

An Editor's Invitation: LGBTQ+

Category: LGBTQ+

written by Paul Gross | July 1, 2019

When I was a freshman in college, my closest friend told me that he was pretty sure he was gay.

I was perplexed. I knew that gay men existed, but I'd never known one. (Of course I had; I just didn't realize it.)

Not long after, my friend began a journey of exploration, of figuring out who he was—yes, he was gay—and I had the good sense to reserve judgment, to listen and learn, and to remain his friend.

In the years after that, most gay men and lesbians I met, worked with and made friends with were closeted, even as they lost partners and loved ones to the AIDS epidemic.

By the time I had children of my own, I was part of a liberal church community with a sex-education program that I helped to teach. That program emphasized that sexual attraction and love come from the heart, that the human heart is precious and unique to each individual and that we needed to respect and honor mutual expressions of love.

It felt like a radical assertion for its time—a time when teens would use the term “gay” as a pejorative. A time when a University of Wyoming student named Matthew Shepard died from head injuries after being beaten and tortured for being gay. A time when we tried to arm our children against thoughtless slurs and the threat of violence.

Today, that seems like another era.

Matthew Shepard died just over twenty years ago. Now gay marriage is legal in all fifty states. A gay man is a serious candidate for the presidency of the United States. There are some trans individuals holding statewide elective offices.

I know young people who are coming out—more freely than I would have thought possible—and young people who are transitioning. I know parents who were prepared to happily accept a gay son or lesbian daughter and who are now having a different sort of conversation with their transitioning children—one they couldn't have imagined having five or ten years ago.

At the same time, as progressive, open-hearted and open-minded as some parents and some communities are, I can imagine the courage it takes to express a gender identity or a sexual attraction that is still not universally accepted.

And I'm acutely aware that the threat of rejection and violence still exists for LGBTQ+ individuals in many families, neighborhoods and communities.

And I know that many healthcare facilities feel unwelcoming to LGBTQ+ individuals.

Among my patients, I ask teens about their crushes. I ask if they're attracted to girls or boys. I haven't yet started asking them about their gender identity, but I should.

I have yet to be asked by a patient to help them transition. That day will come.

This month's *More Voices* theme is LGBTQ+.

What is your experience as an LGBTQ+ patient, an LGBTQ+ health provider or the parent of an LGBTQ+ child, or of caring for an LGBTQ+ patient or loved one?

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