

Quiet, noise battle bias against gays

Day of Silence: Utah students join national event to educate others

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Some students had forgotten what it was like to live a lie.

As "queer teenagers" in the closet, they never spoke up when openly gay students were teased and harassed. They were afraid of getting beaten up. They pretended to like the opposite sex.

"For a while, I was trying to ignore it," 16-year-old Daniel Hill said about being gay. "I didn't want to seem different."

Hill and many students who participated in the national Day of Silence on Wednesday said the event reminded them of what it was like before they told their families and friends that they were gay.

"Today was just a taste of that again," said Hill, an openly-gay East High School junior who helped organize about 15 students on campus for the event.

"I wanted to talk, but I couldn't," he said. "I kept thinking - I have stories to tell."

Hundreds of Utah students, many with duct tape across their mouths, didn't speak for most of the day as part of the 10th annual Day of Silence that started at the University of Virginia.

This year's theme was "Silence is Loud." Supporters hoped the event raises awareness about intolerance and discrimination faced by the gay community. The day had a particularly potent meaning this year for many students who watched the Utah Legislature debate and finally reject a ban on gay student clubs earlier this year.

An estimated 15 Salt Lake City-area campuses participated in Day of Silence.

By lunchtime on Wednesday, Mel Elizondo's mouth had started to hurt from the duct tape strapped across her lips.

"It shows that we're not going away, and we're still here and doing our thing," said Elizondo, a straight Hunter senior.

Some of the 20 Hunter participants wore Day of Silence T-shirts and held signs explaining why they were mute. Sean Jarvis and other students clustered around Elizondo as they read the explanation.

"If they're gay or lesbian, I may not totally agree with it, but I have no say in it," said the Hunter junior.

Katelynn Shelton, a straight Hunter student who was silent, wanted classmates to see how much people suffer when they're forced to deny who they are.

"It's more important just because of everything that did go on with the legislative people trying to completely wipe us out and putting us back in the dark and keep us silent," Shelton said.

On Wednesday night, roughly 100 people, mostly high school students, attended the Night of Noise at the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Community Center of Utah.

They shared poems about their fears of coming out of the closet. They talked about their experiences throughout the day - a teacher who forced them to speak and students who teased them.

Cameo Garrick, a West Jordan senior, didn't speak for eight hours Wednesday.

She said she hopes that someday she won't be stared at for holding her girlfriend's hand in public.

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