

## Briseida



My eighth-grade year I noticed that I was seeing girls differently. You know, I didn't see girls as in, "Oh, they're pretty." I saw them as, "Oh, my god, they're really pretty and I really want to be with one." In the beginning I kept that on the down low because of my parents. I wanted to make my parents proud and at the same time be confident with who I was. So my freshman year I got a 4.0, my sophomore year I got a 3.9, and I felt confident enough to tell my mother that I was a lesbian. I thought that by doing good in school and making her proud, that would change things, but it didn't. And she told me that she loved me, but that she couldn't accept who I was, and we didn't talk for a year.

I was really, really upset. I mean if my mom didn't want me, and that's my own mother, then who else will? You know? So then I just, I mean I lost it. I went out of control. I started doing crystal meth. I did cocaine, weed, alcohol, everything, you know? I was caught, I went to jail, all my accomplishments were thrown away, and I worked so hard.

As I was sitting in the cell, all these things were going through my mind. And I just wanted to change. I went back to the same goals that I had before—college, go all the way. When my senior year began, when I heard that we were going to have student council, I was like, "Oh, this is perfect!"

I wanted kids to see me for who I was. So the first day of school, I brought this shirt that expressed everything that I was. I went around, said hi to people. When there was a little freshman by themselves, I would go up to them and be like, hey, what's up, and have a conversation with them, and then at the end be like, "Oh, I'm running for president, can you vote for me?"

It made me realize that what I am doesn't really make a difference. It's who you are inside. I mean, you know how people say you're hiding in the closet? It's not a closet, it's sort of like a prison.

# Micah



In my community it's very socially acceptable to say things like, "Oh, that's gay," and, "You're a fag," and there's a lot of anti-gay sentiment that goes around. If you're the one that sits there and is like, "Oh, that's not funny, you guys, that's not cool," you're [asked], "Are you gay?!"



Nobody on my cross-country team, that I know of, knows that I'm gay. A friend of mine who's straight, who doesn't know I'm gay, asks me about this girl and that girl.

I won't say, "I'm gay, blah blah blah." I'll just say, "Yeah, you know, she's hot" or whatever. I don't know, I guess I'm a pretty good actor, but I don't have any interest in girls, period. You know, I'm not bisexual or anything. And, yet, still I play it off quite a bit.

I'm 18 years old and there's a lot of me that I still have to cover up. I can't even take my boyfriend to prom without being jumped. A couple of years ago, one of my friends took his boyfriend to prom and they were slow dancing and they kissed, and a group of guys came over and basically jumped them. Tackled them. That's why I didn't take my boyfriend to prom this year, because I have that same fear.

So I'm like, OK. I'll just go anyways. Have some fun with my friends. And it ended up being kind of an upsetting experience because prom—it's prom, you know, it's made with that romantic feel. You see all the straight couples dancing and kissing and everything, and everyone has their guy or girl there, and it's like, what about me? I have a boyfriend and he's 20 minutes away, but he's not here. There's just a piece of that night missing. A huge piece.

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I'm an Eagle Scout, so I'm actually taking a significant risk [by participating in ***Straightlaced***], because if they were to watch this video they could take my Eagle Scout away from me.

## Norma



Some guys say that I talk too much and that I have an opinion about everything. They're like, oh you know, you should just sit there. You're pretty, but you're always telling me all these things, using big words. And I'm like, well, that's how I am. What do you want me to do about it?



There was this experience with this one guy, and we were getting to know each other, and he was really cool and stuff. There was this topic that came up about a book, and I started telling him what I thought about it. And then after a while, he's like, "You're too smart. I don't want to talk to you anymore," and I was like, "Are you serious?"

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I think people would be surprised that I am bisexual. When guys are attracted to me, they don't understand why I like girls, but they like it. They're always asking me, "Oh, well, go find your friend, why don't you do something for your friend. If you're really bisexual, then kiss her." I'm like, "Well, I'm not the circus. I'm not gonna give you a show."

And I'm actually not active at all. I mean, I'll flirt with people and I'll be, like, kissing people, but having sex is a whole different level.

## Lance



Spring of my sophomore year, I was in my English class and I went to use the restroom, and as I was going to use the bathroom, somebody threw a bottle into the stall and said, "I'm going to kill you, you f\*\*\*ing faggot." Two weeks later, during passing period, someone yelled out, "Fag!" and they threw a rock and it struck me in the forehead and I started to bleed a little bit. And then the third incident that took place, I was in my sex ed class and two male students started to ask me sexual questions that I thought was extremely inappropriate. They didn't know what my sexual practices were. They were just guessing. And for the entire hour and 40 minutes the only the thing the teacher said was, "Stop." She didn't remove the students from the class, she didn't talk to them about it, she didn't talk to the class about it. She just said "stop" and went back to doing her work.

I was extremely scared. It got to the point where I wouldn't go and eat lunch. I would go to a teacher's room instead. I wasn't comfortable using the bathroom anymore on campus. If I would go to the restroom and there was another student in there, I would turn around and walk out. I had a group of teachers on campus that I was comfortable talking with. They would listen and they were sympathetic, but none of them stepped up as an advocate for me. No one, none of them stepped up to make sure I was gonna be safe.

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I ended up filing a lawsuit to make sure that no other students from that school or school district will be experiencing the harassments and hate crimes that I went through.

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I know who I am today. I've grown into who I am. And I wouldn't trade that for the world. But if I could be who I am without going through all that harassment, I would accept that in a heartbeat.

## Jessica



I've had to deal with a lot of people telling me that I'm too aggressive, that I'm too big and too strong and too loud, and my voice is too deep and that I'm too *this*. It's like they are saying, "You're too you."

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For as long as I can remember, I have always been attracted to women. And I also am attracted to men. When I'm the only black cheerleader or the only bisexual person, I've become accustomed to people being a little intolerant.

Recently there was an issue where one of the mothers of one of the cheerleaders had called the coach, because she felt uncomfortable with her daughter on the cheerleading squad with me, knowing that I was bisexual. I got called to the vice principal's office and I had to talk about it. They called my mom. And then later on in our practices, we were doing our little formations and I was catching a girl and you catch them like this, which is the way you're supposed to do it. But it made the girls feel uncomfortable—they thought that I was trying to grab the girls.

So that was just a big issue that just happened very recently and it really hurt me.



**Stacey:** People got really upset, and they would come up to me and be like, "Oh my god, she's really touching me, like, I don't know if she has a crush on me or something." And I'm, like, "She's trying to save you from falling to the ground!"

Everyone was really unsure—they didn't know what to think. I asked my mom how to deal with this. And she's like, "Well, how were you treating her lately?" and I'm like, "Nothing different." And she's like, "Then treat her like that." Now I'm just—she's one of my friends.

**Jessica:** It really does make a difference when somebody breaks away and tries to communicate with someone when you can see that they're different.

## Rae



Growing up, I've always felt like I was different from everybody, more feminine than other boys. My dad's Rey Sr. and I'm Rey Jr., so I guess he expected me to be more like him. When I was about 10, people started noticing how I acted, and how I'm very feminine, and they were really judgmental. They were like, "Oh, why are you acting that way?" And I just said, "I don't know, it's just the way I am."



When I got to middle school, I felt like I was forced to look the way a boy's supposed to look—a straight guy, how a straight guy would dress. So when I started high school, I wanted to come out to everybody that I am who I am, and you're going to have to accept it no matter what. So I came out to everybody at school as transgender.

One day I went shopping with my friends. They told me to try on a dress and see how it would look, and I liked it. I mean, we all had a laugh about it. But they didn't expect me to show up one day to school and actually wear a dress. They were like, "Wow, Rey, you've changed a lot." And I was like, "Uhhh, yeah I have."

Right now I'm dating this one guy from City College. And he thought that I was a girl at the very beginning. And I kind of explained it to him and he was like oh, OK. We didn't talk for a week after I told him. And then he called me back and he was like, "So, do you want to go out for dinner?" And I was like, "OK." And that was really cool.

Now I see myself as a girl. I mean, I don't think I see myself as a gay guy. 'Cause deep inside I feel like a girl. And, you know, if I were to present myself as a guy and not stay true to myself, I would definitely feel uncomfortable.

I'm definitely thankful for my friends. They're my support system. They've stuck with me through the whole way and I'm really thankful about that.



## Josh



**Hannah:** There was a sophomore named Josh Shipman, and Josh was one of the most amazing people I've ever met. Josh could do The Matrix. And he liked to do cartwheels. He was just a very vibrant person.

**Athena:** My best friend and I were going out to the bus and we saw him. He was in the red shirt, the red short pants, those red zebra shoes. He was just "oh my god" talking to everybody, and we kinda took a double-look and were like, is that a guy or a girl? And we kinda timidly, we were kinda like, "Excuse me," and he goes, "Yeah, hi! How are you? My name's..." and all this stuff. And I was like, "Yeah, his name is Josh," and we walked away, and it was like, it's a guy—all right, then. He's totally awesome.

**Hannah:** It was hard because a lot of people didn't like him just because he wasn't like everyone else. I mean, when I was with him, there was always someone that was like, you know, "Why are you hanging out with him?" And I didn't really have an answer. I just liked him. He was fun to hang out with.

I was in my first block class and after the daily announcements, the principal came over the intercom and said, "Josh Shipman was found in his room last night—he's died." Or something along those lines. It kind of took me back a second and I was like, "Oh no!" And I started crying and I ran out of the room, and I headed towards a teacher that I'm real close to. And what killed me the most was there was entire rooms laughing. It was hard to hear that—that so many people could be so cruel. Most people heard things said like, "It's about time that fag killed himself," and stuff like that, and that was really hard to deal with. It changed how I valued my life and the lives around me.

## Understanding LGBTQ Experiences



**QUESTIONS**  
your student is  
wrestling with



**HOPES**  
they have expressed  
for their life



**CHALLENGES**  
and struggles  
they are facing



**STRENGTHS**



## Becoming an Ally

**Ally:** An individual who speaks out and stands up for a person or group that is targeted and discriminated against. An ally works to end oppression by supporting and advocating for people who are stigmatized, discriminated against or treated unfairly.

1. Returning to the ***Straightlaced*** student your group has been focusing on, what does that student need from an ally—both on a personal level and in dealing with external attitudes or discrimination they are facing?
2. What could individuals do to be an ally to this student?
3. What changes do you think would be needed in the larger school or community to make sure this student feels fully supported and accepted?
4. What kinds of policy or legal changes do you think would help address the prejudice this person faces?