are under a lot of peer pressure from the culture that they live in," he said. "They're expected to be very mas-

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-Jimmy
geology professor

culine and very sexual at a young age."

Jimmy said many young students here still are uncertain of their own sexuality because they haven't practiced it yet.

"With all of these insecurities developing, it really seems natural for them to target gays as a result," he said.

Jimmy said aside from the occasional obscene phone calls, being openly gay at Texas A&M is a positive experience that doesn't interfere with his job.

"As a faculty member I've found that my colleagues both in the geology department and in other places have no problem dealing with me," he said.

"Last year I won the Distinguished Teaching Award and my dean made sure that my spouse was there when it was presented," Jimmy said. "It was a surprise to me and it was a surprise to see him there."

In addition to being a professor, Jimmy is a faculty senator and an adviser for his department. He said that people in those situations often learn he is gay before they really get to know him. People can be uncomfortable at first, he said, but they tend to relax when they discover that he keeps his private and professional lives separate just like everyone else.

"They find out that I'm all business here, and the gayness doesn't enter into our relationship at all," he said.

The trade-off for Jimmy between losing some students to homophobia is that many minority students come to him hoping that he will be sensitive to their needs. Jimmy's open attitude, despite what it may cost him, is part of his dedication to making the campus safe for everyone. Until that dedication spreads to the rest of the campus, he says he's settling for second best.

Stacey
Stacey is a freshman engineering major who works toward acceptance of gays on campus in the same way Jimmy does - she is openly gay. She came out to her hall last se-

mester after someone vandalized a display on her door of paper freedom rings (a chain of five different colored rings that symbolize diversity and gay pride). When the display was ripped down and someone scrawled and misspelled "dyke" on her door, she asked her resident adviser to call a hall meeting to calm tensions. The experience, she said, turned out to be a positive one.

"Some people have an adverse reaction to it, but they're more quiet about it," she said. "They just quietly turn around and walk the other way, or go upstairs, or avert their eyes, or whatever. Most people admire me in my courage to say, 'Yes, I'm Stacey, and I'm a lesbian.'"

She said not everyone's reaction to her openness has been admiration. One man contacted her on the campus computers and wanted to meet her after reading a personality profile that mentioned she is a lesbian.

"It was about an hour and a half of nothing but his Bible in his hands, in my face - shaking his Bible in my face and pointing out verses, reading them to me, saying 'How can you do this?'" she said. "It was miserable. I tried to retain my composure because the object is not to get mad and attack right back. People have more respect for your opinions if you're calm. He still doesn't agree with me. I will never forget that man."

Tammy
Most people - including other gays - are surprised to discover that Tammy, with her long hair and makeup, is a lesbian. Tammy is now out to most of her friends and said the experience has been a mixed one. Because of that experience, she is more hesitant than many of her friends to wear gay pride symbols.

"I wouldn't be me," she said. "It's not so much the criticism - I can take the criticism - it's just that I don't know what would happen to me here. Because you go from people that are open-minded to some hick around the corner that might beat the shit out of you," she said and laughed. "And I'd be the one!"

"When I told one girl, the first thing she did was get on the phone and tell all my friends," Tammy said. "I lost a whole bunch of friends through that."

"When I told one girl (I was gay), the first thing she did was get on the phone and tell all my friends. I lost a whole bunch of friends through that."

-Tammy
A&M student

The guys were OK - they said just get a woman and we'll watch! And I was like, well... no, no, no. But I lost a lot of friends, and I thought that they were really, really my good friends, and they just said, "See ya!"

Tammy said she is offended by the stereotyping of lesbians as masculine and aggressive. Like many other gays and lesbians, she greets gay jokes and terms like "dyke" with a sense of humor, but says that many of those stereotypes are not joking ones and contribute to the fear of gays.

"My question at the panels is always, always, always, 'If you met the guy of your dreams, would you date him?' And I want to ask, 'Do you not understand the concept?'" she said. "Just because I do my hair and wear makeup does not mean that I would date a guy if he was the guy of my dreams. I'd hang him on the wall, but I wouldn't sleep with him! You know, but if I don't

look it, maybe people will think twice.

"It's not a big deal," she said. "It's not so devastating that life can't go on. Honestly, it's everyday life for us. We go about everyday things the same way. I don't think it should be a ruling aspect of your life. I don't think that the stereotypical dyke, lesbian, fag thing really exists. It's so amazing how different people are just within the gay community. They're just as varied as the straight community. It has nothing to do with who you are."

Brent
Brent (not his real name) is a freshman computer science major who will be an officer in GLSS next year. Perhaps the most obvious thing about his homosexuality is how unobvious it is.

Because he has not come out to his family, he wishes to remain relatively anonymous. More than that, however, he says that being gay shouldn't matter to anyone. He is somewhat open, he said, to help that happen.

For Brent and his roommate, homosexuality is not an issue.

"I was lucky," he said. "I went potluck and we got along really well. After a couple of weeks, instead of lying to him about where I was going and who I was seeing, I came out and told him; and he didn't even bat an eyelash. We've been good friends ever since. It's really iffy because we're both guys so there's no curfew and nobody cares if you bring guys back to your room. You have to be careful to respect your roommate."

Brent often wears freedom rings, and said their meaning can come as a shock to other people. One memory stood out:

"To most of them it wasn't a big shock, but I saw one or two of the girls - their eyes just got real, real big. That's kinda good in a way, too, because maybe next time they meet a gay person their eyes won't get so big," he said.

Brent said his Aggie pride is a much bigger part of him than being gay. "People ask me why I came to A&M," he said. "It's because I like A&M; I like the Aggie Spirit and I like the traditions and I like the games. I like whooping behind upperclassmen's backs. I'm an Aggie and I'm a gay Aggie. I'm not out to change anything and I don't think it's that big a deal. If people could just one day wake up and realize that it doesn't really make a difference... that would be all I was looking for."

Dawn
Dawn is a freshman architecture major who next year will be the youngest president ever elected to GLSS. She describes herself as disgustingly happy and says she comes from a "Brady Bunch" family. Although her family supports her, her early friends on campus did not.

"I came out to my roommate before I moved in, which I thought was plenty fair," she said. "She said it didn't matter."

Dawn said their friendship was great until she wore gay pride shirts during Gay Awareness Week. One of her suitmates was so upset that the woman's father called the dean of her college. All four of the women later sat down and discussed the issue, but it remained so tense between them that Dawn moved off-campus at semester break.

"Their biggest complaint about me was that I wore gay T-shirts," she said. "I don't think me being gay was really a problem; it was when I started to have pride in it that it bothered them. I still, to this day, am hurt by it, and I still don't understand what happened. My roommate and I were good friends... it still hurts."

"We never said goodbye and we never spoke after that," she said. "Now she's dropped off the face of the earth. I can't find her;

"Yeah, I have a real problem with fags. Thank God my girlfriend doesn't!"

-Dawn, freshman
architecture major

I've tried. I've got some of her stuff I'd like to give back to her. I don't want to hound her; I just want to find her and see how she's doing, see if she's still with the same guy. But she doesn't want to be found."

Despite her soured relationship with her roommate, Dawn said that being gay at A&M is a good experience - and often a funny one. Perhaps more than any of her friends, Dawn sees the humor of other people's misconceptions about gays and lesbians - and she uses it.

"One time I was in a classroom - where most of the class knew I was gay and some didn't - with two or three Corps guys and they were talking about gays in the military and 'those damn fags,'" she said. "It was a three-hour class and I kept my mouth shut a good hour and a half. Everybody would walk by me and laugh at them; they were putting their foot in their mouth pretty bad. Finally I said, 'Yeah, I have a real problem with fags. Thank God my girlfriend doesn't!' It was really wonderful."

"But most of my experiences on this campus have been good," she said. "I've met so many wonderful people through our group and through people who are gay-positive. The phrase, 'You may be a gay Aggie, but you're still an Aggie,' has come up more times than I can count. I've had people tell me that this campus is a family and it doesn't matter what or who you are."

"I think your sexuality should be something that doesn't matter," she said. "How often do you discuss who you're having sex with? Why should it be an issue? If I'm a computer engineer, if I'm sitting behind a computer - my computer doesn't care if I'm gay. If I'm an architect I'll build the same house whether I'm gay or straight."

Kim
Kim is the current president of GLSS as well as a former member of the Corps of Cadets.

"I feel I've made a difference for people in GLSS to feel proud, to feel welcome, to feel OK," she said. "I've made a difference for myself and for the community to see that we can be recognized by the paper, we can be recognized by the TV, we can be recognized by the university, and that it's not forced; it's by invitation."

"I'd like to see a compromise,"

"I feel I've made a difference for people in GLSS to feel proud, to feel welcome, to feel OK."

-Kim
GLSS president

she said. "That's what I've found to be most successful in this past year. As a gay person, I can compromise with the people I interact with because we have to share... We have to be not so hostile. There needs to be mutual respect."

Kim said part of that respect is being sensitive to people who have never met an openly gay person. That sensitivity, she said, will help others to be open-minded.

"Then they can make their own judgments."

• Tuesday: Part 2 - Relationships and religion.

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