

Movie Kit

Coming Out: A 50 Year History of Public Gay Identity



Year of Release: 2017

Rating: NA

Length: 57min

Director: Phil Siegel

Starring: Jazz Jennings

English level: Medium

Themes: LGBT Rights, Human Rights

Please note:

- This movie is available at **no charge for American Spaces using Kanopy streaming videos**, through eLibraryUSA. Kanopy is available only through the American Spaces Staff Resources section of eLibraryUSA (<https://elibraryusa.state.gov/resources.html>). American Spaces may request eLibraryUSA accounts by emailing americanspaces@state.gov.
- Films on Kanopy may NOT be downloaded, so American Spaces should ensure they have the technological capability for a film screening that relies on streaming video.

Warning/General Advisory

Includes discussions of adult situations, mild profanity

Synopsis (adapted from Kanopy website)

Transgender teen, Jazz Jennings, narrates this documentary that has young people interviewing a number of LGBT elders who “came out” at different times from the 1950s through today. Listening to their stories you will see how the once harsh social attitudes toward the LGBTQ community have gradually eased over time.

These personal accounts provide perspective into the political and social changes that shaped today’s LGBT movement. The young interviewers get an opportunity to compare and contrast their “coming out” experience with people who came out in the decades before them. They learn about the socially repressive 1950’s, the challenges faced by the LGBT movement of the 60’s and 70’s, and how a new awareness began with the AIDS epidemic during the 1980’s. In the end, they learn that every generation of activists stands on the shoulders of those who came before them and how there is still more work to be done.

Key Vocabulary/Places

- **LGBT** – an acronym that stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender. There are variations to this acronym to include a broader set of people, such as LGBTI (includes *intersex* people) and LGBTQ (Q can be used for those who are *questioning* their sexual identity).
- **Coming Out** – when people of the LGBT community self-disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity. Taken from “coming out of the closet.”
- **Electroconvulsive Therapy** – a procedure in which small electric currents are passed through the brain to trigger a brief seizure. This is often referred to as shock treatment, and is used to treat mental illnesses.
- **Tenderloin District** – a neighborhood in the downtown section of San Francisco, California, known for its art scene, theaters, restaurants, and nightlife.
- **AIDS – Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome** is a disease of the immune system due to infection with the **human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)**. HIV destroys important cells of the immune system, which leaves the body vulnerable to life-threatening infections and cancers. AIDS is the most advanced stage of HIV infection. (Definition adapted from <https://aidsinfo.nih.gov/>)
- **Harvey Milk** – an American politician, who was the first openly gay elected official in California history. He was elected to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors.
- **The Ladder** – first nationally distributed lesbian magazine in the United States. It was published from 1956 – 1972.

Discussion Questions

- What are some examples of how the LGBT individuals in the film *Coming Out* were discriminated against at various points in their lives?
- Did any particular stories in *Coming Out* stand out for you?
- How are attitudes changing toward same sex relationships in the United States?
- How are members of the LGBT community treated in your communities?
- LGBTI Rights are Human Rights. How can we build an atmosphere of inclusion, regardless of our personal or religious views?