

The Pursuit of Happiness: What Should We Do After We Come Out?

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"You can't pursue happiness in the dark." -Daniel Mendelssohn

Introduction

I wanted to talk about coming out tonight, since yesterday was national coming out day. I read something a few weeks ago in a book edited by Bruce Bauer, in an article by Daniel Mendelssohn. He wrote, "You can't pursue happiness in the dark." He was writing specifically about coming out. He was also writing about gay rights and he comments that it often seems, at least in New York, that gay rights have to do with the right gym and the right bar and the right outfit. His argument is that gay bars and other places where gays congregate are often as dark and as stifling as the closet, and that coming out shouldn't mean going back in. That's why he says you can't pursue happiness in the dark.

I'm only going to make one comment about gay marriage. I read a paper a year and something ago at Sunstone and then again at the Affirmation Conference last August about gay marriage and one of my points was that gay unions can serve as a model for heterosexual unions. If a lesbian couple decides that one of them is going to work and the other is going to stay home, if a gay couple decides that one is going to pay the bills and the other is going to mow the lawn, it's because they decide to do it that way. There's no culturally defined way to divide up the work. That doesn't mean that they'll all be totally equal, indeed they may divide up the work in a rather traditional way, but they'll do it by choice.

A week ago yesterday, the Promiskeepers met in Washington, DC. Promiskeepers for those of you that haven't read the news are a group of evangelical men who make promises to treat their families better and live better in society (which in and of itself is probably a good goal). One of the more outrageous statements, at least the one that hit all the headlines, was made when the leader of Promiskeepers argued that men in a marriage ought to be the tiebreaker. I find that an outrageous thing to say. Men, by their sex, because they have an X and a Y chromosome, get to break the tie.

Of course the allusion is to sports, where ties don't happen very often, and when they do happen we find a way to break them. This is at least true in our American sports (you know, football, baseball, basketball). We don't like ties. In sports they are relatively rare and we break them. We want to make sure there is a winner and a loser. The fact of the matter is, I would guess, that in marriage ties are indeed rare, also. Although I've never been married, I've seen a lot of marriages and dissolution of marriages in my family. Generally people disagree and that's not a tie, that's the disagreement. A tie is

when things are the same, in marriage you don't want to break a tie. You want to leave it alone. So what the head Promiskeeper is saying is that in the majority of instances, when a husband and wife disagree on something, the husband has the prerogative of making the decision. I find that outrageous. I think heterosexuals could learn a lot by observing working gay unions to see how they work.

What is Coming Out?

Yesterday was National Coming Out Day. I came out one NCOD, October 11, though not necessarily by choice. What has always struck odd me about National Coming Out Day is that it is just one day. I wonder if you can really do it in a single day. I wonder if that's healthy. I have heard some argue that coming out is a life long process. I also wonder if that's truly healthy. Must we spend our lives doing something and feeling that it's unfinished, when it is something that really can be done and over?

I see coming out like peeling an onion. A layer at a time. (It will usually make you cry). But it does get done. It can be over with.

Some people comment that once you're out you still have to come out all the time. I wore this little rainbow pin all last week in my classes. A couple of students on about the third day of class, in the back row, as I was walking around doing exercises in Spanish, they said, "What flag is that?" I said "Well that's a flag for gay pride." Now if I had said that at BYU, where I worked for five years, their jaws would have hit the floor. But here at Weber State they didn't bat an eye and they said, "Oh, we thought maybe it was the Spanish flag." So I'll admit that you do get to inform people of your sexual identity over and over throughout your life. But that, for me, is not the same gut wrenching process that my real "coming out" was.

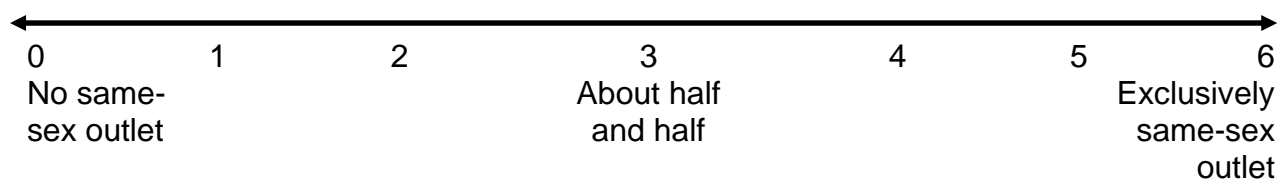
As I've talked about coming out as either a one day process or a life-long process, I'm really introducing the topic of my talk this evening, which is continua. I don't think that coming out is necessarily most healthy as a one day thing, nor most healthy as a life-long incremental process. I think there's a happy ground in between. I'm going to talk about several continua. People distribute themselves along the line of a continua. We're familiar with a lot of them. I'll mention several particularly dealing with homosexuality.

My Coming Out Story

First, I'd like to talk about how I came out. I was a student here at Weber State years ago. Graduated from here. I was an LDS missionary in Spain and when I came back my parents had moved to beautiful Ogden, so I went to Weber and majored in Spanish. And I really liked Weber. It was at that point that I was coming to grips with this whole idea of homosexuality. I went to the Weber State library, which (to any librarians in here, no offence), it was kind of pathetic. I looked up homosexuality. There were a few books on it, and the only one that really was very interesting, that didn't say I was evil and going to hell was this one (I brought a visual aid -- I didn't steal it). This is *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* by Kinsey. It's fabulous reading as you can tell. This chart, for example, shows outlet, age and frequency among adolescent and married males, occupation class and when we have sex and with whom and how often.

Kinsey came up with a continuum and he was one of the first sexologists to do that with homosexuality in specific. Kinsey was the ultimate social scientist. A lot of people have badmouthed his work in the last 50 years, but at the time it was very cutting edge. Kinsey said we can only talk about things we can measure. We can only measure things we can see or demonstrate. So we can't talk about the way people feel, or the way they want to be, or how they think they are, we can only talk about what they do. Today we've got a way, we think, of measuring those other things too, but Kinsey would only count how often people had sex with other people. When he talked about "the homosexual" he was not referring to a homosexual person, but rather he meant the sexual outlet for homosexual activity. He described as a zero a man who has never had sex, ever in his life, with another man. So as far as "the homosexual" is concerned, he's a zero. Some people mistakenly interpret Kinsey's scale to mean that a zero is a man who is exclusively heterosexual. This is not necessarily so. A zero is a man who has never had sex with another man. He may have sex with women or he may not have sex with women. He may have sex with horses. He may have sex with himself. But he has never had sex with another man, so he's not homosexual. Kinsey is not saying anything about what other kind of things he might be.

A six, on the Kinsey scale, is a man who has exclusively had sex with other males. Now that may only be once in his life, but he's never had sex with anyone else. Kinsey divides these poles into a continuum.



The interesting thing about Kinsey's continuum is that he puts it on a bell curve. It was thought, in Kinsey's day and age, that most naturally occurring social phenomena happen on a bell curve. The average male, Kinsey thought, had about half of his sex with men, and about half of his sex with women. Kinsey wrote that 50% of men have had reached orgasm with another man at some point in their lives since puberty. The average man if you just pick one of the street, is bisexual.

(I should mention that Kinsey wrote a second volume just as thick on *Sexuality in the Human Female* and, no offence, but it's really dull).

There is another kind of curve. This is called a U curve, or a bipolar curve. A lot of people are at one end of the continuum and a lot of people are at the other. I didn't realize that this was a possibility until long after I'd graduated from Weber State and finished reading Kinsey. I am a Kinsey 6. Even reading his book on female sexuality or looking at the graphs didn't do anything for me.

How gay am I? I failed physical education in the second grade. And I remember the note my teacher sent home because my mother yelled it at me for five weeks. It was: "Tommy refuses to play games with the other boys." I took ballet lessons in the third grade. That was the second time in the third grade, because I failed everything in the third grade the first time through. My sister had been taking ballet lessons on a scholarship with the Ford Foundation and I got to sit there and watch and wait while she

took her lessons on Thursdays after school. Irena Koffmoska, the ballet teacher saw me sitting there week after week. Of course, any boy could get a scholarship to take ballet lessons. So without asking me, she talked to my mom about me dancing on Thursday afternoons, instead of just sitting there. Mom was thrilled. I did that for a year, and I gave it up after a year. It was too embarrassing.

I was always, throughout high school and college, overtly nervous and often frightened when dating women -- particularly at the ends of dates with women. I knew what to do, I just didn't want to do it. I was scared of it. I'm a Kinsey 6.

Reading Kinsey's book was thoroughly interesting, but not helpful. What it told me, as it described it's bell curve, is that I was still an absolute weirdo. Maybe no more weird than a true heterosexual, but still strange.

Coming out for me, and I think for many people, happened in two stages. First was a self-realization, which for me took a very long time. Then, many years after I came to that realization, was coming out to family and then coming out publicly.

I think that what we celebrate on October 11, is public coming out. Maybe coming out to family. For me that part of coming out was sudden and rapid. It was the next closest thing to being outed. It happened on National Coming Out Day, 1995. My name, sometimes with my picture accompanying it, and an article about me by the Associated Press was in all of the daily newspapers in Utah, and some of the national press. I had a blurb twice in the *Advocate*, (notably the *Advocate* always spelled my name wrong). The shortest blurb was in *USA Today*: "PROVO, UT. Brigham Young University-Professor Thomas Matthews [spelled incorrectly] who made his homosexuality public in 1994 says he will leave the school because he cannot commit to celibacy."

I didn't make that news -- actually Rex Lee, who was president of BYU did. I had started coming out at BYU, to students, to friends, to church leaders, and somebody decided to tell an Apostle. I had my 15 minutes of fame in the Quorum of the Twelve. They had me interviewed with one of the BYU vice presidents and it really was no problem. But I told Vice President Britsch at the time that I was not planning at staying indefinitely at BYU. I would have been up for tenure review this year had I stayed. They were, of course, very relieved by that.

Several months later, in October of 1995, President Lee was giving his monthly news conference and a newspaper reporter asked "What are you going to do about the gay professor?" President Lee was an interesting man. He died a year ago. But for a living he spoke in front of the Supreme Court. Rex Lee argued as many supreme court cases as any other man in the history of the United States. He was a terribly articulate man and you would think that he would therefore know precisely what effect his words would have on people. But nobody had asked him about me before and I imagine he hadn't thought it through. He said, and I paraphrase, "it's uncomfortable for the university and Dr. Mathews has announced that he's planning on leaving." Actually, I hadn't announced that but that's what became national news.

Several Continua

So far I've mentioned a couple of continua. One is the Kinsey scale for "How Homosexual Are You?" Another is a scale for "How Out Are You?" I'd like to talk about several others.

Recently most of the literature on homosexuality is starting to describe sexual behavior as a U curve. Particularly Dean Hamer and Simon LeVay and others have argued that most people are either heterosexual or homosexual, with not a lot of people falling in between. But these aren't the majority. The majority state unequivocally "I am gay" or "No I'm not."

Some time ago I got an anonymous email message. I could tell he was a librarian from the email address. Otherwise I knew nothing about him. He used an alias; I'll call him Mark. He was reaching out. He'd never had any contact with the "gay community." He'd seen my name in the paper and looked up my email address. He suggested that Gay Mormons exist along a continuum with Evergreen at one end (Evergreen believes in Reformation, Reclamation and Repair), groups like Reconciliation or Family Fellowship in the middle, and Affirmation at the other end. He wanted my opinion on the matter. I came to learn that Mark was a completely closeted and married homosexual man, who had never been a part of any of the groups he mentioned, but that he believed that Evergreen was a good group and Affirmation was a bad group. I did share my opinion with him. Since then my thoughts have developed into what I'll share with you tonight.

Physiological & Chromosomal Sex

It is a very common misconception to conclude that the poles of a continuum represent good and bad, or indeed that any judgment can be made at all. One very obvious sexual continuum is physiological and chromosomal sex. People, of course, fall out on this continuum in a textbook U-shaped curve. The vast majority of humans are either undeniably male or undeniably female. The "intersex states" (chromosomal females that look like males, or vice versa) are statistically rare, but are common enough to let us define physiological sex as a continuum. Otherwise it would just be an either/or proposition. There are lots of people who fall somewhere between a boy and a girl. "We think you had a girl, but we need to do some snipping!" Or "Pick a name and we'll decide on these things later." Although we have a good bipolar distribution on a continuum, this is not a basis at all for us to say that one end of the continuum, either male or female, is good and the other bad. Certainly, culturally a lot of people do that. One end is superior to the other. I don't think there's any basis for it.

Other continua that are commonly used in discussing homosexuality include, Gender Identity (whether, without regard to one's physiological sex, one considers oneself to be a man or a woman) and Sexual Orientation (whether one is attracted to individuals of the same or the opposite sex). The idea of Gender Role's can also be placed along a continuum in any culture, from those who comfortably and willingly follow the roles assigned to their sex, to those who rebel against the roles imposed on their gender. Our culture certainly has expectations. If a person is physiologically female (i.e., two X-chromosomes) she should also feel like a woman, act like a woman and want to have sex with men. Men, of course, should feel manly, act macho, and want to have sex with women.

As I said, it is easy to be judgmental, but I don't think it's right. Our culture, however, is very judgmental. You line up the continua, and say "You should be here, here and here." If you're not, you're a weirdo.

So Mark, in creating a Gay Mormon Continuum with Good Guys at one end and Bad Guys at the other, had made, in my opinion, two mistakes. First, he saw things in terms of black and white. And second, he put everything together in one simple choice, Good vs. Bad. This evening I'd like to talk about three continua that we may find ourselves playing along with after we come out of the closet.

Outness & Community Identity

The first continuum deals with how out a person is, and with what community that person identifies. This Outness Continuum has to do with self-perception and outward identification. At the right end (of course, I picked the ends arbitrarily) we have men or women who are completely out, vehemently proud, often offensively in-your-face, and will never apologize for who they are, what they think, or how they behave. (I make no claim here about the way they do behave--they may be sluts or virgins--but they're completely open and unapologetic about whatever their behavior may be).

The other end of this Outness Continuum (on the left) represents those who are deeply in the closet and have never used the word "gay" to refer to themselves. They follow Elder Packer's advice and shun the word "homosexual" except as an adjective. Following the Evergreen model, they prefer to use acronyms and euphemisms -- "same sex attraction," "defensive detachment," "father hunger," (which isn't what you think) or the absurdity presented a year or so ago by LDS Social Services -- "non-gay homosexuals." They look at the flamboyant, pushy and provocative affirmation of the "gays" at the right end of this continuum and they shy away in horror, thinking, hoping, pleading, "I am not one of those." Certainly, I am giving speeches as "one of those" now, but I fell into the category of denying it for a long time.

I really believe that the great majority of Gay Mormons begin very far to the closeted left end of this continuum. Slowly, but I think inevitably, we move to the right. Hopefully, only a few lose their moorings completely and bound all the way to the outrageous activism found at the other end. I say it's outrageous because I think some people define their lives in terms of the sexual identity -- and I don't think that's healthy either. I am a university professor, but I don't completely define my life in terms of being a professor. That would be unhealthy. Still, neither end of the Outness Continuum is a healthy place to be. The fear and self-loathing at one end is no better and no worse than the pride and hedonism at the other.

Spirituality

A second continuum describes the moral attitude and spiritual strength of Gay Mormons. I am using the word spiritual in a Mormon way and not in an . . . Affirmation way. When I say spiritual I mean what your Aunt Millie thinks is spiritual.

At the left end is the morality presented by the LDS Church, and espoused and followed more or less faithfully by Evergreen. "All sexual relations outside of marriage are a sin." Moreover, in their thinking, same-sex affection becomes overtly sexual and therefore offensive, much faster than similar heterosexual behavior. Straits are allowed, even encouraged, to date, to dance, to hold hands, to cuddle, to kiss. At the left of this axis, none of these behaviors are acceptable for the homosexual Mormon. (Even the

Evergreen-types are not clearly at the far end; I've attended several meetings with Evergreen, and there's a lot of fraternal hugging and supposedly proper "male bonding" that goes on).

At the other end of the Spiritual Continuum is moral anarchy and probably atheism. These Gay Mormons have lost all belief and faith in the Church and in the Gospel. Towards the center are people who have found the LDS Church stifling, and yet retain a spiritual sensitivity and a desire to worship. They may attend LDS services only rarely, or join congregations from more tolerant traditions. Again, in my opinion, neither end is a good place to be. The frustration and sterile loneliness at the one end is just as damaging to the soul as the complete lack of purpose or direction at the other.

Sexual Behavior (with whom, how often)

The third continuum I want to talk about is the Sexual Continua. The left pole represents total abstinence and virginity (at least as far as same-sex relations are concerned). At the center is a healthy view of human sexuality, and a sex-life akin to that of well-behaved heterosexual Mormons. Gays here search for long, committed, monogamous relationships. To find that, they date and show appropriate affection paralleling the courtship of strait Mormons. At the other end is promiscuity and sexual abandon. "If it feels good do it." Any talk of sexual morality or restraint is viewed as a personal value judgment or an uncalled-for condemnation. These people often feel that they will go to hell no matter what, so they might as well have fun getting there. Or they've given up belief in hell altogether.

Gay Mormons

One of the major problems with a single continuum, as Mark the librarian proposed, is that it encourages people to arrive at simplistic assumptions that only tend to reinforce stereotypes. If I collapse all three scales -- the Outness, the Spiritual and the Sexual Continua -- into one, and then find a gay man who is completely out of the closet and comfortable talking about homosexuality and his own feelings, I will want to place him at the far right end of this single scale, and I will then assume that he is also spiritually dead and sexually promiscuous. This is of course absurd.

Since my picture appeared in the paper two years ago, I have been as out as a person can get in the state of Utah, yet I am near the opposite end of the spectrum in terms of sexual experience and I do still try to keep myself in tune with the Spirit as I work out my relationship with God and my Church.

While I was teaching at BYU, I was accused (on the radio) of being a "practicing homosexual," not because the speaker (who was president of the BYU "Ditto-Heads Club" -- a bunch of Rush Limbaugh wanna-be's) necessarily believed that I was engaging in homosexual acts, but simply because I was talking about my homosexuality. Talking about it means I'm practicing it. This is an unacceptable conflation of the Gay Continuum (the Outness Continuum) and Sexual Continuum.

Defining Gay Mormons along three continua allows for a lot more variation in the community than we can see if we measure everything against just one yardstick. The Evergreen-types, for example, tend to cluster around the left end of all three continua

(not very out, still clinging to strict Mormon ethics, and aiming for celibacy). Of course, anyone involved in Evergreen is evidently out to himself and at least partially out to the community, in that the other members of the Evergreen chapter will know their secret. Although the Evergreen members I have talked to represent a wide variation in sexual experience and history, at least at the present they are hoping to maintain Church standards both spiritually and sexually.

The people who I know that attend Reconciliation meetings cover a rather broad spectrum, particularly in regards to their relative outness and their sexual activity. Many are still rather closeted. Others are out to the world. Spiritually they tend to cluster toward the center. They have realized that the Church's paradigm for change is not realistic, and thus cracks have formed in their faith in the Gospel and more so in their trust of Church leaders, yet they continue to struggle to fit their acknowledged sexual orientation with their ongoing spiritual feelings and religious heritage.

As a member of Affirmation, my experience is that this group, as the only national Gay Mormon organization, has members scattered all over the place. They do tend to avoid the Evergreen corner, and they tend to be better represented on the out and sexually active side of things. Some are clearly clinging, however they can, to the faith they have. Others are roundly anti-Mormon. Some are celibate, others are married (to women or to men, but in straight relationships), many seek or are in monogamous same-sex unions, others jump from one short-lived relationship to another.

Some in both Reconciliation and Affirmation view their sexuality as a gift. Some use that gift liberally. Some are saving it for true love and commitment. Gay Mormondom represents a great deal of diversity. Groups like Affirmation allow us all to come together. It's comforting for me just being with people who have at least some things in common and usually we are quite able to overlook the glaring differences in behavior and belief.

I'm sure placement on these three continua -- Outness, Sexual Behavior, and Spirituality -- is correlated, but I also believe that the three aspects move independently of one another. This allows for the tremendous variety that exists among Gay Mormons. Obviously, the most visible among us are those at the right end of all three scales. Promiscuous. Immoral. Loud. It is sad that the world tends so readily to judge all gays on the sometimes obscene stereotype presented by those who are merely the most visible.

The Church's View of Things

It has been argued, though not extensively, that St. Paul may have been a homosexual. A rather latent one I think. His is the only scripture that clearly and definitively seems to denounce homosexuality. But Paul wrote of his "thorn in the flesh." I believe that our thorns are often the result of an errant belief that spirituality, sexuality and gay identity can all be conflated to mean the same thing. It is a mistake to believe that spirituality and homosexuality are incompatible, or even that homosexuality and chastity are inconsistent. I think the greatest difficulty the Church has had in dealing with homosexuality is its refusal to acknowledge the variety of situations that exist in the Gay Mormon population. The Church has placed all gay men and women on one simple continuum, and therefore assumes that a simple solution to the problem is possible.

I know a young man in his 20s, admittedly a virgin, and still completely in the closet to his family and community. He very much treats his homosexuality as a "thorn in the flesh." He felt he could not serve a mission. He finds it quite difficult to go to Church. He recognizes that he will never be rid of his homosexuality, and yet he has a suicidal fear of going to hell. Several times he has wondered aloud if it might be that the Church is right about everything. I worry about him. Frankly, the Church has proffered him no help, and as things stand, I doubt the Church will be able to.

The Church desperately wants all gays to believe blindly and to demonstrate the kind of insipid spirituality that is all too common in most of our Sacrament Meetings. The Church is often quick to excommunicate those who start moving away from that end of the spirituality scale. The common result of excommunication is a tragic retreat to the immoral end of the Spirituality Continuum. People reason: "If the Church abandons me, then I will abandon the Church." "If the Church is so very wrong on this issue, then everything the Church teaches must be just as wrong."

Similarly, the Church is fanatical in its crusade to keep gays and lesbians near the chaste end of the Sexual Continuum. I'm using the word "chaste" the way your Aunt Millie used it too. The Church is too often ruthless in the excommunication of those who begin to move toward the center. Again, the common result is a slide into sexual debauchery.

The Church is also quite uncomfortable when we stray from the closet. Homosexuality is a taboo, and no one must ever talk about it. Perhaps I'm making too strong a point here, since the word has appeared in the Ensign several times now, but it's been very recent. As Gays move toward self acceptance and seek help from others, they are told to stop, to keep quiet and to keep personal things to themselves.

Conclusion

I want to say that coming out was the best thing I've ever done. I am surrounded both at work and in my family and at Church with people who at least have a shot at knowing who I really am. Better yet, I don't have to hide anything anymore. Moving out of the closet is an honest move into the light. Going back to the quote at the beginning of my talk, "You can't pursue happiness in the dark."

At the same time, coming out of the closet was the most frightening thing I've ever done. At the time I knew it would cost me my job, and it did. I was also afraid it would cost me the few real relationships that I had with people. With few exceptions, it did not. The fear I had that my family would reject me, turned out to be irrational, in my case.

But my other fear was that people would make wide ranging judgments about me based on one bit of information. With my affirmation that I am a gay man, they would therefore make assumptions about other aspects of my life. This is what I think is at the core of all prejudice and stereotype.

Many people, when they come out, go through a "rebellious stage." If religious constraints have kept you at the "spiritual" end of things, you go to church twelve hours a week, you shun all homosexual thought and affection and thus live a cloistered life with no affection at all, when you finally get rid of that and you're "free" you pop down to

the other end of the continuum. But eventually you probably come back and find a life that's meaningful.

It has been suggested that it might be nice if people don't come out too publicly until they're through with the rebellious stage. I don't know that I agree with the premise that people shouldn't come out until they're going to put a pretty face on everything. We need to see more people coming out at all points on all three continua. Still, I think we particularly need to see the mass of gay men and women that are at the middle of these continua. These are normal and well rounded people with all the foibles and all the virtues that most people have. These will be more helpful to the cause than people who have nothing to lose by coming out -- those who have already alienated their community, who have already alienated their family, whose only friends are already out.

In closing, let me say that I believe the only way to fight the sort of prejudice that comes from ignorance is to come out. I was a graduate student at the University of Delaware. The state of Delaware has a considerable African American population which is not well represented, as far as numbers go, at the university. That is, the percentage of black people in the state is much higher than the percentage of black students at the university. Every year the University of Delaware had a number of events during African American awareness month. Once a professor in sociology handed around a survey to all kinds of students and faculty alike, and it asked questions about how many African American friends you had. "Have you ever been on a date with an African American? Or, if you're black, have you ever been on a date with a white person? Have you ever eaten in the home of an African American family?" Those kinds of things. I was shocked. I had to answer "no" to every one of them. This is not because I'd grown up in a community where there were few possibilities for me. I grew up in Los Angeles, where there were lots of opportunities for me to overcome stereotypes, but I never got out of my racial closet.

As you get to know people you become aware that they are indeed real people. It is for that reason that coming out for everybody is an important thing to do. The more out you are the more you fight prejudice, the more you allow people to see that you are a real person.