

Day of Silence

Contributed by Kate Schlenkert
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How many gay, lesbian, transgender, or bi-sexual people do you know? Surprisingly, it may be a higher number than you realize. Why is this? Typically it is a taboo topic- one that, when actually discussed, is met with opposition, fear, anger, and hatred. So how could you expect these individuals to be open about their sexuality? American society hasn't exactly made an inviting and safe environment for this openness.

This is why the Day of Silence was created in 1996. This project, led by the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN), was created at the University of Virginia. The goal is to create a "day of action" so that supporters of bias and discriminatory comments and actions in schools are deemed unacceptable and intolerable. It is a day-long vow that, by keeping silent, you not only acknowledge the discrimination, bullying, harassment, etc, but that you are protesting it, as well. This day-long silence vow is intentionally meant to mimic the silence that most lesbian, gay, bi, and transgendered students must take in order to remain safe and not tortured.

Why is a Day of Silence necessary? A 2005 survey (GLSEN's National School Climate Survey) discovered that approximately 80% of lesbian, gay, bi, or transgendered students reported various forms of abuse at school. Even more startling is the more than 30% that admitted to missing school because they were scared for their safety. The Day of Silence is meant to bring attention to the bullying, harassment, and abuse-and to do something about it.

Is the Day of Silence successful? Yes! It is estimated that more than half a million students have organized Day of Silence events. In the United States, the Day of Silence has become the largest all student-led action. These events and numbers have placed GLSEN and other similar groups in the media, drawing more and more attention to the issue at hand.

This year's Day of Silence is on Friday, April 25 (the Friday before dreaded finals week). It is held in memory of Lawrence King, the eighth grader that was killed in California. A classmate murdered Lawrence because he chose to express his sexual orientation, and even went so far as to dress more feminine (wearing heels, etc). This was Lawrence's choice; he should not have been murdered for it. Tens of thousands of students, maybe more, will be participating across the country in the Day of Silence.

If you are curious about how to participate, look no further! Lake State's very own Student Organization for Diversity is making all the "tools" necessary for participation available to you, free of charge. School officials have already agreed to back up any student choosing to participate in this year's Day of Silence. All you need now is to sign up with SOFD (tables will be available outside the Quarterdeck and in the Galley during the week of April 21-25). They can provide you with any information you might need on participation.

Lance Boehmer, President of SOFD, passes this message along to Lake State students: "Together students can participate in the silence and make an impact on the hate crimes experienced by so many every day. Through silence we can protest hate on campus. We all talk during the day, so you might even say that through silence we will be heard." For any further information on the Day of Silence, visit this website: www.dayofsilence.org.