

Hello everyone. My name is Hillary Gleason, and I am a graduate student in the Clinical Psychology PhD program at the University of Montana and a Pride scholar. I want to thank you all for the support you've given to Pride Foundation; it is because of you, and many others I've yet to meet, that I have the opportunity to be here today.

When I asked what I should talk about tonight, I was encouraged to talk about who I am, rather than what I do. But as I focused on that prompt—to talk about *me*, and not what I *do*—I came up blank. Not because I'm a boring person—I can assure you that I'm pretty weird—but because separating the two seemed impossible. For better or for worse, a large part of me is wrapped up in what I do. I am an advocate, and have been since I was first strong-armed into this role during a pivotal time in my identity formation.

You see, I am a queer woman, born and raised in central Massachusetts. I came out to the world on my 15th birthday—I thought that was a good idea because who can be mad when it's your birthday? Well this was only three months after the ruling of *Goodridge v. the Department of Public Health* that legalized same-sex marriage in Massachusetts; tensions were running high. I came out in a way that only an overly idealistic 15 year-old can: brazenly and without much thought given to the matter. I only had a vague sense that people would see my queerness as immoral or bad, but like a typical 15 year-old, my response to that notion was “to hell with them.” Ideally, we could all come out in such a carefree way. Of course, many of us don't live in families and communities that afford us the celebration that coming out deserves.

Likewise, I did not come out in a warm and welcoming place. I lost friends. Family members distanced themselves from me. And as a high school student I would go to school, and I would hear homophobic and transphobic insults from my peers, my teachers, and even the school principal. I was bullied; my friends were bullied. I did not see people like me on faculty, or among any of the adults in my life. It was hard for me to look forward to a future, let alone my every day.

So this brings me back to considering my prompt. At the age of 15, I began a life of advocacy as a means for survival; I did not pursue it at the time for passion or for a sense of justice. Just survival. At 15, my high school's GSA had four people; by my sophomore year, 8; and by my senior year only four of us original members were still in school - the rest had dropped out; too tired from harassment.

So with the help of the school librarian, Mr. Daniels, we grew the GSA until it was one of the largest clubs in school. We advocated for faculty trainings on queer and trans sensitivity and things started to get better. And I took this work into college, too, where I helped grow Clark University's GSA.

Now, I am a burgeoning psychologist, researcher, clinician, and instructor who studies the health and resiliency of LGBTQ communities. I get to be me, and to do what I do best, as my livelihood. This is an incredible opportunity, and I'm lucky to

do what I love every day. But I sometimes struggle with the fact that my advocacy efforts are no longer for my own survival; rather, as I advocate through my research, teaching, and clinical work, I'm also bolstering my career—and I struggle with this. Because I see other people still fighting like hell just to be seen as human. You see, publications on heteronormativity and cissexism add a line to my vita, bolstering my overall hirability. Yet these same publications shed light on injustice and uplift the narratives of the oppressed. But I still can't resolve the uneasiness with this change in the nature of my advocacy; I don't have an answer for it yet. I am an advocate; I was raised to be an advocate; and now my advocacy is my livelihood, with all the bureaucracy and formalities that come with professionalism.

But overall, I do know that I've made the right decision to come to Montana and do the work I do. In Montana, I have the opportunity to promote resources for rural LGBTQ folks with little access to queer and trans communities. In Missoula, I get to witness the amazing, pioneering work of organizations like the Gender Expansion Project and the Womens Resource Center. At the University of Montana, I work with an incredible research lab devoted to bettering the world for queer and trans folks, which includes my adviser, Dr. Bryan Cochran, and my labmates, Katie Oost, Nick Livingston, Robert Enoch, and Oak Reed. My research is activism, in and of itself, and to have it honored by the Pride Foundation feels incredible. It is more than a scholarship; it is recognition of everything I've done and continue to do; it is a chance to reflect on who I am and where I'm headed as a psychologist; it is the validation that 15 year-old me needed, the coming out party that I never got. That's what the Pride Foundation does.

When I see how much we've progressed since I first came out, I'm in awe of the movement. When I see how much I've grown alongside my peers, beyond just a homonormative bubble, I'm grateful. Upon reflection, I am reminded of an oft-quoted line by E. B. White: "I arise in the morning torn between a desire to improve the world and a desire to enjoy the world. This makes it hard to plan the day." I think this summarizes our movement right now, especially during pride weekend here; we have made incredible gains that should be celebrated, but we have more to learn and do. As a queer, white, educated, cisgender adult woman, I could kick up my boots right here and now and be relatively comfortable. But the need to advocate runs through my blood; I am a product of our movement, and I have to keep doing what it's in my nature to do. Thanks for supporting that.