

Every Day Is Coming Out Day

The day after Jane Lynch hosted the Emmy Awards, one of People.com's top stories was Rosie O'Donnell and her new girlfriend making their red carpet debut. The September issue of *Vogue* featured an article about "green" weddings with models Julia Nobis and Kate King posing as the betrothed couple, and Kevin Keller, a gay character in the Archie comics, is getting his very own comic book. Gays are rejoining the military, being paired on *Millionaire Matchmaker* and Chaz Bono is dancing with the stars.

It's ubiquitous; the gays have gone mainstream. As a lateblian, I've only been "out" and part of the queer community for seven years. In that time, I've seen a significant shift in not only acceptance but also a "Who cares?" attitude about sexuality, especially in the media. I suppose it's easy to think that I wasn't as aware of gay issues before I was gay, but I believe that although it didn't happen overnight, there has indeed been a difference over the past few years.

It's easy to identify some of the catalysts of this change and exciting to think that it's only the beginning of what could be the total assimilation of gays into mainstream media. I'm not suggesting this will cause a "doing away" of gay websites and publications such as this one, but rather a blending of our queer community into the larger culture.



living out loud

BY KATHRYN MARTINI

In order for us to be treated equally in our culture, there must be less concern with our differences.

At one time, a lesbian who decided to come out in the media risked career suicide. Now we can find something gay related in the mainstream every day and an actress' sexual orientation is much less relevant. There's less focus on "lesbian celebrities" and more on celebrities who happen to be lesbians.

Trish Bendix is the managing editor for MTV and Logo's AfterEllen.com. She and her wife Julie recently moved to Portland after spending 10 years in Chicago. It's Trish's job to cover lesbians in the media and pop culture, and she loves that mainstream society seems to care a bit less about a woman's sexuality.

"When Rosie's love life is speculated about just as much as George Clooney's, I think it's a step forward," she says. Although she realizes that many gay celebrities don't want to be tabloid fodder, she finds a bizarre sort of equality when out celebrities are treated exactly the same as straight ones: "It's normalizing when

we get to see an aspect of ourselves in pop culture," she says. "It's validating."

Bendix believes that factors driving this change include Prop 8 and the recent rash of teen suicides—events that have compelled public figures to stand up for their beliefs. "Terrible things have given rise to some great things," she says. It's true that the fight for marriage equality has thrust gay issues into the media spotlight over the years. Publications like *People* magazine featuring the wedding of Ellen DeGeneres and Portia de Rossi on their covers proved a huge game changer. Bendix notes that it was probably many people's first look inside a lesbian wedding. "And wow! It doesn't look so different, does it?" she adds.

As the general population begins to see that the sky won't come tumbling down because queers can—and do—serve openly in the military, get legally married and dance on prime-time television, we'll begin to see further acceptance of all people, regardless of sexual or gender identity.

All of this attention on gay issues starts to desensitize people to the fact they are "gay" issues but rather lays them bare, as they truly

are: societal issues. In order for us to be treated equally in our culture, there must be less concern with our differences. Much of this is dependent on a positive focus on queer celebrities and non-stereotypically gay characters on television (and, apparently, comic books). When gay characters and gay actors can kiss on film and it's *not* noteworthy, we will have reached a new critical mass. Positive queer role models in the media make it easier for other people to come out, especially young people so heavily influenced by what they see in magazines and on screens big and small.

The one area in which we're not seeing more out figures is sports. Last year, *Portland Monthly* profiled Portland State University's Sherri Murrell as the only openly gay coach in women's college basketball. Bendix feels that female athletes not speaking about their sexuality is a continuing problem in the field. "The only way to change is to be the change," she adds.

Still, Bendix has great hope for the future. "Anytime a public person is openly out and says, 'I'm a lesbian,' it makes my job easier," she notes. "It gets easier to be gayer every day." ☐

Trish Bendix's column, "Morning Brew," can be read on afterellen.com. Kathryn Martini is a Portland freelance writer, blogger and columnist. Reach her at kathrynmartini.com.

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