

Bryan Taico: Not Just ‘the Kid with the UGGs’

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Flashback to 2008. The class of 2012 is gathered in the auditorium for the annual [NAMES](#) assembly. After watching a few emotionally capturing videos about anti-bullying, a shy freshman—who had gone to middle school in Chicago—tears up and sits quietly by himself.

One by one, students line up in the front of the big auditorium. He listens to their stories about being mistreated, and he can't help but tear up even more and connect with them. All of a sudden, he feels his feet leading him to stand up and fall in line with the other students.

To his surprise, the boy—with a long emo-like hairstyle—speaks into the microphone and says, “My name is Bryan and I want everyone to know that I'm gay.”

“I knew I was gay from a young age maybe between 10 to 12 years old. I didn't like fighting or sports. I didn't like girls. I've kissed girls before, but I never liked them in a sense where I want to be more than their friends,” says **Bryan Taico**, who is now a senior.

Senior **Jason Magel**, who was at the NAMES assembly, remembers the event.

“I was really impressed, I thought Bryan coming out was the greatest thing a student could do. He was very brave and I've never seen him show fear. The event was a very memorable thing to witness,” he says.

After Bryan came out at the NAMES assembly, he says he received support from security guards, staff members, and teachers; however, there were also times when he was bullied.

“It was a very emotional time for me,” he said. “For a while people called me faggot and I really had no friends. I was so emotional that I would cry whenever people just poked me with a pen. I got bullied. There were moments when I would see people who think I would get bullied by and I would immediately start walking the opposite way from them. I always felt unsafe when I was in school.”

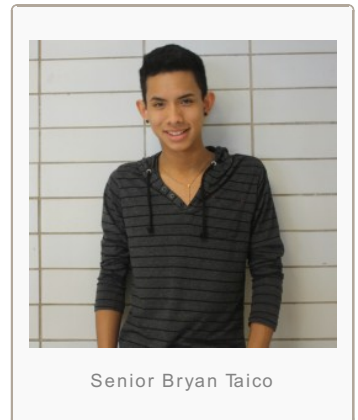
Today, April 20, marks the 16th [Day of Silence](#), in which students from all over the country participate by staying quiet for a whole day in hopes of raising awareness for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youths that have been harrassed, bullied, and victimized.

According to the [National Youth Association](#), nine out of 10 LGBT students are bullied and harrassed, and one out of three of those teens have attempted suicide.

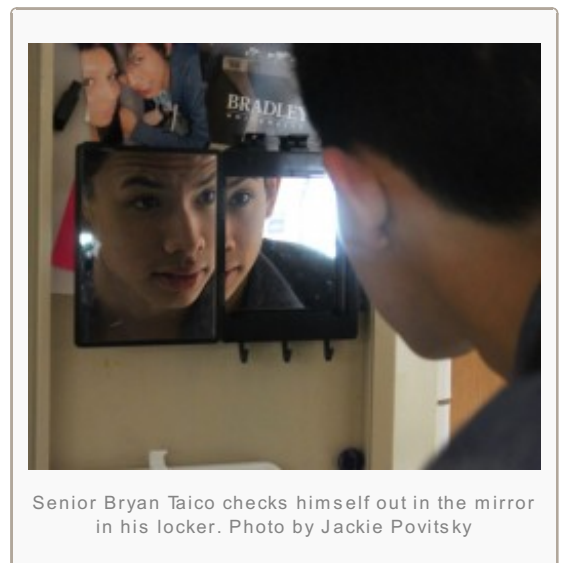
Bryan—who will be participating in his fourth Day of Silence today—encourages students to take a vow of silence.

“The silence is for the people who weren't heard and were afraid to come out. You have to think of a better meaning for people and break the noise,” he said.

For many gay teens, coming out to their families might be just as difficult as coming out to the their school. [Statistics](#) show that more than 30 percent of LGBT people have been suffering



Senior Bryan Taico



Senior Bryan Taico checks himself out in the mirror in his locker. Photo by Jackie Povitsky



from physical violence from the hands of their own family members. LGBT children even have trouble telling their parents, because they fear being unaccepted.

Bryan, however, said he was lucky that his parents supported him.

“My dad actually knew I was gay before I could tell him,” he said. “We were in the car and I wanted to jump out the window. He was very supportive and he told me that he loved me and supported me. If I had one leg and couldn’t see, it didn’t matter to him who I was. From that moment, I knew he had my back and that he would be that person I could go to for anything. My mom also accepted it, even though she thought it was only going to be a phase, she was more worried about school and how the kids would treat me.”

After Bryan came out to the school and his family, his real personality came out, too. He went from emo and shy to preppy, outgoing, and “flamboyant,” a term that Bryan uses to describe himself.

“I had Bryan in my freshman English class and he brought a lot of great energy to the class. He always complimented me and Ms. Lauer on our outfits. There were times when he would do the craziest things. One time he slid into class like he was sliding to home base. He’s a unique kid who is easy to talk to. He’s comfortable in his own skin and he has confidence in himself. He’s definitely a student I will be keeping in touch with,” says English teacher **Kristen Jackson**.

By the time he reached his sophomore year in high school, Bryan started finding friends he could confide in, but he still faced major challenges. There were so many things he wanted to do, so many things he wanted to wear, but he knew that daring to be significantly different from the high school’s stereotype of a “macho” man came with a price to pay.

Bryan started carrying totes instead of backpacks, and he became the boy everyone knew as “the kid with the UGGs.” Bryan had confidence and courage to be the person he wanted to be, but he was still threatened and mistreated.

“A lot of issues can affect people who are bullied,” says school psychologist **Felix Caceres**. “A lot of times there’s feeling of isolation and depression. It is very important for them to seek out to someone they can trust.”

According to [Discovery News](#), people bully because they like the sense of power. In some cases, bullies persecute others to get friends. Surprisingly, research has shown that bullies have a higher self esteem and have a lot of friends. The problem is that most bullies don’t understand that what they do is a form of abuse.

Despite being bullied, Bryan maintains a positive outlook.

“All the bullying taught me how to love yourself and it helped me grow,” he says. “I don’t hold grudges. Bullies are uneducated, they need to start loving the differences in the world, and stop looking at them negatively. It’s 2012; the world moves around with love and not hate. It doesn’t matter who you are, you wouldn’t want anybody else to do the same to you.”

Bryan has been able to apply what he’s learned from his past and help other LGBT teens. Some of his hobbies include shopping and acting, but for the most part, he is always helping others. He loves doing volunteer work and being a mentor for organizations like LGBTQ in Boystown, HIV awareness, and Gay Men of Color. He was also Snowball leader for three years and the president of Gay Straight Alliance for Niles West.

“He used to be really shy, but now Bryan always is a shoulder to cry on for his friends and even strangers. He’s very friendly and approachable. He loves helping friends out with their outfits, and he really knows how to make a person shine,” said close friend and senior **Tricia Gattia**.

In the future, Bryan wants to do something in the psychology field. He wants to give advice and help other teens find themselves. He wants to go to Africa and also be an advocate for gay teens.

“Students like Bryan are an inspiration,” said theatre director **Andy Sinclair**. “His compassion, energy, and spirit are contagious and he makes me realize how far we have come since I was a high school student. That being said, I also



think his integrity and courage are far beyond that of a normal high school senior. I am impressed that this young man has had the courage and self-honesty to recognize who he is at such a young age and to face the stigmas and misunderstanding that can come from being a minority in the world of teenage love.”

Bryan offers his advice to LGBT teens who are struggling to come out.

” There’s always a light at the end of the tunnel,” he says. “I know how it feels to be trapped, and you will never get to break that until you learn how to love yourself. The only person that matters is yourself. Set yourself free and take what the world has to offer.”

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