

# Voices

VOLUME THREE



*Trigger Warning*

*This volume contains information about sexual assault and/or violence which may be triggering to survivors.*

*If you need to talk to someone, please contact the Student Support Services team or visit [thesurvivorstrust.org](http://thesurvivorstrust.org)*

*Voices is a collaborative project between EXU, Her Campus and The Falmouth Anchor, providing a platform for students whose voices might previously have been lost in the noise.*

**VOICES VOLUME THREE  
PRIDE**

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# *foreword*

Growing up I had never really thought about the world around me, never mind how I could change it. It was more about getting by and getting on rather than speaking out and standing up for what's right. I had my heart set on being a nurse so when I finally got a place to study nursing at Plymouth University, activism or politics were the last things on my mind. I wanted to focus on helping people by looking after them so my entry into politics wasn't planned. One day during Sexual Health Week, my SU were giving out condoms but with no lube. For many gay and bi men, not using lube means that you're at risk of infections! So in a way, it was lube that made me political, and it has been a slippery slope from there. Once I'd seen what I had thought had been an oversight and told my SU about their 'one off' mistake, I started to notice that, actually, this wasn't an isolated event. These oversights happen daily. For the LGBT+ community, these 'oversights' are institutional, societal, and global.

I'd always been made to think the issue was with me. I was too camp, I was too loud and I was too extroverted (things that only helped me in my activism) but then I saw the issue was in our education system and embedded within our culture, it's about what society wants us to look like and act. That's why I did a PGCE after my degree to be able to teach future generations. Teaching wasn't enough so I ran to be the LGBT+ Officer (Open Place) in NUS to help change the world around me, change education and to help the kids like me when I was 12, who was left confused and lonely in the classroom.

Activism isn't always a selfless act, I want to make the world better for me and people like me. Now I am the Vice President of NUS, fighting for a better world against climate change, getting more young people into politics so they can see the injustice around them! I would describe my journey as somewhat messy. I still feel that I was never really destined for politics but politics is for everyone. The people who often feel most left out of politics are the people who need to be in it. I'm glad I turned from teaching classrooms to preaching the 'gay agenda'. If I could go back again, I would definitely tell myself to get involved so much sooner, I would also tell myself, 'Bab, that bleach blonde look was not for you!'



**S**o, I actually came out in Year Three to some of my friends, not actually having any understanding of what the term “gay” actually meant, but understanding that I was different from everyone around me. I remember they told my mum at the end of the school day and my mum said “don’t be silly.” And it was just never spoken about again.

I think I’ve had it pretty easy. I was picked on in varying amounts during primary and secondary school. That was because I was a bit camp and I’d spent a lot of years trying to repress that, especially with my flamboyant hand movements. I really hated being identified as gay by the way I looked. Rather than insults from people I wasn’t really friends with, I found a particular friend labelling me as their “gay best friend”, the most offensive thing to hear. It always made me feel like a very tokenistic member of my friendship group; that I was a job role to be applied for and filled and that my only characteristic was “gay male.”

I was born and raised in Tamworth, which is a bit of a bubble community, and I wasn’t really aware of other gay people growing up. That opened up slightly when I went to my foundation course on the other side of Birmingham, so I got to actually break out of that bubble, and being around a creative set of people naturally fostered a more open environment. The best thing about that was that I never had to label myself as gay or come out. I assume that’s because the majority of those around me were too.



# *I'm a lot of things before I'm a gay male. That's just one of those genes I have.*

It was interesting coming to university and running for President because I faced a bit of a backlash from some students because I didn't run on a campaign that I was a gay male running for President. To me, that was the absolute last thing on my agenda. I'm a performance artist and I'm a leader (and hopefully a good one) before I'm a gay male. It's on the periphery of who I consider myself to be, and I have no idea if that's a good thing or a bad thing to feel.

Whilst saying that, I've researched and feel clued up on LGBTQ+ history and understanding where I've come from to get the privilege to live like I do today. I've never aspired to or felt the need to attend Pride or get involved with that kind of LGBT+ network. I guess I found it off-putting because every time I've attempted to access that world, I've always experienced such indulgence in sexuality and I've personally just never identified with

that whatsoever. Therefore, I don't think I fit in very well. In that sense, I find the LGBTQ+ brand almost problematic, because it sets up a boundary. I don't like being boxed into a category and it isolates me from feeling like it's an inclusive network much of the time. If I reflect on the name, what group do you see with 24+ letters in it? I don't find it a good brand and I feel strongly (and I've had discussions around this with others many times) that you dilute the supportive ethos of the network because, at times, people stay at the door trying to figure out if they fit into one of the boxes rather than just stepping in for the support they need. I was really impressed that the society here renamed the group to 'Pride' because I think it's much more of an inclusive label, and it just made so much sense to me.

I'm embracing myself a lot more at the moment. I'm a camp individual and I have broken the shackles of

thinking that it is a bad thing. It's just who I am. It doesn't necessarily make me feel comfortable. I wear clothes that I'm interested in and some people think that that defines me as gay and that's fine. That insecurity has caused me to develop agility for catching people's glances, and an emotional intelligence to better understand people in relation to myself, which I find incredibly helpful in the meetings I sit in. I'm fully aware that, sometimes, me wearing a funky shirt just has a look about it, which classifies me as a gay male. I've learnt to live with that and, to be perfectly honest, it's empowered me.

Going home is a bit of a weird one now. I found coming out the absolute worst experience for a really silly reason. It went really, really well, but I resented the fact that I ever had to come out in the first place. I said to my Mum very, very clearly, "Do not make a dramatic event out of this," because me announcing the fact that I'm gay puts

a label on me, and defines me as something because I'm announcing it to the world. I said not to do that, and I woke up the next morning and my mum was on the phone, and she was like, "Guess who's gay?!" which was really annoying. The only reason I ever came out was because I didn't want to be tagged in photos or posts on social media and my parents to find out second-hand. Without that insecurity, I wouldn't have come out to this day. Not because I'm repressing anything, I just didn't see the point of it. Like I said, I'm a lot of other things before I'm a gay male. That's just one of those genes I have. It's just a thing to live with, for better or for worse. I've heard that being a gay male in the visual arts world apparently gets you a lot of leverage. I'm yet to see that but apparently it's true. Hopefully I'll use that to my networking advantage. By that, I don't mean sleep around.





I used to be on the committee for the FXU Pride Society and obviously with that comes a lot of responsibility, because you're the welcoming figure to a whole community. For me, coming to university was actually quite daunting as I arrived as an LGBTQ+ person. So to be on the committee and to run the society was a huge responsibility and, as part of that, I feel like I should come forward and tell my story to hopefully encourage others to do the same.

I feel, in a weird way, a lot like a parent now because, like, in first year I was getting babied by the previous committee and then I took their place. I really needed to step up to be, not the face, but the representative for a whole community in Falmouth.

Family is really one of the main aspects of the LGBT community—it's very tight-knit and very like a family—that's what the Pride society is all about.

Within the society there's a vote for members to decide who should be on the committee and we had to submit a manifesto on what we wanted to achieve. A lot of my goals revolved around art and expression; I wanted to give LGBTQ+ artists a platform to show their work, and we wanted to do open mic nights to showcase talent because, when you're in an oppressed community, you don't really have much of a voice, so a lot of my manifesto revolved around trying to give people a voice and a platform. The society also runs weekly/fortnightly drop-in sessions where people can come in and just talk to someone. It's basically enabling LGBTQ+ people to reach their full potential whilst being in a safe place on campus, away from, you know, oppression and wider society. So, it's kind of a safe space, but pushing them to really get out there and do their thing.

I think that LGBTQ+ art is super, super important—it comes back to the whole being repressed/having your expression and your voice silenced by wider society. I write a lot of poetry and, to be honest, most of my poetry

revolves around my experiences as an LGBTQ+ person because that's basically what I only feel compelled to write about. I often focus on my personal experiences and speak sort of on behalf of other trans men, because some people don't feel like they can really talk that openly about it, so I kind of try and step up and do it for them, in a sense.

I think a lot of the experiences that I write about have been bad experiences, but from that comes more powerful writing, if that makes sense. The bad experiences I have had throughout my life have given me more incentive to be militant and powerful, so it kind of has a double effect on my writing in the sense that it is negative, but it's also super motivational. Some of it is happy, too. Just being in a community that is so much like a family, that kind of makes up for the negativity.

Coming to university has provided me with opportunities that I may not have had at home—being on the committee and stuff, you're always in contact with people outside of the university. The Pride society does a lot with Cornwall Pride who do the Newquay Pride Festival in the summer and we also get things like this—invitations to come and share our stories and stuff. And it's just... there's always something. We have an e-mail account for the society and it's always full of stuff; invitations to things and offers. It's just nice that people come to you, if that makes sense.

Falmouth is super welcoming and open about things; at home it was very different. I'm from Plymouth, but it's so weird—it's quite close, but there's such a huge difference. I guess it's because Falmouth is more of a student town and it's a lot smaller as well. In Plymouth, I don't know, everyone is just so aggressive. In Falmouth you can smile at people and they'll smile back, but in Plymouth if you did that they'd probably beat you up. It's not diverse at all. Before I moved down to university, I went to an LGBTQ+ youth group, but that was so small and so run down—it kept almost having to close because the



government wouldn't fund it. Plymouth is that kind of place—you feel like you're a tiny fish in the middle of this massive ocean. You feel like the odd one out; you can't really relate to people.

Obviously, as we're like the younger generation, we have/ have had a lot of access to social media, and that's where a lot of the representation comes from. So, I know it sounds really cliché, but places like Tumblr are brilliant for LGBTQ+ stuff – there's so much information on there and it's a great place for discussion because everything circulates so quickly.

A lot of people say, like, my mum says to me, “Oh we've come so far, it must be so easy to be who you are now—our society is so accepting now, we've come so far.” But the thing is, we really haven't. Like, there's still so far that we have to go to reach true acceptance, and to be honest, in a really sad way I don't think we're ever going to be accepted fully. We can be to an extent, but I just think that the way society works, I don't want to get politics into this, but the way this society works, I just don't think oppressed communities can ever truly be accepted.

Capitalism's nature is to oppress people. They say that you can only really be truly accepted if you're a cisgender, straight, white, rich male and so I don't think we can truly be accepted. But again, I know this sounds really crude, but when the older generation dies out, we've got more of a chance of being accepted, because we can pass on education and awareness to the younger generations, and if we start to normalise things like trans people, gay couples, and the LGBT community I think we will have more of a chance. Because we will be running this world in 30-or-so years time; we're going to be the people that

others look up to and we'll be able to teach the younger generations.

For the younger generations, one thing I really want to improve are the gender services because they are honest to God, I can't even describe it to you, they are the worst thing. The gender services in this country are mainly what makes trans people's lives a lot worse; so that would definitely be something that would really benefit other trans people. So more funding from the government would really improve the NHS gender services; at the moment, the government really doesn't give a sh\*t about LGBTQ+ people so the services are really underfunded. The amount of referrals they're getting from GPs across the country is too much for them to handle. They're trying to refer over 100 people a month, a week, even, which is crazy.

So, the way the gender services run at the moment is that you have GICs which is a Gender Identity Clinic. I can't name how many we have of them, but there are less than ten across the country. To get referred to the clinic, you have to go to your GP and ask for a referral, and the waiting times are really frustrating and they make people's lives a lot more difficult. I got referred in October 2015, I then waited two years for my first letter with an appointment for a few months' time so the whole waiting period was about two and a half years. And the thing about gender services is that, before you can be offered hormone treatment and surgery and things like that, you have to go through 18 months of therapy appointments, where a psychiatrist interrogates you and tries to invalidate you, and they try to make you prove that you're trans enough to be considered for hormone treatment and surgery. Basically, my friend, he went to

one GIC and they did a report on him and they essentially said that “This person, his hair was longer than his chin so he can't be trans, he can't be a man, because his hair is slightly long.” It's that kind of thing. You have to have four therapy appointments with about a five month wait between each one, so it's basically four appointments of just being interrogated and challenged, in a sense. Once you've gone through all of that, you finally get on the list to see the doctor which has about a year waiting period. The government just don't care.

Luckily, I'm currently in the process of going private—so you get NHS gender services, then you get a private service, called Gender Care, which is a network of private doctors and gender specialists who, obviously because it's private you have to pay, but they are so much better. They are understanding and they're specialists in their fields. The doctor who I went to see has been studying gender for about 20-25 years, so you feel like you can trust them so much more than the NHS services, where it just kind of feels like they've just thrown people in who don't know that much about it. But yeah, because I went private for therapy and stuff, I get to skip all of the interrogation from the NHS, so I've been straight on the doctors list, which is good. So, fortunately, I didn't have to go through the pain of being challenged and caught out, and stuff like that.

For people who don't have the privilege to go private, the NHS services are our lifelines, and to be treated like that by the people who we rely on the most is awful. Not to sound melodramatic, but they literally have our lives in their hands. Our future depends on them, and to be treated like that... it's just disgusting, it's so awful. I don't want to get really dark but a lot of trans suicides come from the fact that gender services in this country are

inadequate. My best friend took their own life. She was a trans woman and like, I was saying to everyone... everyone was like, “Oh God, like, not sure how to really act about it.” But I was kind of like, I'm not going to sugar coat anything, like it's bad, and it's dark, and negative, and it's upsetting, but this is the reality. And we cannot ignore reality. I think that's a big problem within society—people tend to ignore trans suicides specifically, and brush it aside like it's not happening. Obviously, because it is quite dark, it's a taboo to be talking about suicide and stuff, but there is a point where you need to put that aside and actually sit down and acknowledge that it's happening.

That's what I'm trying to do in this life, really—make change. I feel like I have a massive responsibility as someone who is LGBT and of the younger generation, I feel like I really need to f\*cking step up, and really try and make progress. Because I don't want to sound like I'm an old wise man, but life goes by really fast—I'm only 20. You've only got one chance to really show the world what you've got.

I know it sounds cliché, I keep sounding really cliché, but it feels like something that I feel destined to do with my life. Like, you know when you get a feeling that it's just, like... when you finally sort of know what your place is. It's kind of like that—like, I feel like this is what I need to do. Hopefully I'm going on to do a Masters, hopefully in Gender Studies, which is something that I'm really interested in.

When I first came out, I came out as bisexual and one of the first people I told was someone in school, let's just call her Beth for the sake of this story. Anyway, I came out to this girl, like 'I think I like girls' and she was questioning me, like, 'how do you know though?'. I think she got defensive because she'd only just come out herself and she wanted to be one of the first people in school to say 'I'm gay', to be seen as special or whatever. I remember thinking that I could trust her because she knew the experience of coming out and the reactions of people and stuff. But she questioned me and tried to say I wasn't and I thought, I don't have to kiss a girl to know that I'm attracted to them. She ended up getting really p\*ssed with me, so I just left it because I didn't want any drama.

A few months later I told my mum. I remember we were in the car and we were driving to cadets, because I was a cadet, how stereotypical. Anyway, I was driving there with my Mum and I was like 'Mum, I've got something to tell you' but I couldn't say it so I wrote it down on my phone and I showed her at a set of traffic lights. I remember the exact part of the road we were driving on and when I showed it to her she was like 'No you're not, I don't believe you, no you're not' and I was like 'but I am' and I started crying. It was all very dramatic and emotional and she said 'I don't want to talk about this' and then I got out of the car to go to cadets and didn't speak to her about it anymore. The next week or so I wrote this big status on Facebook telling everyone I was bisexual and I remember getting a lot of positive responses. It was really nice





# *Straight people don't have to come out so why do we?*

because I thought I'd lose a lot of friends. Turns out I didn't and I started dating a girl called Lucy and she was the first proper girl I ever kissed. I really liked her. I was in my first year of college and she was in her second so she was about to go to university and I remember people saying to me, 'you're not a real part of the LGBT community', 'you're not really bisexual', 'you don't dress like you're supposed to', so I started dressing really obviously stereotypical bisexual/gay or whatever. Flannel shirts and all that. I remember Lucy going to university and she got really weird with me and later she got with this boy called Mark, who she's still with now. She told me she was gay but she got with this boy, I don't care about labels and stuff but it was just the fact that she lied to me, that she was with someone else.

I was very open about my sexuality; I've never really had anything negative happen towards me. But, since I've been with Soph, which is just over a year, I think I've come to terms more with my sexuality; I'm not bisexual. All the men that I've slept with, like, no thank you. Every guy that I've slept with, the morning after I've just felt really unclean and just, not how I want to feel. It made me feel guilty and not very nice and yeah, since I've been with Soph I've come to terms with the fact that I probably won't ever marry a man or be in a relationship with a man. I mean, I don't know that for certain, but say if I ever break up with Soph, which I highly doubt, and if a man comes along and he treated me amazingly, there's always the possibility that I could fall in love with a man, I suppose. But right now, in this moment, I'm not attracted to men.

I remember when I first came out, there was one person and they were like 'oh, so, if you get with a guy then you're straight and if you get with a girl you're gay'. This was when I identified as bisexual and I was like, 'no'. But she was being so pointed and protective over her sexuality. I just remember thinking how insecure she was. I don't know why we have to feel like we have to justify all our reasons to people and why we have to tell people. I don't even understand why we have to come out. That's just stupid. Straight people don't have to come out so why do we have to be like 'oh, I'm attracted to the same sex' because you should just be able to turn to your family and friends and be like 'this is my girlfriend' and they should just be happy for you. It gets me so mad when I find out people have been mistreated by their friends or their family or about people getting disowned by their families, it's just so sad because you can't help loving who you love. You should be able to freely love whoever you love and it shouldn't matter.



**W**hen I came out to my sister, she immediately hung up. A few minutes later, she texted me, “You’re never telling our parents.” Her’s was the only negative reaction I received coming out as bisexual and I haven’t come out to a family member since. It shocked me so much because we had a very multicultural and open-minded upbringing.

“Lesbians aren’t real women and gay men aren’t real men.”

This is the stigma in my home country. There’s a societal misconception about gender and sexuality back home, which makes bisexuality incomprehensible to them. A lesbian or tomboy to them is an umbrella term that includes trans men. They expect women-loving women (WLW) to dress up like a boy, and vice versa for men-loving men (MLM). They feel deceived when someone isn’t upfront about their homosexuality, so they only expect lesbians to be butch or trans. They also believe that LGBT people are “contagious” and will “convert” others, which can lead to very hostile cases of homophobia.

Whenever I visit home, I’m always asked if I have a boyfriend. If I said no, they would say I’m too independent. It would be even worse if I said I have a girlfriend and burst their heteronormative bubble. I wholeheartedly believe that I would be disowned if I came out, or otherwise be forced to solely date men and suppress my feelings for women. No matter how many

academic achievements I bring home to make my parents proud, I will lose them for loving women.

Figuring out my sexuality hasn’t been easy either but I’m lucky to have supportive friends. There were times that I said I was gay to feel more accepted and sacrificed my femininity to look a certain way and embody a stereotype. But those things are completely against what the community is about, which is showing your true colours and being unapologetically authentic. Biphobia is a real problem and it’s a shame to see discrimination within the very community that already faces so much of it.

Regardless of my partner’s gender, I am still bisexual and we are still LGBT. It breaks my heart to see young bisexuals turned away when they should be accepted with the same love and inclusivity the community is based on.

My first Pride parade was in 2016. I cried tears of joy (and glitter) when I saw a float of supportive parents. I fell in love with my first girlfriend that same year. We overcame the fear of holding hands in public together and we both learned the importance of the LGBTQIA+ community. From bonding over (very limited but it’s improving) gay media, to becoming family when times get real, being part of this community has improved my life and added more love than I thought possible. Love is a beautiful thing, and I’m glad I have this bunch to celebrate it with.



People often look at sexual orientation on a scale, which is a perfectly fair, reasonable way to look at it. Nevertheless, I almost feel like I don't fit on that scale. I don't really pay too much attention to that. I hadn't even considered it until someone said, "If you're not heterosexual, you fit into what people call queer." I think I come under the bracket of what they call grey asexual or grey aromantic, which doesn't mean that I'm incapable of feeling those things, just that it's incredibly rare for me. And even then, I feel uncomfortable saying that out loud because, for some reason, in my mind, I don't put myself and those words in tandem with one another.

I've only ever been in one relationship. It didn't go well - do they ever? I almost felt that the whole idea of sexual attraction was more something that I was trying to convince myself to feel because I felt that I was supposed to. Then, after my relationship ended, I realised that I just don't have that; I don't feel that. I still feel weird using that word, asexual. For whatever reason, I feel like I'm just not built for sexual attraction or I don't deserve it; as melodramatic as it sounds.

It makes me sad sometimes because I look at how happy everyone else is. Everyone else has this slice of the pie and I kind of just sit there and think, why can't I have that?

What am I doing wrong? What is it that's wrong with me that means I can't feel that? And even then, I don't necessarily feel like I fit into a certain society of asexuals. "It's OK, you're not the only one." I feel that, for whatever reason. I can't even necessarily explain why I feel like this but I feel like I am the only person in the world that feels this way, even though I know that I'm not.

I love that diversity is being proliferated through media but there's not a great deal of media discourse on the idea of asexuality; on just kind of not feeling anything at all. The only example I can really think of is BoJack Horseman: there's a character in it who is asexual and he

just says, "I'm not gay but I'm not straight. I think I might be nothing." Which again sounds very melodramatic. Even the idea of gender: it's not that I don't think it exists, I just don't care. I never really have. It's not something that crosses my mind. So I've never felt the need to over-bloat my masculinity, which I have very little of, and I could not care less.

Platonically, I tend to gravitate more toward women than I do men. But there comes with that the assumption that there is something more there that I desire, which I don't. I very rarely do and I haven't in years, which means I end up in this bizarre string of, what does he call it in Fight

*I'm not proud of who I am*



Club? ‘Single-serving friends’, where I don’t really feel like I know anyone, I don’t feel like anyone knows me or wants to know me, and I just drift from person to person. It’s just lonely.

I don’t disagree with the concept of Pride. If people are proud of who they are, then they can be proud of who they are. But I’m not proud of who I am. I’m not proud of this. I don’t want it. The idea of Pride can sometimes be taken in a way that’s actually counter-productive. The best representations and emblems of diversity and queer culture are the ones that are done in a way which completely grounds it and normalises it, which is what we should really be trying to do. I think that it’s great when people are proud of who they are, and I wish that was something I could feel, but there’s also this part of me that thinks that the more people separate themselves deliberately and label themselves, the more that feeds segregation. It highlights certain groups within culture as different, as not normal, when really it’s all normal.

I don’t like that word, normal, but you know what I mean. As a species, we have this obsession with putting things into these neat little compartments, so that we can look at them and analyse them and even change them a little. It’s ironic, isn’t it? How people strive not to be compartmentalised sexually, so they compartmentalise themselves into these LGBTQ+ groups. And I have nothing against that; that’s just something that people do.

It helps us get our bearings on things. But to me, the idea of sexuality is just another piece in a much, much larger postmodern picture, where we’re all slowly beginning to realise how completely pointless this all is, and we’re all beginning to realise how, actually, all these rules that we’ve set ourselves, and this goes far beyond sexuality, are fictional. We start to question, “Where did that really come from? Is that natural or do we just make it up?” And that scares people.

I suppose if you’re gay and you enter a homosexual relationship, you eventually have to tell your parents, you know, “By the way, here’s this person that I’m now dating. I’m gay.” When you’re someone who’s like me, and, I mean, I feel more like this weird, loveless, sexless cardboard box, it never comes up in conversation. It’s never a topic anyone wants to address, so there’s no need for it. I mean, I’ve been attracted to guys before and I probably will be again, but until that point, I can just avoid it altogether. To be honest, this is the first time I’ve ever really talked about it openly, because it’s just not something that comes to my mind. I ignore it as much as I can, because it just feels kind of pointless to me. I’m not here, I’m not there. I’m just a nothing. I’m a nobody.

I think Voices is an important step to the idea of normalising something and painting it in a way which allows it to exist within culture, not as something to be pointed at. Not just something to be segregated from

other parts of culture. In that, it seems to me to be at the very least an attempt to give a voice to those parts of culture which don’t really have one. Or maybe to give people the opportunity to pose their honest perspective on something in a realistic and grounded way. And I support that, which is why I’m here. It’s also difficult to put things into words when you don’t really feel anything at all, and I don’t really have any stories because of it. I don’t have any exciting tales that I could tell about the time that I did a thing and something happened because of it and it made me feel a certain way. It’s all completely internalised and, to be honest, I think that’s maybe what hurts the most.

I struggle to feel someone’s love toward me. Maybe it’s because I don’t believe them, I don’t know. I don’t know what it is. I feel like there must be more psychological complexity to it than I am ready to understand, but it’s just not there, you know? It’s like I’m seeing the world through a lens that makes everything that should make me happy end up invisible. And sometimes I feel it slightly. It’s there, and I can kind of see it, and then it fades instantly. I forget about it.

I don’t even know where this came from. I remember back in middle school, I used to be a perfectly normal guy who liked girls and felt things, but slowly, gradually, somewhere along the line, it all disappeared. Which is why I think people take it for granted. I think there’s

a stage in everyone’s life, and it happens at different points—maybe it’s like a mid-life crisis, maybe it’s a quarter-life crisis, maybe you’ve always had it—but a point where they wake up and they really look at themselves. And they realise that something’s not there anymore, and that the sights and the sounds and the smells aren’t fresh and new anymore. They’re old and they’re tired and they’re overused. And that’s just how I see relationships in general.

I know I am looking at this very pessimistically. There are so many people who would be like, “That’s fine. I am this way and that’s OK.” It’s not even that culture makes me feel that it’s not OK; I just don’t want to be like this. I have lots and lots of acquaintances and people who are just there, who I nod at from time to time. But this is not a conversation that you’d have with one of those people. You can’t just go over to some person who you don’t know that well, who has an image of who you are, and say, “You know what, I don’t feel anything.” They’d look at you like you were a lunatic. This is the first time I’ve had a conversation about it in detail. The first time I’ve been asked questions about it.

There are always things that we all want to change about ourselves and I would love to feel that connection with another person, but I guess I don’t. So, unfortunately, I don’t have a story to tell.



# *if you love yourself, then you can love other people*



**I**t's weird because that word, pride, was never something that I really identified with before. I'm bisexual but my sexuality is something that I've only been very out about since quite recently. It's something that my closest friends knew, and I kind of knew within myself for a long time, but it usually took me a while to open up about. Not because I was ashamed of my sexuality, I've always been proud of who I am, it's just because I never felt the need to shout about it. But, more recently, it has started to identify with me more. That this is who I am, and I am proud to say it. So, I feel that the word has only applied to me more recently.

As for the society and stuff like that, I'm not a member, which is quite bad, I probably should be. I went to one of their events as a Fresher. I went to their screening of the film *Pride*. So, I went to that and I really enjoyed it. It was really good seeing a film about LGBT people, that kind of resonates with some people in real life as well.

I really enjoyed that. It was good knowing that it was a good, accepting space.

I feel like I've actually been quite a lucky person in the sense that, when I tell people about my sexuality, people are almost always like, "Cool, yeah". They're always quite accepting of it, really, which is great because I find that my family and friends are such a good, supporting network, and that it really doesn't matter to them. As long as I'm, you know, a good person in myself, then the whole sexuality thing doesn't really play into it.

Within my immediate circle, there aren't really any problems that I've come up against. When I was in secondary school, I wasn't really out, but that didn't stop people speculating. And it didn't stop comments, and stuff like that, especially when I was younger and started wearing trousers instead of skirts, and cut my hair short, which just added fuel to the fire. But it was never

something that really bothered me particularly. After a while, I just got used to it. It was never too bad, really. I just thought, "I know who I am, and if people don't like it, well, obviously they're just not going to be a part of my life". You never really need that negativity in your life. Overall, most people I've come into contact with have been quite positive and reassuring.

It does worry me sometimes, saying I'm bi, because I always have that worry that people aren't going to take it seriously. I'm not one hundred percent straight or one hundred percent gay. There's always that concern that people are going to say, "Oh, it's just a phase", or, "You'll choose one in the end". I've never really understood that argument because you want what you want if you are comfortable enough in yourself to say, "I know that I can fall for anyone." For me, it's more about falling in love with a person than with a gender. So, really, I could fall in love with anyone in the end. Again, that's another reason

why I feel so lucky, because when I have come out people haven't really asked me that question, or suggested that I was confused, whereas I feel that some other people have come up against that—you see it sometimes in the media every now and again.

I do feel that being in Falmouth is actually really great because I've met so many different and diverse people, which makes it so much easier to be accepted and to be a more accepting person, especially with this campus. There are so many different people doing so many different courses and living their own different lives. You really do feel like you can be whoever you want to be here. Those worries dissipate the longer I'm here; the more people I meet, and the more friends I make, the happier I am to say that this is who I am, and the more accepting I am of myself. I think this really is the most important thing; if you love yourself, then you can love other people.

**M**y experience of being part of the LGBTQ+ community on campus has actually been really nice: I come from a little town in Italy so I'm used to small close-minded communities, but I must say that I've never really faced any experience that was really negative or whatever. I just really feel like here it's all about actually being different, so obviously being part of the LGBTQ+ community is not a problem. It's a great time to be alive and gay.

The only thing that I have a slight issue with here on campus is that there's a big thing about, sort of, you know, exposing the difference. I really feel like we can't really fight for equality just by exposing our difference, I just think that's something that's never going to work. You see people walking around with their bright flags really exposing their sexual identity, and that's not something I think we should do to get equality. Campus is definitely more about that, and that's the only problem I really have with being gay and on campus, but apart from that, everyone's really nice and I never really felt too judged.

I've never even been stereotyped, it's more like I'm me and then there's the fact I'm gay. It's always secondary. In the past, I was always labelled as "the gay guy" – at school, I was the first one to, you know, come out of the closet. I never wanted to be known as "the gay guy", I wanted to be myself, Mauro; I'm an artist, I love to write, I love food, I love everything; I'm a lot more than my sexuality and that's something that I've found that you can actually achieve in Falmouth.

The thing is, Italy has the Catholic religion, obviously, and I live in a town of 20,000 people so you couldn't really see a lot of gay guys and even if you could find LGBTQ+ people, they usually hadn't come out yet. At Falmouth University though you

meet a lot of LGBTQ+ people from all over the world, which actually doesn't surprise me because so many gay people are really involved in art, which is something I never really got but it's true. In fact, here it's probably harder to find a straight guy.

The thing that really surprised me though is that it doesn't make me feel less lonely as a person. I always thought that if you were surrounded by people of the same orientation, you would probably feel less lonely and misunderstood, when actually it really doesn't make a difference as we are all so different; we're all people at the end of the day. See, I really believe in the idea that you are yourself, you f\*ck whoever you want, you do whatever you want with your life.

I have this really weird relationship with the Pride community because I kind of appreciate what they're doing, because homophobia is still there and we have a history of a lot of people dying for equality. Then again, why do we have to say homosexual, bisexual, pansexual or whatever? There are a lot of problems with being in this community because of all of the labelling; if we were actually more chill about stuff, I think things could be a lot easier. To be fair, it's more like, there are so many other problems on this planet than finding the right name of your sexuality, if you see what I mean. That's the only thing I can talk about in a mean way about the LGBTQ+ community in the contemporary world.

Apart from that I feel like we're really, really close to getting complete recognition as human beings. Voices is a really nice project because you get such an array of really small sub-cultures, and putting them together in a book so people can read what it feels like is really nice. That's the thing, I feel like the world is all about empathy; if you don't have empathy, the world dies.







**O**n campus, I feel quite comfortable being a part of the LGBTQ+ group, and in the UK in general. It's acceptable to be whoever you are, especially on this campus where there are so many LGBTQ+ members. I've always been welcomed here.

Back in Lithuania, it's definitely not OK to be a part of the LGBTQ+ community. I've only seen the Pride parade once in Lithuania, and then it vanished; it no longer exists. When the rumours of me being gay started in my home town, the entire town just turned on me. Everyone suddenly hated me, and all of my friends suddenly turned on me. I've had people chase me with knives in the middle of the town, in the middle of the day. Now that's homophobia; that's what I call homophobia. Not someone giving you a mean look for making out in the middle of a town, not someone saying something, but someone actually physically threatening you. That's what I had to live with for a long time.

It was summer, and I was just in the town doing photography stuff. Shooting nature and things. There's a sports club near the place I was and three muscular guys come out and see me. They're like, "Oi, faggot, come over here," and I just tell them to go away and to get away from me. So, they pull out knives, and start chasing me around the town. Again, that was in the middle of the day. There were so many people around, yet no one cared.

That kind of stuff would never happen in the UK, let alone on campus. Over there, it's fine. No one cares. If you're gay, you're basically doomed. But that's just in my home town. I don't know about the capital. Maybe they're more accepting there, but even then, it's still perfectly fine to do that kind of stuff.

It's starting to improve bit by bit, but my country needs to reach the levels of acceptance that the UK has, and that's going to take 20/30 years. People are still thinking about the old Soviet Union days, where it was fine to say something against black people, or against gay people. And, if you're trans, goodbye. That's it. You're over. There used to be this one trans woman in my country. She was from Azerbaijan, I think. She's been assaulted so many times; even the police didn't care. They made fun of her on TV and on the news. It's still perfectly acceptable to be racist and to be homophobic.

For the people who are here in the UK, don't think that there's homophobia here anymore. It's fine being gay. Come out if you want, don't come out if you don't feel like you want to. But don't say that there's still homophobia around here when this country is the most accepting country ever. I have never felt so accepted. I have never felt so loved. I have never felt happier than I do here. I can't say enough how accepting this country is. Be whoever you want to be. You do you, boo. Just love yourself and love everyone else.

*BLACK,  
GAY  
MEN  
EXIST.*



I identify as gay and it's actually kind of a long story. When I was younger I grew up without a gay community - there wasn't a very strong sense of community where I was. I knew gay people were about, things like Grindr and stuff existed, but there wasn't really a sense of a community that you could, like, talk with and hang out with and stuff like that.

I grew up with mainly straight friends. The first time I think I even heard the word gay was when my mum was watching a Scissor Sisters music video and she said to my aunt, "Oh, you know they're gay", and I was like, "What's gay?" She was like, "Oh, you don't need to know".

When I first heard "gay" being thrown around at school, I didn't really know what it meant, but I knew that it was this bad thing that no one wanted to be. Then I eventually found out what it meant and was like, "Oh no, I'm the bad thing that no one wants to be".

I didn't officially come out until I was seventeen and I came out as bi and not gay because it's easier for the transition. I eventually came out as gay when I finally got into a relationship with a guy when I was 18. Even then because I was living in the same town, there wasn't a massive sense of community, as I keep saying, so I still didn't really fully understand all of the issues and the struggles the LGBTQ+ community face with oppression and things like a heteronormative society.

It wasn't until I came to Falmouth that I started actually meeting more gay

people and actually started having gay friends. Back home I'd say there were only like three of us who were gay, and I was probably the only guy. I didn't really understand the issues that other people had when they would be like, "Oh, we can't go into this bar because it might frustrate people" or "I can't feel comfortable" and stuff like that. I didn't properly understand these because, as far as I was concerned, if I was able to fit in then anyone could. But when I started understanding that it was more like a generalisation, it's almost like you're excluded from a society. By very simple things as well, like you can't hold your partner's hand in public without being afraid of being heckled just walking down the street, or the same with kissing your partner in public.

Coming to Falmouth Uni, where I actually started to make queer friends, really helped me to understand that there are actually a lot of issues that I wasn't aware of. I think because of that, that's why I am here doing this now, because I was ignorant. A mixture of naivety and ignorance, because there's obviously the saying that ignorance is bliss, that naivety of not just knowing but then the ignorance of ignoring the problem when it was raised. Because I had that and then I realised that it's not all like that, that's why I'm here doing this and I'm a bit more political and a bit outspoken with what I do and say, because this can't be a thing. Especially because, although things were OK for me, I understand that's not the case for everyone. It's almost like there was a part of a culture that I belonged to but didn't know I was a part of. Now that I am

part of that culture and have embraced it, I definitely like being a part of it. I haven't looked back.

My mum always said that she knew ever since I was a child that I was going to be gay. She always said, "Oh, I always knew", but I think all parents say that about their children. But I remember my mum telling me a story about how she was sat down with my dad and she asked him what he would do if I turned out gay, and he said he'd actually disown me. This was whilst I was still a toddler. I actually didn't come out to my dad until quite a bit after my mum, because they don't live together and they're not together. Because I live with my mum I told her, because I was in a relationship with a guy and wasn't really wanting to hide that. With my dad, because I wasn't living with him, I actually told him about six months after over the phone, very casually like, "Dad, by the way, I've got a boyfriend". The fear in me, it took me so long to get to that point where I could do it. I was actually very surprised. He was OK with it and said, "Oh, I knew" and I was like, "Why did I have to know that you said you would disown me if you were suddenly going to be OK with it?"

I feel like some of my friends back home use it as banter, as I like to call it. They'll say things that if anyone else really said to me I would take it as an insult, but because I know that they're not speaking from a place of malice, and they know I'll call them out over it, they don't say anything that's too much. I almost give them a free pass, which, in hindsight, I realise that I



shouldn't do, but it's just that I've got such strong bonds with those people that it's hard to not. If I hear people use gay or "poof" in a derogatory manner, that's immediately a turn off for me, not like an attractive thing but as a person – you're using something that I am as a negative and I don't really want to communicate with you and I don't really want to have anything to do with you. I just shut those people out.

I do sometimes get annoyed that, because my name is Ben, it's a very common name, so sometimes when people are talking about me it's easy to identify me as like, "Oh, gay Ben" – that does irritate me because there's more to me than my sexuality. Yes I'm part of the LGBT community and I'm very proud to be gay, but it's not my defining feature. It just so happens that instead of liking girls I like guys – that's all it is.

I'd say that I've had a very different experience than what a lot of other people have had, in the sense that I grew up in a straight community with a fair bit of acceptance. Obviously, there were some negatives, like I've had arguments with people in the street because much of the older generation would give out their leaflets talking about God and would often have kind of negative attitudes towards it. I know that doesn't speak for all religious people, in fact one of my best friends is a Christian, but I know that's not the case at all. It's more of a generational thing than religion, that sometimes would be a bit hard and some of my friends wouldn't get it, but then some of my friends would actually defend me, which was really nice.

I came in to the community late, if that makes sense. I had attended Pride before coming to Falmouth, but it was a lack of understanding, perhaps from my age or just

the lack of experience, given that I didn't grow up with a strong sense of gay community. There were a lot of things that I didn't quite understand. I didn't quite understand why Pride needed to be a thing. I was happy that it was a thing, and I would feel so comfortable and safe in Pride, but I remember thinking to myself at my first ever Pride, when I was 18, that this is amazing. I feel so safe and I can literally actually kiss my boyfriend in public. But I didn't understand why it needed to happen. When I was younger, and I regret to say this, but I was one of those people who said, "Oh, I don't think we need Pride. I feel like we don't need to make it a thing because if we do then we're just pushing ourselves further away from the norm." But then coming here (it all relates to Falmouth really) and having understood more of the history - even for some of my projects I've looked into gay culture because it's a part of my heritage, understanding why it happened and why it's a thing, just all of the civil rights issues, the lack of equality and being othered - I am a complete advocate for Pride now. I completely think it should happen and understand that we are so far from equality. We've come so far but we're still very far away. The fact that there are countries I could step foot in and be executed is terrifying.

When I was in a relationship with my partner (my ex-boyfriend), I often felt like I couldn't really talk about sex or relationship issues with a lot of my friends because it was like "it's two guys?" So it was very much like, can I say this? Can I not? Will they actually listen or will they just be a bit like "Can you stop talking about it?" Now they understand that it's not fair if I don't get to talk about what they can. If I'm talking to my male straight friends, then definitely it's something which, and not necessarily all of them, but some of them will be a little bit uncomfortable. That's more in the sense of they're used

to talking with guys about female sex and relationships, so I guess if I'm talking about the time I was sucking a penis, then to them that's not something they can actually resonate with I guess – it's very hard to find the correct wording.

I am cisgender but because I am cisgender, and because I am white and because I am male, I have privileges – more than someone who is a person of colour, someone who is female or transgender. Sometimes I find it hard to communicate issues with society because some people will be like "What are you talking about? You're a straight, white cis-male?" I have to be like, "I'm very clearly not straight, excuse me". I am part of these other groupings that do have privilege, but I am still technically a minority, and I am still an advocate for complete equality. There is a greater visibility than there ever has been before in society, however, I do think because of that visibility there is actually a decline in political movement, in the sense that I think some people are thinking that "Oh, because you guys have that you don't need much more". That's not the case at all. One of the most popular shows with society at the moment is RuPaul's Drag Race, a show where queer men dress up as women and do a whole manner of things, like performing, which stereotypically isn't viewed as very masculine. That is a great thing that it's one of the most popular shows at the minute, however, just because that show is so popular, that doesn't mean that everything is OK. Yes, because we're now at a point where gay men can walk around in dresses on TV, that is amazing, the fact that is even possible, and (beyond possible) accepted, but that doesn't mean that we have little to do. We've still got in America that members of the LGBT community can be discriminated against. How long is it before gay marriage is revoked again? Not just in America, but here as well, especially when the

DUP does have a prevalence in our government now. There are a lot of things where we're getting closer and closer, but we still have so far to go.

I don't know, honestly, if we'll ever reach a true point of equality, just because of things like unconscious bias, where we're taught to think certain things about certain groups of people because of society, so it's hard to ever reach a true point of equality, because those things are always going to exist. We can get more and more progressive but will we ever reach a point of true equality? I can't say that we will. I would love to think that at some point, for future generations, it may be a thing, but at least for my lifetime I can't say it will be a thing.

For people who end up reading this, understand that we are more than just the 'gay best friend'. We are more than just people who are tokens. We are actual people and there is so much more to us than who we are attracted to. We do have issues that straight people will never be able to fully comprehend but that's the exact same as someone who is Caucasian never fully being able to comprehend the issues that someone of a different ethnicity would be able to understand. Myself being white, I don't ever expect to be able to understand the issues of someone who is black. I don't ever expect myself to be able to fully understand, I can sympathise but I could never empathise. It's a case that you need to support us and stand by us and speak against hate, but don't ever speak for us. I'm proud of who I am, I am very happy to be gay. Be a little bit more considerate, just don't be dicks.





I'm a bisexual woman but I'm marrying Matt, a straight man, which has been quite interesting in terms of people's perceptions. I've been thinking about this a lot and it's been keeping me up at night about what I'm going to say in this, because I've obviously read the others and I was like, "Wow, these people are so moving and wow, these are amazing" and then there's just me and I'm just me. It's been something that's never really shaped me, really, but I know, for a lot of people, it has completely shaped their lives.

One of my bridesmaids is transgender and that completely changed her life. One of our best friends is an asexual lesbian and that just blew my mind when I first came here and we talk about it and that's really cool. But I'm with Matt. And for some reason, when I have conversations with people about that, it just kind of mutes my bisexuality. That's a really interesting thing.

It's just really interesting to read about bisexuality because it's just one of those things that just never comes up because, I don't want to say ghost, but it's like this thing that no one can really put their finger on, because nine times out of ten, if a bisexual woman or bisexual man is dating a person of their same gender they're gay. If they're dating the opposite gender, then they're straight. But that's not how it works. You never stop being that thing but when people look at you, and when Matt and I eventually walk down the aisle and stuff, we're just the average Joneses next door. Whatever, you know what I mean. As I said, it's not something that really ever shaped my personality or the way I've held myself or the things I've done.

I think that labels are this really, really strange thing, especially when it comes to sexuality for me, because there's just so many. My lesbian friend is different to my other lesbian friend, they're interested in different things, they explore and manifest their sexuality in different ways. I find the same with gender. I don't like saying that's a boy and that's a girl and that person's in the middle.

It's not like that, it's not a light switch, it's a, I suppose you could say a dimmer switch. You've got all of these different types of people in-between and you can change throughout your lifetime. People marry a man and find out halfway through the relationship, after three kids, that that isn't for them and that's extraordinary. You get people coming late into their lives who realise, you know, that now is the time that they're not a man, they're going to live the rest of their lives truthfully, as a woman. That's awesome. But, for me, I've just kind of felt a little bit, I don't want to use the term imposter syndrome, because that's an incredibly weighted phrase, but I can just walk through life and get on with things.



# *There's a lot of privilege that comes with being a bisexual female.*

There's a lot of privilege that comes with being a bisexual female. People don't tend to be disgusted by you, you don't get banned from places, you don't get beaten up, that kind of stuff. But a lot of other people have to deal with this in their day-to-day lives, whereas I can just do whatever I want. It's never got in the way of a job. If anything, I probably tick a box on their diversity statistics. They like all that, don't they? I'm marrying a dude. That's probably going to work in my favour in the future. The fact that I have to sit and think about it speaks volumes to what bisexuality is, I suppose.

Pride is a really strange one. I've been to Pride once in my life and that was when I was dating my girlfriend. The only girlfriend I've ever had. That was the first time I'd ever been because I finally felt like I could go. I finally felt as though, because I was holding hands with a girl, I fit in there. I probably wouldn't go again because I'd feel, again, like a bit of an imposter, like I was faking the whole time. Just because my partner is the most straight-white-normal guy, ever. It's really strange.

It's strange to be in this weird position because, as I said, you know, I don't come across any of the daily issues that people of other sexualities might do. If anything, my sexuality's possibly like one of the most searched thing on Pornhub. It's just odd, isn't it? Me liking girls and liking boys is socially acceptable, but not only that, it's something people like. Something that people are into. But at the same time I don't think I identify as being a bisexual woman but it's not something that has shaped me. I'll identify as female. I'll identify as a writer. I'll identify as a bunch of other things before I identify as bisexual because it never comes up and it's never affected anything I've had to do. Do I wish it had more of a role in my life? I don't know.

I've recently got into RuPaul's Drag Race and it's changed my life and I've learnt so much from it and the people on that show. I love to keep learning, every day, every month, every year, especially at university - your horizons are just broadened by meeting new people, new types of people, people who believe in different things. As daft

as it sounds, RuPaul was one of those. Like, I'd never seen this world before and it started making me think about myself. These people are so passionate about who they are. They know completely who they are and I'm sat there like, well, I'm just me, I guess. I like how I can just dip in how and when I want to but there's an element of guilt that comes with it, which is ridiculous, but I'm a well-educated white woman. Apart from the woman bit I'm doing alright in terms of the whole privilege thing. Getting married to a straight dude, we can buy a house in the future, nothing's going to stand in our way, our neighbours aren't going to turn around and say 'we're not going to invite you round because we don't agree with that lifestyle' because we are the norm lifestyle. But then, if I were to marry a woman instead, no one would see me as bisexual, they'd see me as a gay woman.

We're doing better in terms of bisexuality awareness. Avatar: Legend of Korra, the moment when they finally put two girls together and it was the first time anyone had seen anything like it on children's television. It blew

everyone's mind! There was an outcry. They eventually cancelled the series but that story carried on in the comics and I think that's so important, especially as a writer, that we've got representation because, again, it's daft, but when I sit down and watch the television, if I pop on Netflix I can watch The L Word or Orange Is The New Black or I can watch RuPaul's Drag Race and I can see gay men and gay women, but there's never the middle ground. It's quite sad, really. I suppose it's really difficult for TV and film makers to write complex bisexual characters because it's not something that audiences are used to yet. Especially, if you dip in and out of a TV series, one minute they're with a guy and one minute they're with a girl and you're like, when did that happen? Is this new? Brooklyn Nine-Nine have just done it, which I am so happy about, because that TV show is fantastic. But we've got so far to go in terms of bisexual representation because it's just not a thing.



Being trans when I was a kid was kind of an interesting thing because I spent the entirety of my childhood just pretending to be Peter Pan or Robin Hood, because I never wanted to play a girl in any of the children's stories. As I got older and realised some things, I thought, "Wait, that all makes more sense now". I realised I wasn't straight to start with, and basically came out to my brother, who got drunk and told my step-mother, who then told my father, who told my mother. It was just one big mess. My mother basically went ape-sh\*t and was not impressed, and told me that she was in mourning for me. So, clearly, that was a fun time. She told me that she was mostly p\*ssed off because I hadn't told her first, so when I decided to come out as trans to my family, I decided to tell her first. I thought it would make things easier. But, again, she went ape-sh\*t and now I'm too scared to tell the rest of my family. So that didn't work out as I'd hoped.

For a while, as I was doing my A-levels, I was homeless. That was fun because I really did want to pass those exams. And I did. That's actually one of my proudest moments, because I was going through such a sh\*t time and didn't really have a family or a home, apart from the ones that I'd made for myself with my friends. Yet I still got two As and an A\* in my A-levels and I was like, "f\*ck, I'm actually doing something right."

Half of me is very frightened to be myself but the other half has got to the point of being like, "Right, I've been through so much sh\*t. I don't really give a f\*ck anymore, I'm going to be myself," because I'm not really sure how much more hurt I can get. For now, I'm just going to ride this train; I'm going to see how things go

and try to be myself. Coming to university and introducing myself as Dorian rather than my birth name has been so, so liberating because I feel like a new me. Well, not a new me. Just more me than I did before. Joining the Pride society especially, and contributing to the committee and stuff has made me a lot happier. I just want to help people in the same way that other people helped me when I was in trouble. I realise how important having a family of people around me is, who actually really care about me, and who know what I'm going through. And now I just want to be that figure to everyone else.

I want to be a writer when I'm older. I want to write stories with gay people, and trans people, and all of that in them. Rather than the stories that I've read that are all about coming out, where it's like, "Oh, it's such a struggle being me," I just want to tell stories where there are some lesbians fighting dragons. It's just telling the exact same stories as everyone else, but featuring gay people and trans people because why the hell not?! Why do our stories have to be confined to be about being gay people and trans people? That's just bullsh\*t. That's not good storytelling.

I feel like, looking back at how unhappy I was when I was younger, back when I had eating disorders and dysphoria and all of that, I feel so much more comfortable in my own skin. I feel like I fit myself a lot better now, and that's something that's really important to me, and I'm really glad.



*I just  
want to  
tell stories  
where  
there are  
lesbians  
fighting  
dragons*



I don't really know where the story starts, other than that I was born one day, and then I was a gay, trans person. And that's kind of it. The weird thing is that a lot of trans guys are like, "I've always known that I was trans because, when I was little, I played football". But, when I was little, I loved Disney and Disney princesses and everything. I was about 12 when I first realised it and I actually realised it because I watched Glee. I really loved the characters Kurt and Blaine and I used to watch them and be like, "Oh, I'm so much like Kurt". Then I had this weird thing where I was like, "I love men but as if I was a gay man". Then I found out that trans was a thing and I realised, "Oh, that's what it is". Not just like being a weird straight person. I knew that was me and I've never really been shy or ashamed of it. I've never shied away from it but when I first came out I had this idea in my head that, if I was going to be a trans guy, I was going to be the manliest man in the world so, I bought loads of polo shirts and wore jeans all the time.

A couple of years ago, I kind of realised that, through meeting some people in the community, identity is what you make of it. There are plenty of feminine gay men, so why couldn't I be a feminine gay man just because I'm trans? There seems to be a specific set of rules to being accepted as a trans man, and so I can understand why some trans men are uncomfortable with somebody like me. Somebody who likes dressing feminine, who likes makeup, and loves

pink and glitter. It does take a long time to get accepted and I'm not completely accepted by my family. I've realised that, going through life, there are always going to be people aren't going to accept me. And, if I'm going to be trans and a gay man, then I might as well go the whole way and be as completely myself as I possibly can. There are always going to be people who hate me no matter what I do and no matter how I dress and no matter how I look. People are always going to have a problem with it. So, the best thing to do is to just be as me as possible.

I've always known trans people and gay people because when you're in secondary school you accidentally congregate into a group of LGBTQ+ people without knowing it, because you're all like 12 and you slowly start to come out. An old friend of mine is a trans guy, and his ex-girlfriend is a trans girl, and whilst they were dating they swapped genders. I've always known people but not really to the extent of coming here, where I've felt like a part of the community.

I've never been to Pride because where I live, Pride scares me: we have a gay club, but the gay club is very much for the cis-white gay man rather than for everyone. I think coming here and meeting people in the Pride society, and making so many friends who are trans or gay, and just being surrounded by so many people, is really important. I know so many younger people who are struggling in the way that I was



struggling when I was younger. They always say that, “Oh, it will get better”, but when you’re younger you never really believe that. It’s true to some extent but at the same time it’s not. I can’t go back to my younger self and say, “Mental illness is going to go away, you’re going to go to university and anxiety is just going to disappear. You won’t be depressed or have issues”. I think it gets better because the people around you get better. I’m worse off mentally than I was when I was younger but I’m around people now who make it easier to function, and to be happy with who I am.

That’s why the Pride community is so important and it makes me so upset when I see that there are so many arguments that go on within the community about different matters. It makes me sad because I feel that the real meaning of Pride isn’t just being proud of yourself. It’s being proud of everyone. It was Transgender Day of Remembrance on Monday and the overwhelming feeling was that everyone should mourn for the people we’ve lost, but also just keep fighting by being yourself. I feel like that. My friend Scarlet, who is a lesbian, said to me that her biggest fear about coming to university was that she’d have to come out to everyone again. I felt that and I was so scared about it. But then I walked into my first class and just went, “Hi, I’m Riley, and I’m a trans guy.” I just did it, and even though not everyone called me the right pronouns, and not everybody knew what that meant, it was a lot to myself to just not be scared about it.

I spent so long having to come out to people individually and explain what it meant, so it felt nice to come in

and just say it. And if people accepted me, or if they didn’t, then that wasn’t my problem. I don’t like being misgendered but I understand why people can get confused. When people think of a trans guy, they think of it being quite masculine. I’d say I get misgendered a lot more than my friends but that’s kind of a given, because I am very feminine and I dress very feminine. But I also think that another thing that has helped me, and it’s another debate in the trans community, is drag. It’s a massive part of my life, specifically Sasha Velour. I love her with all my heart because she just doesn’t care. Just watching her makes me so happy because her whole thing is blurring the lines between gender, and that gender doesn’t really matter, so just be what you want to be. If people have a problem with it, then that’s not your issue. All my life, I’ve had people on the streets yell at me with every name under the sun—female and male slurs, everything. That’s always happened no matter what I’ve done, or no matter what I’ve worn, or who I’ve been with. So, I’ve realised that people are always going to have a problem with me and who I am, so I might as well make them even more mad by being just as big and over the top as I want.

I’ve lost quite a few friends to suicide. One of them told me, when I first met her, that you should always remember to wear your slurs, because then people can’t hurt you with them. I think that’s something that’s going to stick with me forever. And I wish she’d known it, because it’s people like her, and everyone in the world who was like her and isn’t with us anymore, that will inspire you for the rest of your life. Just the way that she

was; she was so unashamed to be herself. I think of that a lot, and it helps so many people. People who are so proud of who they are, that they move the community forward because, even though the world is pretty sh\*tty to LGBT people at the minute, specifically trans people, you have to look back. Obviously, the world’s not perfect for gay people now either. But 50 years ago, there were all these hate articles toward gay men, and even though the world’s not perfect now, rights have moved forward for them. We’re not going anywhere. We’re not just going to read a hate article that says that trans people aren’t real and go, “Damn, we’re not real. We’re going to have to stop this”.

One thing that proves to me that the world is moving forward is my family. My parents were never against me being trans but they were kind of not really sure. I think I came out almost four years ago now and they never really spoke about it. But when I moved to university, my dad started using my preferred name, which is Riley, and my mum in the past couple of weeks just keeps telling me that she’s proud of me. Even though it does kind of break my heart that people’s parents don’t accept them straight away—and, obviously, there are some terrible cases with parents. And there are horrible, horrible people in the world who don’t care about their children and just want their child to be a cookie-cutter straight person who’s going to get married and have a family and all this. I was always raised to be different. My dad was one of those a\*\*hole footballer players in school. He wanted to be an actor but he never got to do it because people would call him gay, and now his biggest regret is that he never went into acting because he loves it. I think that, because of

that, he raised us to be who we wanted to be and to not let anyone stop us. Obviously that caused some problems for me in my life, but I’m proud of it. It just means that I’m proud of who I am.

I think that it takes time but people do learn to deal with it. All of my family is from Worksop, which is a sh\*tty little town in the North. It’s a mining town and has been the same way since the 30s—it has never changed. My parents recently told my grandparents that me and Dorian were together, and that was my biggest fear, because I thought they wouldn’t care about me anymore, because they’re from this sh\*tty town. Their reactions were, “Oh, OK. Well, I don’t really get that, and don’t one hundred percent like it, but you’re our grandchild and that comes above anything”. I’ve very slowly realised how lucky I am to have the family that I do, because although there have been problems and I haven’t been a hundred percent accepted all the time, I feel that it’s a bit of a blessing, because every other person I know who is like me has had the sh\*ttiest time. I’m really grateful to have so many wonderful people, especially here in Falmouth, who have changed everything. I go to gay nights out every Monday and just feel like the community here is extremely accepting. And it’s nice to be in a place where you feel like you can just be who you are and not worry about what people are going to do, or what people are going to say. Nobody who matters cares, and the people who do care don’t matter.



**T**here are no two gay experiences which are the same. This is mine.

I don't feel proud of who I am but I am not ashamed either. I often wonder why I am this way, what went differently, or whether I am different but, after all, why does one prefer chocolate to vanilla? And it shouldn't matter more than that: it's a preference, a taste. But growing up in a small town, the fear of uncovering something as big as my sexuality always scared me, so I kept it a religiously guarded secret until I moved abroad and started university.

In my teenage years, I never got to experience the drunken parties that, for my friends, would often end up with them slipping into some beautiful girl's bed. I always watched from the side-lines, with the constant sensation I was walking backwards on that slope of hormones and sexual awakening that made my friends run downhill to their ever-changing partners. For me, it was an exercise in annihilation of my sexuality, at least on the outside. It is this kind of thing that formed my identity, not liking men.

That is why I don't feel part of a community—nor do I feel the need to be part of one. My identity is my own, not shared by anyone else, and can't be arbitrarily grouped on the basis of a preference. And, most of all, I refuse to be the canvas where stereotypes are painted: I don't have to particularly like pink to show how comfortable I am with disrupting traditional gender roles; I don't feel the need to dress in a feminine fashion; and just because I like men, it doesn't mean I also like drag queens. Not that any of those things are wrong, they are just not me.

Since coming to university, I accepted that I am, to use a concept by singer Christine and the Queens, tilted in a world that can too often feel so straight. I walk the world on a slope that constantly changes its steepness depending on where I am, who I think I am, and who I am with. Sometimes it feels like I need to be a bit of an equilibrist in order to stay on my feet on the slope, but those moments of uncertainty add to and shape who I am.

I sometimes wonder what my life would be like if I was straight, what would go differently, or whether I would be different. Maybe one day I will decide on an answer, but should it matter more than liking vanilla better than chocolate?



Campus is really inclusive. I feel a lot safer here and I'm not worried about people knowing that I'm gay. I moved in with my housemates over a year ago and I didn't know them very well beforehand: turns out they're also members of the Pride community.

I'm not out back home to anyone but my sister, whereas I'm out to pretty much everyone here. It's even more rural than here, I think it's safe to say, and there were only a few gay people at school. And they were always like, "Oh, that's the gay boy from Year Eleven". It was always very othering, so I didn't feel comfortable at home. One of my friends, back when I was about sixteen... at the time, they thought they were bi and a lot of my other friends suddenly stopped talking to them. It was really awful—you didn't want to lose your other friends but you had to stand up for them.

As I've mentioned, I'm out publicly here—all you have to do is look at my Facebook. I'm pretty much out. But my family don't know. They could Google my Facebook and find out. It's odd because it means that I'm two different people, here and back home. Whenever you meet new people, you have to choose whether to come out, over and over. I wasn't out at work but that wasn't like a choice. I just never saw the chance to mention it. It's not that I thought that they'd react negatively, it's just you have to keep doing it and it gets tiring telling everyone.

If you don't come out, you're of course always going to be subject to people asking, "Oh, have you found a boyfriend yet? etc." which makes you feel like you have to. You don't always feel safe with it, and you don't know who is going to react well and who is not going to react well. The whole concept is pretty crap.

As for my family, I don't think they're overtly homophobic but they make side comments. I don't think they mean it but like when they watching telly or something and there's a gay character, they go, "Oh, that's the puff character," or something. There are a lot of small things that add up that make me afraid to say it.



*I'm going to wear this  
and be proud about it*



I think something that I might start off with is that I was always quite lucky, I think, in that I didn't experience a lot of homophobia growing up. I was quite lucky that I sort of realised when I was about 11-ish. I mean, some people don't realise until they're 20-odd. I was on Yahoo! and I was looking at the LGBT section, and was like, "What is bisexual?" and suddenly thought, "Oh, that's what that is, that sounds like me." That was my whole experience of finding out who I was. I just went, "That makes sense." I've always had crushes on girls and stuff. I also had crushes on guys in secondary school but I felt very pressured to. "Oh, you have to like a boy. Which boy do you like in your class?" Stuff like that.

I was always more focused on girls though and I sort of didn't have to come out, really. I was just really lucky with that, I think, like especially with my family. So, when I was 11, I kept it quiet. But I remember I told some of my classmates, and they were all very like, "Ew," so I just kept it a bit quiet. That wasn't homophobia, it was just that they didn't get it. I was always like, "Oh, OK. Whatever if they think it's a bit strange." But there was never any, "We hate you, get away from us", or, "You can't look at us in the changing room". I know people experience that but I never had any of it.

It wasn't until I was 13 that I dated a girl. It was a secret for two years. My parents sort of found out but I didn't explicitly tell them. They were just like, "Yeah, you can like whoever you want and stuff".



That was kind of my whole experience with it. My mum asked me more directly later on, and she must have spoken to my aunt because I did have the whole, “Oh, it’s just a phase, you’ll eventually come out of it”, from her later on. They were like, “Well you don’t know what you want right now because you’re young,” which I guess in a way is true, but at the same time it is that sort of mild, not overt, homophobia or biphobia.

It’s funny, because the only sexuality anyone ever has as a phase is normally being straight, because you sort of go, “Oh, I’m just going to be this for now.” And then you change your mind and realise that you’re not. It was really funny actually when my mum asked me. She’d been hinting at it for a while because I was about to go to university and I don’t discuss stuff like that with my parents just because I never felt like I had to. Which is nice, in a way, because I never felt like I had to be like, “I like this person”. or, “I like that person”. I guess, in a way, it did make me feel, not isolated, but like there was a bit of distance between me and my parents.

I remember my dad first said when I was about 13, “You know you can like who you want”. When he said that my response was just to laugh, hysterically, and it was just left really awkwardly. In comparison to other people who have these terrible experiences where they’re not accepted, I got away with some really good stuff. And I don’t know how my Dad feels about it, but my Mum is really accepting. I’m dating someone who is non-binary, and I identify as non-binary, and I haven’t expressed that to my mum yet.

But my mum will sort of be like, “OK, well, bye girls!” and then be like, “Oh, I’m so sorry, what would you want me to call you?” She started calling us avocados recently as like a plural, like, “How are you dumplings doing? How are you avocados doing?” It’s because she just wants to be really lovely to us. I feel really good about that, so in terms of coming out it was just the best I could have hoped for, really. It wasn’t like hugging or congratulating me, like people say that and then go, “Well done”, and I’m like, “What?”

I guess I hadn’t been open about it before I came to Falmouth but everyone who sort of knew me already had preconceptions of me because they’d known me for so long in secondary school. When I came here, I was really nervous about joining the society at first. There’s the “gay look”: the dyed hair and the flamboyance that people sometimes aren’t OK with, especially when they’re new to it. They’re like, “Oh, I don’t want to be so, like, proud and bold about it.” I remember I saw the society from afar and they were all colourful. And I was like, I’m open, but I didn’t feel like that was something I could join. I felt out of place. It wasn’t until the next year that I went with a friend and was like, actually, all of these people are really good. Once I actually got involved with that, I feel like it actually helped me remove some of my preconceptions. Just because people look a certain way doesn’t mean anything.

You learn, and you internalise homophobia, so that when you look at people with bright coloured hair or really bold outfits, for example, you wonder whether they’re gay. But

as you go into those groups you realise that, actually, that’s cool, and I want to do that too. It becomes a staple for, “Actually, we’re choosing to look this way”. It’s like how flannel is associated with being gay as well. Like, you’re trying to tell other people, “Yeah, I am gay. And if you’re going to associate me with being gay for wearing this then hell yeah, I’m going to wear this and be proud about it.”

Stereotypes are bad in a way but I think it’s the same with like slurs, in terms of it being bad when it’s coming from other people, but when you are making it your own, it becomes this, like, “Yeah, this is good. This is ours and we’re going to own it”. If you’re going to be like, “Wow, that’s gay”, we’re going to be like, “Yeah, OK it is. And now it’s ours, and you can’t have it anymore. Bye.” Obviously, not everyone falls into the stereotypes of being flamboyant, or colourful and bright. But you do start to think, “OK, if people do think that looks gay, then I’m going to wear it”.

I remember seeing someone on my course who was wearing a lot of flannel and going, “I wonder, but no, I can’t think that! Maybe they’re not? But are they?” It turns out they were, so I don’t know. I don’t think “gay-dar” is a thing, and you can’t just inherently tell, but you do make decisions that maybe are influenced by the other queer people you know. So, like how shaved heads is a thing that a lot of people are doing now.

How you choose to dress is a big part of your identity. It helps you to deal with internal stuff, because otherwise it’s like, “We’ve had to be quiet about being gay this whole time, so now I’m going to be really bold and out there”. Some people are like, “No thanks”, but, well, you haven’t had to hide away, and you can just be yourself, so we’re going to be ourselves now. And if you don’t like it, we’re at the point where we’re like, “Well, I don’t care because we’re tired of hiding”. I do think that eventually most people feel that way. I don’t think I’m very bold or anything like that, but I think you do eventually go, “Actually, I don’t want to have to be quiet about being gay”. So, you make lots of jokes like, “Haha, I’m so gay.” It’s a really common thing that people do.

People talk about how you make everything about the gay agenda. Not everything has to be gay. You have to go, “Well, it’s my life and I’m gay, so I’m going to do that.” I feel that way about TV as well. It’s that old joke about how you’ll only watch something if there’s gay characters in it, and you do find that you go, “Well, does it? I wasn’t going to watch it, but now I actually might”. I do that with a lot of things. It’s nice to see representation in TV and stuff. It’s really cool as well. I like watching a lot of movies and TV. Some of my favourites are the ones that actually manage to balance having its own plot that isn’t just, “This is gay,” like *The L Word*. But *Person of Interest* and a bunch of others are focused on their own stories, but happen to have some gay characters. That makes me happy. It’s nice to see yourself represented.

I came out when I was 11 and, at this point, I thought I was a bisexual girl because I went to an all-girls school and I'd been (secretly) seeing girls for a little while. Then I met this trans guy, who explained it all to me, and I was like, "You can do that?!" So, I went home, really confused about everything, and went on Yahoo! Answers—because I'm 11 and didn't know what else to do. I posted a question along the lines of, "I'm trans, what do I do?" and then went into school the next day, having left the tab open. My mum saw it while I was out. When I got home, she was angry at first; after two years of unsafely, secretly binding and eventually transferring schools, my mum found out how I was binding. And she was like, "Alright, I don't want you to be doing this unsafely, so I'm going to buy you a binder."

Then everything started going uphill from there because she realised that she'd rather I was safe and happy, I guess. Now our relationship is really good; she helped me get my name changed legally and she came with me to a bunch of my appointments.

The other big help was going to Out Youth in Plymouth. They were like an LGBTQ+ group; I had a counsellor who was a lesbian and she pointed me in their direction. It was the first time that I'd met groups of other LGBTQ+ people and I started going there when I was around thirteen. I got so much more confident as a result. I learned a lot about my own sexuality and I met my first long-term partner there, so that was a really positive experience.

*I didn't  
really know  
that it was  
illegal to  
treat me  
like that*





Once my family and friends had accepted me, it was just the actual medical transitioning side of things that took time. I originally got referred to the Tavistock and Portman Young People's Clinic. It then took me a year to get an appointment, so I didn't actually start having appointments until I was about thirteen. Then I got on blockers when I was fifteen, I think. Unfortunately, I had a lot of other things going on growing up and, if you have any mental health issues or anything, that really delays the process—even if they're completely unrelated to you being trans. So, it took me a long time to get hold of the blockers and then, eventually, when I was seventeen, they said I could start testosterone.

It all took a while because I had developed quite severe anorexia and had dropped to about four and a half stone. They said I had to be taken off the blockers and removed from the service until I was at a healthy weight again, which sucked. I knew that if I wanted to come back into it, it would take another couple of years to get testosterone. But I did recover, basically because of my mum; she was really helpful during everything, and I went to CAMHS, which I guess was helpful. Then I got back in touch with the clinic and got on testosterone last year and I can't believe how much it's helped me. Within two weeks, my voice had dropped a little bit and I still notice things changing all the time. It's really exciting and I finally got my date for top surgery last week, so I've got that to look forward to in April.

Probably the most important aspect of everything for me was just having support, because I had a really good friendship group who were also LGBT, and it was really important that I had access to the youth group. Otherwise, it's very lonely being an LGBT person in school, especially when there aren't many LGBT people around.

When I went to secondary school, I had a really bad experience with some of the teachers because they didn't know any of the trans legal rights. When I came out to them, they wouldn't use my preferred name because I hadn't had it changed legally, which

is obviously wrong. And, of course, they can still use my preferred name verbally and things. I had to use disabled toilets; I nearly got detention once for using the men's. They also said I couldn't do P.E. anymore, as it wasn't appropriate for me to get changed or be in either gender group, so I had to go and sit in the library instead. After I left school, I got together with a bunch of people and started trying to put together an information pack to give out to schools in Cornwall and Devon and I emailed the school to explain to them how to improve. When I was younger, I didn't really know that it was illegal to treat me like that. But then, when I got to college, I did a piece of writing for one of my A-levels on stigma and trans people, and I learned a lot.

University has been fantastic! I came here a lot more confident; college had really improved my confidence and I had a lecturer who was my best friend, and I could be really open with him about everything. I also had a nice group of friends and I started going out to parties all the time. By the time I got to university, I was already quite a confident person, and I got involved straight away with the LGBT society. I went on all the outings and met a load of new friends through that. I came down to Cornwall with two people: my partner at the time, and Max, who was and is my best friend. So, I came down to university in a really good place. I've had no trouble with any of the lecturers; no trouble with any of the students; only one small incident with a local, but other than that university as a whole has been perfect. Now I'm on the Pride Society committee, which is very exciting. The School of Writing and Journalism is fantastic. I'm honestly so glad to have met all of my lecturers here, especially Niamh and David. It's really nice to have such an understanding and warm department to be working in, and obviously I'm excited about studying because I've always wanted to study English.

I'm just glad I got here. I didn't think I was going to be able to get to university and when I did I was so excited. I really want to do well here.



*"I hate lesbians".*

**W**alking down the street with one of my best friends, aged around 13, this hit me like a tonne of bricks. I couldn't understand why she felt like that, and at that point I hadn't even figured out my sexuality.

Growing up, 'lesbian' always seemed to be a dirty word, whilst 'gay' was perfectly fine. All my friends wanted a 'gay best friend,' a guy that you could talk to about boys and go shopping with and fulfil all those stereotypes. No one wanted to be friends with a lesbian.

Why are gay guys seen as cool and lesbian girls seen as a mystery at best and a threat at worst? To be a girl that's into girls is either seen as a phase or wrong or freakish. Obviously the huge majority of stereotypes surrounding the LGBTQ+ community are wrong but that doesn't make it any easier. Women that like women are hard to find and tend to be much quieter about their sexuality and it tends to lead to us feeling ashamed.

I completely, 110% support the Pride community: what they do is so, so important. That being said, I've never felt like it's something that I can join. I don't fulfil any of the stereotypes of what an LGBTQ+ person is meant to be like; I'm not flamboyant, I don't have dyed hair and I've just never felt 'gay enough'.

I guess part of that is because I'm bisexual so I kind of just fall down the crack. Most of my relationships have been straight ones, so the part of me that likes girls tends to get lost and forgotten.

I've always felt like there's been such a huge disparity within the LGBTQ+ community and I always get the impression that there's a difference in how people react to different members of it. Like with my friend. It wasn't 'I hate gay people' or 'LGBTQ+ people' or anything. It was specifically lesbians.





**HARRY BISHOP**  
FXU PRESIDENT COMMUNITY & WELFARE

# *afterword*

I've known I like men since I was a kid, around Year Four I think. Controversial, I know. But I was in love with Li Shang from *Mulan*. I once cried because I'd never be married to Gareth Gates and, once I was over him, it was Leonardo DiCaprio. But I soon learned that I was only allowed to like girls, apparently. Of course, in hindsight, I didn't associate any of this with being gay or straight or bisexual or pansexual or whatever; I just liked who I liked and it was as simple as that.

I'm conscious that I'm lucky to have been born into a society that was gradually becoming more accepting of the idea of LGBT. But the school playground still taught me that gay was a bad thing and that gay people were ultimately the joke of society. I quickly learned to hide my secret love for Gareth Gates, accept that being gay was a joke and join my peers in perpetuating that fact.

I don't know how to talk about this without sounding too frank, I'll just start talking and see where it goes. When I was twelve years old a close friend of the family started grooming me before eventually raping me on Christmas Eve. The pain was so excruciating I remember feeling sick and unsteady as I finally managed to push him off me and run to the bathroom. My breathing was heavy; I felt light-headed, my legs were trembling, my hands were shaking so violently as I leant over the toilet bowl heaving. I was in shock and pain and I was confused and scared. He followed me into the bathroom and told me that if I told my mum what we did then she would kick me out of the house. He said 'we'. He manipulated the whole situation to make out like this was something I asked for. But I was twelve years old and, at that age, I was scared of my mum telling me off, let alone the prospect of her kicking me out. I couldn't get comfortable in bed that night, every position was painful. At five in the morning on Christmas Day I woke up, sat on the toilet and just cried. I wasn't excited about Christmas anymore. All I could think about was how disgusting I felt, replaying it over and over again in my head. Re-experiencing that horrific feeling again and again. I told myself that what happened must've been what gay meant and why people thought it was so horrible. Suddenly, I was scared of being gay because if he was gay and what he did to me was gay then I didn't want anything to do with gay.

When I was fifteen I told a friend and then a teacher and then the police and eventually, together, we told my mum. But how the f\*ck do you tell your mum that? Unsurprisingly, she didn't kick me out. She wrapped her arms around me and sobbed and told me again and again that she loved me. I know everyone says it but when I say it, I really mean it, because my mum really is the best in the world. We very gradually told the rest of my immediate family, a lot of them knew the person who did this, and, of course, their first reaction was anger. But once everyone stops being angry and making empty threats, it starts to sink in and I could see how hurt they all were by it. I sometimes wish I hadn't told anybody because watching my family suffer was the hardest thing I've ever had to do. Eventually we all learned to talk about our pain and, once the court case was out of the way, we began to repair our family again.

University was a whole new world for me. People were out, whether that was out publicly or within their friendship groups: both equally as brave. I had never met so many LGBT people in my life; I didn't know so many could exist in one place, especially here in Cornwall. I had told myself for years that I wasn't allowed to be gay and I'd done a pretty good job of hiding it but, suddenly, surrounded by this new community, I was jealous. Like, really jealous. I really wanted to come out. It felt right. It felt normal. Isn't that strange? Of course, I'd prefer a world where coming out didn't exist but for now I was happy to be in a place where I felt so comfortable that I was excited about coming out. So, one drunken night in the middle of a club, without any warning and under the influence of far too much alcohol, I blurted it out.

That will always be one of the proudest moments of my entire life.

The next day, with the support of some friends, I rang my mum and told her and she told the rest of the family. She was scared that I'd be hurt and, understandably so, she really didn't want to have to watch me hurt anymore. When I came home for Easter and first started talking about it she was thoughtful and fascinated, yet filled with concern and hesitation. She joked that she didn't care what I did as long as I was happy and as long as I didn't start dressing up as a woman.

Well, she must've flicked a switch in my head because that's exactly what I started doing. I became a drag queen. On 12 August 2016 I debuted as my drag alter ego, Bettie, in my hometown, Redditch. Standing on a stage with friends, dressed in full drag, doing the Time Warp, looking at an audience of family and friends who had travelled from all over the country doing the Time Warp too, was the second proudest moment of my entire life.

I have always suffered with PTSD. I'm actually a very unconfident, insecure and withdrawn person at times, though I always try to walk around with a smile on my face. But if I'm honest, and without wanting to sound at all self-absorbed, I'm proud of what I've overcome and of myself for what I've achieved so far. Over these last three years at university I've learned that hating the person who did those things to me when I was younger only ever really hurt me. Being filled with hate for somebody, anybody in fact, is only self-destructive. It achieves nothing. It just meant, I feel uncomfortable saying it but, in a way, as long as I hated him he still had a hold on me. So, simultaneously, in the process of learning to stop hating him I was removing him from my life completely.

Now, in that previously hateful place inside me, I replaced him with Bettie.

The point is, I'm no longer scared of gay. And also, I'm not actually gay. The pressure I put on myself to not like men and only like women meant that I never really knew if I actually did like women, if that makes sense? But anyway, turns out, I kind of just like everyone. I've just stopped trying to label everything. It really is quite easy; you should try it.

We have a picture in my living room at home and it says "Throw kindness around like confetti". I think we could all spend a little more time doing that.



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