Greetings-

It is hard to believe that we are already at the end of the fall semester, and that winter break is upon us here at Tufts. It was quite a busy semester that was full of a plethora of successful LGBTQA-related events, such as the annual Coming Out Day Rally, a lecture by “out” former NFL player Wade Davis, a Vagina Monologues inspired event called “Queering the Monologues,” a Queer Women’s Mixer (page 3), and a panel event titled “Trans* Spiritual Leaders Speak Out” (page 5). We have documented some of these events in this issue of Tufts LGBT News, and also put the “spotlight” on alumnus and performer/activist/trainer Laurie Wolfe, History Professor Kris Manjapra, and the topic of asexuality. A special thanks to graduate intern Racheal Pozerski for putting this issue together.

I want to take a moment to acknowledge the life and recent passing of Nelson Mandela. Some of Mandela’s many great actions and achievements were very specifically focused on LGBTQ people. As the former president of South Africa, he is credited as being the first world leader to ever include sexual orientation as a protected classification in his country’s constitution, enacted in 1996. In 2000, he also appointed an openly gay and HIV-positive man into South Africa’s highest Court of Appeal, and Chief Edwin Cameron now serves as Justice for the nation’s Constitutional Court. There were countless contributions Mandela made for LGBTQ individuals, which have had worldwide impact. Even though he is no longer with us, his spirit and vision for equality continues to live on.

I hope you enjoy this issue.

In solidarity,
~Tom Bourdon, Ed.D.
Director, Tufts LGBT Center
You spent many years as a teacher in California. What sparked the move back to the East Coast?
I didn’t enjoy living in Los Angeles and I needed an occupation change. When I moved back to the Greater Boston Area, I wasn’t sure if I could work in an office position; it just wasn’t the right fit for me. But I worked in a temp position in an office, it wasn’t that bad. I realized I actually could work in an office.

As a graduate of Tufts, what is it like for you to now work here?
One of my friends mentioned there was an open position at the LGBT and Latino Centers and I applied. I thought that it would be great to come back to my alma mater, it felt comfortable to come back. Tufts is like my second home.

Prior to becoming staff, have you (or how have you) been involved with the LGBTQ Community? Tufts LGBTQ Community?
This is my first time formally being involved with the LGBTQ community, but my family has been connected to the LGBTQ community for many years. My older brother came out as gay when he was 17 years old. He ended up moving to NYC and he wasn’t around when I was a child since he is 17 years older than I am. When he did come home, I always felt a connection to him. Besides the sibling connection, we have always had similar artistic and theatrical interests. He is definitely the family member who I feel most connected with, and who understands me the most. I’ve always been accepting of my family and friend’s sexuality, and I am glad I get to now provide support to others through my work in the Center.

As the Staff Assistant for the LGBT Center and Latino Center, what are you looking to accomplish (or goals) in this position?
I’d like to help the Center to continue to run smoothly, help create a welcoming, warm, and friendly environment for everyone. I want to help make this a safe space and a home for students. If a student wants to talk or just vent, I want them to know that I am available as an empathetic and warm ear. I want students to know that I understand what it’s like to feel that you can be truly who you are. Although I identify as straight, I still know what it is like to feel prejudged and misunderstood, and I am here if you need someone to listen.

What is one piece of advice you would like to give our student, faculty, staff, and alum readers?
When I was an undergraduate, I wish someone had told me to ‘Always be true to yourself.’ That would have helped a lot. Make sure to love yourself and don’t compromise who you are to make others happy.

GENDER IDENTITY AND EXPRESSION TRAINING

James Mulder, one of the LGBT Center's Graduate Assistants, is developing a Gender Identity and Expression Training. This training will supplement the SafeZone training that the Center and Team Q offer to the Tufts community. The Gender Identity and Expression Training aims to build upon the foundations laid by the SafeZone training. The SafeZone workshop aims to equip allies in the Tufts community with the vocabulary and tools to address homophobia and transphobia on campus. Whereas the Gender Identity and Expression workshop expands upon the topic of gender as well as the particular experiences of trans*, genderqueer, and gender nonconforming individuals at Tufts.
A major goal of the new training is to increase fluency with the vocabulary of trans* identities and experiences. The vocabulary of trans* identities can prove to be a stumbling block for many people, not only because so much of the language used to describe trans* identities and experiences is so deeply personal, but also because the language of trans* experience can be unfamiliar, both grammatically and linguistically. Is trans* an adjective or a prefix? Do people say transgender or transgendered? What's the best way to talk to and about a person who has not disclosed their preferred gender pronouns (PGP’s)?

The workshop emphasizes the importance of self-identification when it comes to issues of gender identity and provides participants with the opportunity to develop ways of approaching questions of gender identity with sensitivity and respect. The training begins with a general conversation about ways in which gender expression and gender identity are different. That is, while gender expression is often visible, gender identity is personal and not visible from the outside. The workshop goes on to cover ways in which gender expression is complicated (for instance, when musician Janelle Monáe wears a curvy tailored tux, is it feminine or masculine, or is it both in different ways?). Then, the workshop moves to discussing gender identity and the many, many complex ways that gender identity and transition in particular affect and complicate daily life for people in the trans* community.

The goal of the Gender Identity and Expression training is to foster a campus community that supports and makes space for trans*, genderqueer, and gender nonconforming individuals to be open and empowered in their respective genders. This training will be offered this Spring semester, stay posted for details!

QUEER WOMEN’S MIXER

Written by Anna Annino

An LGBT Center sponsored ‘Queer Women’s Mixer’ recently took place in Remis Sculpture Court. The event was open to all female-spectrum and female self-identified individuals. It was a casual social mixer where women from different parts of the Tufts community could get to know each other while enjoying yummy snacks. While there were many undergraduate students from the Medford campus, attendees also included members of the faculty and staff, graduate students from the Medford campus, the School of Medicine, the Friedman School of Nutrition, the School of the Museum of Fine Arts (SMFA), and the Sackler School of Biomedical Sciences. This event was organized by Anna Annino, who co-leads Queer Women’s Group, a weekly LGBT Center discussion group open to all female-identified students. Annino explained, “I kept hearing that there was a lack of connection and visibility on campus for queer women, not just undergrads, but also within the faculty and staff. I thought this would be a great opportunity for students to meet other students from the campuses in Boston, which usually we have very little connection with, and also meet queer women who are faculty and staff at Tufts.” With all of the positive feedback from attendees, Annino hopes that it can become an annual LGBT Center event.
Can you talk about your experience while you were a student at Tufts?

My experience at Tufts was really different from those who went here after me. I was A74; back then there was no LGBT Center, not even the term transgender: the world was just beginning to waken to what happened at Stonewall. I arrived at Tufts wanting to get help for my gender “issues”, so I went to the counseling center within a few months of arriving. The counselor, a graduate student, listened to me for forty minutes without saying a word. Finally, she did: she said “Your time is up” and that was it. I walked out feeling there was no hope for me if psychology had nothing to say; there was no place I could be.

Back then I used to haunt the library, looking at the dozen or so articles on pathology of trans people and sitting in the stacks by the two books on transsexuals that were in the stacks along with a couple of others on female impersonation in England. I was too scared to actually check anything out for fear of being found out. Around 2001 or so I visited the library to see how the collection of books had changed. There was a young man sitting on the floor in the stacks right by the area where I used to sit; when he heard me coming and saw me enter the aisle he threw the books in the stack, jumped up and ran away. I was sad to see that things were still like that when I was beginning to get support. I’m glad things have gotten better since then, but I know it’s still hard for many.

What are you doing post-Tufts?

Post-Tufts I did a number of things, held a few different jobs, and then I went on to what is now Southern California University of Health Sciences and earned my Doctor of Chiropractic. I also studied polarity therapy and learned craniosacral therapy and practiced for a while. After I came out and began transition (millennial rising), I wanted to work more in concert with other people, and I became an activist. I got involved in fundraising for progressive non-profits. I also became a speaker/trainer on trans and bi issues. I initially trained with SpeakOut Boston, and continued speaking gigs there, on my own, and with MTPC (Massachusetts Transgender Political Coalition). I testified at the first hearings on the trans rights bill in Massachusetts and was thrilled to be there to see it pass and become law a couple of years ago. The last eight years I’ve worked more closely with Keshet, the Jewish LGBT(Q) Organization and chaired a couple of their committees. I also served on the board of the Bisexual Resource Center a few years back. During this time I’ve been writing and performing poems and stories about my life, gender and sexuality at different venues and open mics, and have headlined a few.

Can you talk about your performances in Bilicious Boston, Boundless, Body Verse, and/or The Vagina Monologues by Vday Boston?

I auditioned for the Vagina Monologues when a notice went up that there was a need for transwomen to audition for a local production of the Vagina Monologues. I had been reading about the first ever trans production of the Vagina Monologues that was staged that year in Los Angeles, so I was excited that they were going to hold one here as well. I went on to appear in it three years running, performing different monologues each year. (The Vagina Monologues is a marriage of acting and activism, helping to raise awareness to put an end to violence against women, and it’s also great theater). I had the pleasure of doing this with VDay Boston, a troupe of incredibly gifted and talented women actors and activists.

Body Verse was an evening in Fenway Health’s Boundless series consisting of poetry on the theme of deconstructing the body and gender. I wrote a new poem series specifically for that evening, one of which
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became an integral part of my performance in last year’s Bilicious. I’ve appeared in Bilicious the last three years, a multimedia evening highlighting bisexual artists. I enjoy collaborating with producer/director Susannah Layton in picking out which pieces work best together, and she does a fantastic job on the videotaped interviews and with the whole show. It’s also fun to see and get to know the other performers over time.

My art is my activism, a way for me to begin to open people’s hearts and minds, to change things for the better. When you can move people or get them to laugh and feel, you make friends.

What is one piece of advice you would like to give to our student, faculty, staff, and alum readers?

I don’t like to give advice. Okay, let’s try this one:

There’s a place for you, for all of us. If it takes time for it to appear to you and/or the world, it may just be you’re meant to do even more fabulous and fun things later on. (God loves all the flowers, the early and the late bloomers).

When in doubt, don’t.

Also, breathe. Breathing is good.

WE HAVE FAITH: LGBTQ PEOPLE OF FAITH SPEAK OUT EXHIBIT

Over the past few weeks, a photo-text exhibit “We Have Faith: LGBTQ People of Faith Speak Out” has been featured on Tufts Campus. The exhibit features stories of queer and allied faith leaders and their experiences with religion and sexuality, and that intersection. The majority of the pieces were featured in the Interfaith Center and the LGBT Center, and a few additional photos were placed in the Africana Center, Asian American Center, Women’s Center, and Hillel. The exhibit culminated with a “Trans* Spiritual Leaders Speak Out” panel. Representative Carl Sciortino (‘00) commenced the panel with an introduction and John Kelly, a Tufts undergraduate student, moderated the panel. The panelists that were featured included Reverend Christopher Fike and Rabbinical student Becky Silverstein.

From left to right: Rabbinical student Becky Silverstein, Reverend Christopher Fike, John Kelly, Representative Carl Sciortino
Can you talk about how you found your way to Tufts?

Sure. I was in Los Angeles on a postdoctoral fellowship after I completed my dissertation. I feel fortunate that the position at Tufts opened up. I arrived in 2008 and have tremendously enjoyed my time here ever since.

What sparked your interest in South Asian and German History?

I have a deep interest in how people who seem to have little in common with each other can end up sharing in each other's political, cultural and intellectual projects. I suppose I also never felt comfortable working within one single field of research, but [I] am 'at home' working on the borders between fields. Like many scholars these days, I have always been more interested in the things that don't fit in, rather than the things that do.

What is your involvement with the LGBTQ Community? The Tufts LGBTQ Community?

Queer studies have an impact on my research. And I take an interest in Queer [People] of Color activism. At Tufts, I organized events for the LGBTQ community when I was a faculty-in-residence at Lewis Hall. I try to let students know that they can come speak with me for advice on Queer Studies, activism, and managing social life on campus.

Are you able to integrate your interests in academia with the LGBTQ Community?

Yes, I think this [integration] is important. I always tell students that [your] four years of college should partly be about seeking your own voice and learning how to speak from your experience with confidence. It's a special honor, in my line of work, to help guide students on their journey in finding that voice. I think professors at Tufts try their best to reach students and to impart what we know to be the most vital aspects of our fields of expertise. But we also want to impart to our students a sense, borne of our experience, for the questions and perspectives we want students to intensively grapple with. Certainly the way I conceive of the most vital debates in my field and the kinds of questions I have my students grapple with in class, are informed by my social and political experience as a gay person of color.

Any advice you would like to share to our student, staff, faculty, and alum readers?

My advice to students is to seek out good mentors and guides, and to keep asking that central question: 'what is my voice, and how can I use it, along with everything I have learned in college, to speak about what matters most?'
A lot of people have heard about asexuality, but how many actually understand asexuality? Here at Tufts, the topic tends to not receive much attention, and it is also an often misunderstood identity and community of individuals. So let’s start with the basics: What is asexuality?

To begin with the meaning of the word itself, the prefix “a” refers to “without,” and the word “sexuality” refers to someone’s “sexual feelings.” Therefore, the literal translation is “without sexual feelings.” Most who identify as asexual would describe asexuality as not experiencing sexual attraction. However, that is not to say that all asexuals do not experience sexual attraction—some asexual people still experience arousal.

When some people think about asexuality, they assume this means celibacy. However, there is quite a big difference between the two. Celibacy is the conscious and deliberate choice to abstain from sex and not act on sexual impulses. Individuals who are asexual do not have these sexual impulses in the first place, even if they consciously try to create them. Asexual individuals do not necessarily want to be sexual, it is more about the process of understanding one’s identity and grappling with societal sexual orientation expectations and heteronormativity. A lot of asexual people who are active in online communities say they would not want to change who they are, and it is not a choice.

Sexual identity and romantic identity are distinctly separate for some people. That being said, there are people who are asexual but not *aromantic*. This could mean they may be interested in romantic dating relationships, but do not want to be sexually active with a romantic partner.

Beyond the distinctions between sexual and romantic, there are other identities within the asexual community (which is sometimes called the *ace* community). *Demisexuality*, which is along the ace spectrum, is described as needing an intense emotional connection to someone before being interested in or comfortable having sex. *Gray-a* is another identity on the ace spectrum that can have a few different definitions. It can mean that someone usually does not feel any sexual attraction, but attraction can still happen on rare occasions. In other circumstances, it can mean that a person has an extremely low sex drive but still experiences attraction. It can even mean that they have a sex drive, but not enough of one to act on sexual desires.

As with pretty much any identity, if someone tells you they identify somewhere along the ace spectrum and you do not know what that means, you can respectfully ask them if they could explain more to you. Hopefully they will not mind you asking, and you will be able to learn more about the person.

If you think you might identify along the ace spectrum or just want to learn more, here are some resources that might be helpful:

Information, resources, and ACE group: [http://www.asexuality.org/home/](http://www.asexuality.org/home/)
ACE video resources: [http://www.youtube.com/user/HotPiecesofAce?blend=1&ob=5#p/a/22C60D7AD4D85346/2/tiuWxKKq_uQ](http://www.youtube.com/user/HotPiecesofAce?blend=1&ob=5#p/a/22C60D7AD4D85346/2/tiuWxKKq_uQ)

If you would like support or have suggestions for more ACE resources, come see us at the LGBT Center!
Marea Murray, LCSW (J ’81), Board Member of Gaylesta, The LGBTQ Therapy Association sent us this information to share: California's anti-gay reparative bill, SB1172, signed by the Governor last December as well as the recently signed NJ bill are both tied up in the courts thanks to Liberty Counsel, NARTH (North American Association for the Research and Therapy of Homosexuality[sic]) and others. The bills in CA and NJ both target licensed therapists who see minors! But similar legislation has been introduced in several other countries, including the UK and Australia.

Bill Barnert (G’05) is now a Commissioner on the City of Cambridge GLBT Commission.

Laurie Wolfe (Allerhand, A’74) and Jen Bonardi (J’98) logged their third appearances in Bilicious Boston, a variety show that entertains, educates, and enlightens audiences about bisexuality.

Eric Pliner (LA ’97) and husband Jonathan Bloom are thrilled to announce the January 2013 birth of their son Jacob. The Pliner-Blooms celebrated Halloween as characters from *And Tango Makes Three*, the children’s book / true story of the Central Park Zoo’s gay penguin dads and their adopted baby penguin.

Want to get involved with Pride on the Hill? Visit their website at [www.prideonthehill.org](http://www.prideonthehill.org)