



## Bryce McKibben

Good morning everyone. I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Bryce McKibben and I am currently a student at the University of Washington. But I certainly didn't just appear there. In reality, I have had many defining experiences ever since I came out while just a sophomore in high school. My coming out process, like that of many others, was not easy. But I can tell you how the process made me what I am today, and how the so-called "ex-gay" movement severely challenged my aspirations.

I grew up in an open-minded household, where my mom always told me that it would be ok if I were gay and that no assumptions were going to be made. So, I knew I had a support network of some kind when I finally settled on the term "gay" to describe my orientation. The problem is, this wasn't ever enough to make things easy. The school environment, my friends, and certain members of my religious community had made me feel that my orientation was unacceptable and dirty.

It was directly due to this internalized homophobia that I clung to the notion I could change. Even before I heard of reparative therapy, I tried just dating more of the opposite sex and doing 'manly things' like sports. Upon the utter failure of that method, I sought out religious perspectives. The ex-gay movement is far louder, though not larger, than progressive people who affirm gays and lesbians. And although I never sought the help of groups like Exodus International because I first came out, it left a residual mark on me that continued a state of depression. It was not until I reached out to the community and started a gay-straight alliance in my high school that I learned of the real dangers of 'reparative therapy.'

As a young gay student, and as a representative of the University of Washington's GBLT Commission, I can say that reparative therapy is mentally unsafe and abusive and scientifically unproven. Exodus has had many victims and will have many more. That is, they will continue to harmfully challenge students during times that are difficult enough. And I will continue to assert that their base claim of a need to change is **false**. I will also assert that gay youth can indeed be happy, healthy, moral, and successful members of society.

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Bryce McKibben is a freshman at the University of Washington. At his high school in Sammamish, Bryce initiated a Gay-Straight Alliance. He now represents the University of Washington's "GBLT Commission" in the Student Senate and volunteers for the group.