



Cheryl Gilliam

Cheryl Gilliam attended Michigan State University between 1977-1982, studying in the College of Agriculture and the School of Packaging. She now works in Battle Creek for Kellogg; she is a Senior Packaging-Engineer working in Packaging Innovation and Technology.

Originally from Detroit, she came to MSU on a track scholarship and was very busy between academics and athletics—

“So as a student athlete you have mandatory study halls that you had to attend and you meet with tutors and things like that. So daytime was classes, between three and six was track practice, then you had to run back to the dorm and eat dinner before they closed— because they didn’t have the hours that they do now— and then you went to study hall, and on the weekends you probably traveled.”

—and didn’t have much time for socializing. She doesn’t remember there being much of an organized LBGT community during her time as a student at MSU, but says because of her focus on athletics and academics, it sometimes felt like she had “blinders” on, “When I was here as a student I didn’t socialize a whole heck of a lot outside of athletics and outside of academics. So if you were not an athlete or you were not in packaging then I probably wouldn’t even— I had blinders on, and I would not have known any other community that existed.”

When asked if she knew if there were any faculty/staff members or professor that she had who were part of the LBGT community she said, “I couldn’t tell you if any of my professors were a part of the group or not because people just didn’t talk about it out loud. I can tell you from the athletic part of it, yeah, you met some ladies but what group? Did you belong to a group? No.”

When asked what she thinks her time at MSU would have been like if the LBGT community had been more prevalent to her, she said, “It would have made my life a lot easier... If there are people that you can talk to and that you can relate to, that you really didn’t have to hunt for, it would have really made it a lot easier life for me.” She said that the lack of visibility of the community during her time was one of the reasons she didn’t come out until later in life.

At Kellogg she is one of the founding members of K-Pride and Allies, one of the employee resource groups at Kellogg. K-Pride and Allies participates in Kalamazoo Pride and Chicago Pride and will be participating in an anti-bullying campaign in October. She is the president of the Michigan State Letter Winners Club; in the club’s almost 100 years of existence, Cheryl is the second female president.

Her advice to LBGT students at MSU is, “Be okay with who you are. Don’t be like me and be shy at coming out. Just go ahead, get together and be you. It’s okay.”