

Being Gay in a Conservative High School

*Written by Charlie Dineen, Tabor Academy
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Disclaimer: all names in this article, except my own, have been altered to preserve privacy.

My name is Charlie. I'm fifteen, I'm a cancer (or a gemini, according to the new star signs), I'm bisexual, and I'm a transgender man. Being in a relationship in high school is complicated enough, even without the added struggle of being LGBTQ. And just ask my boyfriend Tom, my being a sensitive cancer/gemini hybrid is the least of our worries.

For those reading who identify as transgender, you know where I'm coming from when I say it complicates relationships a lot. Aside from questions like "So... is your relationship really gay... because you know..." and "Aren't you guys technically straight?" there can be complications within the relationship, too. Explaining my "situation" to his family could put Tom in a strange position of trying to maintain my privacy while telling his mother that yes, I do look very masculine.

Being in an openly gay relationship can cause some issues in high school. Tabor is a fairly conservative place, and even though people know that directly confronting us is a bad idea (with my position as the child of a faculty member and the head of the GSA), we still hear the occasional complaint from students. Tom has heard more than once that we're far too proud of being gay, and that someone ought to knock some sense into us. We'll get the odd look when we hold hands, and I have heard the f word tossed around (not the f-bomb).

But these little disturbances aren't the biggest problem. The biggest problem is that we are the only openly gay couple at Tabor. Out of five hundred something students, we're among the few (probably five to ten) who are openly LGBTQ, when statistically, there are at least fifty to one hundred LGBT students. When we are together, there are times when I feel like we're some kind of spectacle. To our friends, a group that largely consists largely of closeted LGBT students, we are nothing out of the ordinary. But to the football team, we aren't their idea of normal. To the small but very vocal group of extreme conservatives at Tabor, we seem to be a threat of some kind, and I'm no stranger to bullying. For three months last spring, I was verbally harassed by a member of this group after school so severely that I left my after-school activity, which had previously been my biggest passion, for good. The LGBT people around me aren't immune to the bullying either. My friend Katherine was called a fag by a fellow freshman. Another friend, Derek, who is closeted, is teased and taunted about being gay, just because he participates in the drama program.

The huge problem is that with such a small group of openly LGBT people, those who choose to use our minority status as a target are free to do so. With such a small group of students to use

our voices against the attacks, it's overwhelming to try to deal with everyone at once and still pass our classes. If the population was larger, we would have a more powerful force, and maybe the students who don't have as much experience with LGBT students would learn about the community.

It can be hard to work through some of the drama, but overall, being gay in high school is actually a pretty cool experience. The bullying is terrible, but the friends you make by finding both allies and those with common experiences are truly the best friends I'll ever have. And besides, being a member of the LGBTQ community is a unique and special experience, so why not embrace it?