

The background is a light blue gradient with a sunburst pattern of thin white lines radiating from the center. At the top, there is a shower of colorful confetti in red, yellow, green, and blue. On the left and right sides, there are vertical strips of the Pride flag, showing the colors red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and purple. The title 'THE PRIDE GUIDE' is written in large, bold, purple capital letters in the center.

THE PRIDE GUIDE

An Exploration of LGBTQIA+ Sex Ed



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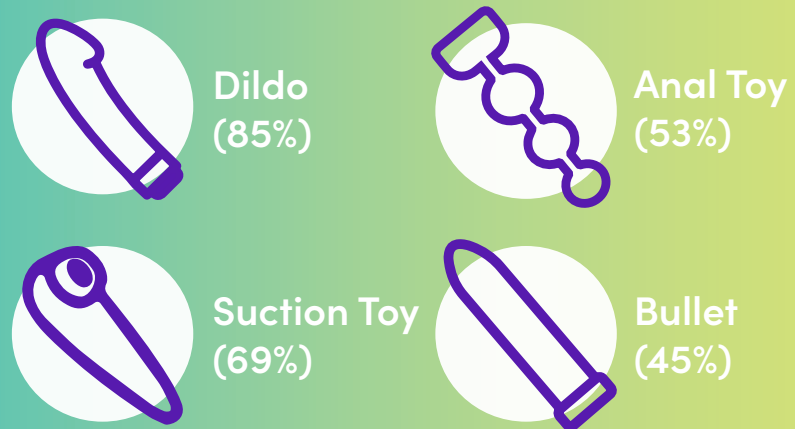
Sex Education:

- 1 in 3** LGBTQIA+ adults say their sex education was self taught.
- 1 in 10** said it would have been useful to learn about gender dysphoria in sex ed.
- 1 in 4** would have liked for self love and Pleasure to be taught within sex ed.
- 1 in 5** say consent should be a topic taught within sex ed.

Source: Lovehoney x TradeMutt Survey 2021 & Lovehoney Global Health Survey 2022

Sex Toys

Most popular sex toys for LGBTQIA+ adults:



Source: Lovehoney x TradeMutt Survey 2021

Dating in 2022:

- 46%** of LGBTQIA+ adults say they are currently more interested in casual sex than they were before the pandemic.
- 71%** say they're more interested in having an long-term relationship than they were before.
- 30%** say they're now more likely to use online dating services and go on virtual dates.

Source: Lovehoney US Summer of Love Survey 2020

LGBTQIA+, 91% vs. Heterosexual, 75%

LGBTQIA+ adults are more sexually adventurous than those that identify as heterosexual, with 91% of the queer community having used sex toys.

Source: Lovehoney x TradeMutt Survey 2021

Deal-Breakers:

- 34%** say that wanting to commit quickly is a deal-breaker.
- 32%** say that living too far away is a deal-breaker.
- 52%** say that hearing "I love you" on the first date is a deal-breaker.
- 40%** say that wanting to have sex on the first date is a deal-breaker.

Source: Lovehoney US Summer of Love Survey 2020

A FOREWORD FROM

Lovehoney Sexologist,

Chantelle Otten

SEX EDUCATION HAS HISTORICALLY BEEN HETERONORMATIVE AND BINARY.

You might think: “okay, but that’s easy to change the language to non-binary and voila! Everything will be okay then – right?”

No, actually. Because language is one thing, but normalisation comes from exposure. Most of us have never heard about LGBTQIA+ issues at school.

There is a direct link between our traditional sex education which fails to normalise queer desires, bodies, and lifestyles, and the discrimination queer individuals face in their everyday life. For example, trans kids are at a higher risk of bullying and mental health concerns.

Here, we are going to talk about queer sex ed, and move away from looking at sex through a heteronormative lens. Heteronormativity is when hetero sex is considered ‘the norm’. So, basically penis in vagina sex.

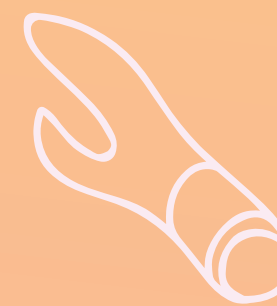
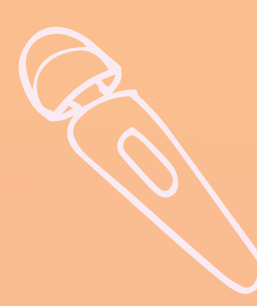
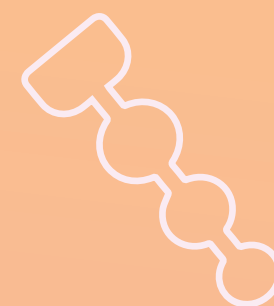
As I have spoken about many times before, prescribing penis in vagina sex rules out many people from the LGBTQIA+ community, people with certain disabilities and people who cannot have penetrative sex due to some sexual concerns. It may also not accommodate for variation in erotic activities, like using toys to assist in pleasure!

If you can, start to challenge the way you look at sex and examine whether you’re looking at sex in a more inclusive way, or ‘queering’ it.

There isn’t enough research or literature around trans and gender non-conforming sexual experiences. And for me, that means we need to break the silence and start to change the conversation in the mainstream.

There are a lot of binary narratives which we use when we talk about sex, and many of those in the gender non-conforming and trans-communities rarely feel like they are included, or have the opportunity to discuss sexuality, different types of trans-bodies and experiences in an open way.

Having a queer view of sex can change that, alongside re-thinking our language when it comes to activities and anatomy. It is always an individualised experience though, of course.



EXPLORING GENDER AND SEXUALITY

Did you know, by age 4, we start to develop a solid understanding of who we are and our gender identity, meaning a sense of who we are within our body? At this age, we are constantly analysing and absorbing the world around us.

As we grow as a society, it’s extremely important for young people to see that the scope of gender and sexuality is vast and colourful. This includes seeing their peers, friends, family and members of the general public as having a non-conforming gender and sexual identity.

What do I mean by this you may ask? Many of you may have been taught in school and through mainstream media that male and female are the only gender identities. This is the binary view of gender. In reality, there are many different understandings of gender which can be broken down into three parts:

Gender roles: The behaviours, values and attitudes a society considers appropriate for your perceived sex.

Gender identity: How you experience your own gender.

Gender expression: How you publicly express or present your gender. For example, your outward appearance and behaviour; the way you dress, your body language and voice.

When a child is born, they are often assigned a gender based on their physical attributes (i.e. whether they have a penis or vulva). This in turn tends to apply specific gender roles and expectations on the person from the get-go.

Those who have a vulva at birth are usually assigned female and are therefore expected to identify and present as such. There is an expectation that females are soft, gentle, emotional and caring.

On the other hand, those born with a penis are usually assigned male and are therefore expected to identify and present as such. There is an expectation that males are hard, strong, handy and dominant.

But we know now that these are just ‘stereotypes’ and people are able to be whoever they want to be, regardless of what their gender roles expect of them.

We also know there are many people who sit outside the model of typical gender identity. This means the gender they identify with doesn’t match the gender they were assumed to be at birth based on their physical characteristics. These people are characterised as non-binary.

Non-binary can be used as an umbrella term to include all the different gender identities which don’t fit into the binary system of male and female. Now, this can mean different things to different people so always ask someone who identifies as non-binary what it means to them.

Some people experience their gender as both male and female, some people experience gender as neither and some may not have a label for what they are experiencing.

So far, we have spoken a lot about gender, but we are yet to speak about sexuality. Yep, sexual orientation is a totally different topic.

Sexual orientation is about who you are sexually attracted to. This can be men, women or anyone on the gender spectrum.

Sexuality can be intertwined with emotional attraction (who you are emotionally attracted to) and physical attraction (who you are physically attracted to). And of course, it’s important to remember this is a broad spectrum, it’s not black and white.

We’ve covered just the basics of what are both massive areas of the human experience. I encourage you to find out more about these topics wherever you can to grow your understanding.

Gender and sexuality are colourful and your sex life should also be. It’s a great time to celebrate the diversity we have within our gender and sexual orientations, and take a broad approach to our sexual playground.

Going Your Own Pace: A Lived Experience On Understanding Our Own Personal Path

By Calum McSwiggan

I had my first crush at eight years old. His name was Thomas and he lit my small world on fire. I didn't really understand why I liked spending time with him so much, why I loved the way he did his hair or why I loved the clothes he wore. It was very much innocent then, and I had no idea how that crush was going to be the beginning of something bigger than I could have ever imagined.

I wasn't the same as everybody else: I liked boys instead of girls, just a small insignificant detail, and yet that meant my life was going to be different. It's only really now, some twenty-five years later, that I'm really able to appreciate how it put me on a completely different path.

Understanding and accepting myself was just the first step. It was a challenge, of course, but what I really struggled to get to grips with was how I felt I was being left behind. My school friends were all having their first kiss in the playground, fumbling their way through the awkward

school dance, asking that special someone to prom. The movies I watched and the books I read all told me this was normal – the high school experience – and yet I wasn't getting to enjoy any of it. One by one, my friends all lost their virginities, hooking up behind the bike sheds and bragging about the sex they had in the supply cupboard. They had boyfriends and girlfriends and told them they loved them, and yet I still hadn't even met another person who so much as felt the same as me. My world was small then, and I felt like the only gay person in the world.

By the time I left school and started meeting other queer people, I felt like I was playing catch up. My first kiss, my first boyfriend, losing my virginity, all of it had to happen fast. I felt the pressure so intensely that I ended up engaged to the first gay man I ever met. It was a mistake, of course, but nothing in the world could have convinced me of that then. We were just like our straight friends and at the time, it

felt like a win. It was only when that relationship would fall apart I would see the bigger picture.

It's true being LGBT+ sometimes limits our opportunities, there's less of us, we have a much smaller dating pool, and things just aren't always as simple. Before we can even contemplate love and romance, we have to go through the often difficult process of outing ourselves, and even then people may not accept us. We had to fight for our right to get married, adoption/surrogacy is complex, and sometimes it feels like the whole world wants to deny us the most fundamental life experiences.

I'm at the age now where all my friends are getting married and having kids, and while I'd be lying if I said I hadn't experienced moments of jealousy, I've also really begun to realise how being queer can be so incredibly freeing. It goes without saying that LGBT+ people experience discrimination and difficulties in

life which others perhaps don't, but when life tells you the rules weren't meant for you, then you have no choice but to throw away the entire rule book and make up the rules yourselves.

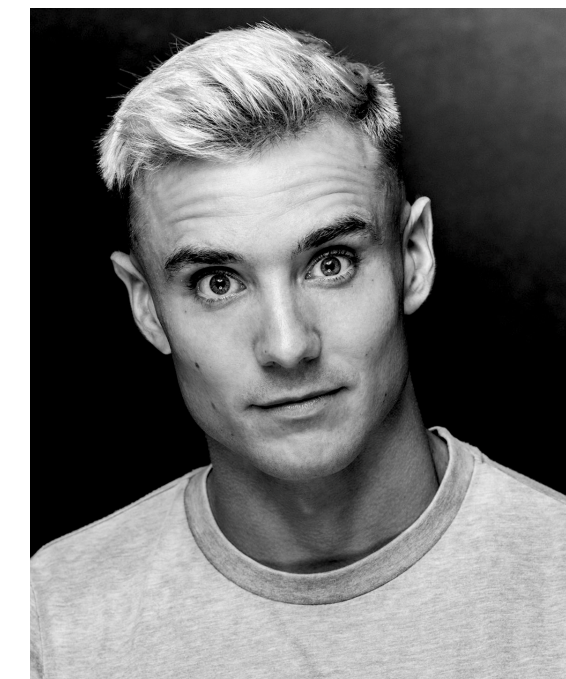
It's for this reason, in my experience, LGBT+ people are far more willing to experiment and explore. While others may feel the immediate pressure to get married, find a steady job, and have kids, queer people have the freedom to go against those norms. I believe we're more likely to experiment with open relationships, throuples, and meaningful sex with our friends. I believe we're more likely to find family in our friendship circles and in our wider community, and I believe we're more likely to be experimental in the bedroom and beyond. I think I spent so much of my life focusing on the things I was missing out on, then I never really stopped to realise all the wonderful things my identity has brought along with it.

"So, wherever you are in your journey – whether you're a teenager who's just beginning to accept themselves or whether you're in your sixties and deciding now is the right time to come out – just remember to do things at your own pace."

Life comes with so much pressure to do things and to do them quickly, but this is your reminder: all of that is a complete and utter nonsense. Nothing in life comes with a time limit and the same goes for people outside of the queer community too. Life will try to tell you to rush through some of the most meaningful things you'll ever experience, but there are no milestones, and no specified age-limit on reaching them, so just focus on your own journey and forget about everyone else.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Calum McSwiggan is a London based LGBT+ lifestyle YouTuber who makes content about queer culture, issues that affect the LGBT+ communities, mental health, and sex and relationships.



BECOMING OSCAR

Becoming Oscar was a confusing journey. It was early 2000's. I didn't know about transgender people beyond the tabloid's theories about celebrities being "secret" transwomen. As I got older and the internet grew, I understood transwomen existed, but I still didn't know what a transgender man was. I felt like a boy, but I thought I was crazy, so I acted like the girl everyone wanted me to be throughout school. I came out as a lesbian at 15 and no weight came off my shoulders, it made it all so confusing.

As high school came to a close, I realised I was Oscar. I felt like I was finally me, ready to face the world but left to figure it out all on my own. When my peers got guided through life because cis heteronormative people were the blueprint; the rest of us just had to fend for ourselves. It felt like the world was created for them and not people like me.

I remember sitting in my sexual education class being out as a lesbian but knowing in my mind I was a boy. I felt left out of the entire conversation in more ways than one. I was ready to learn but left knowing only how to safely have heteronormative sex and how to conceive a child.

Safe sex is just one of the things I wish they had talked about. I remember my peers often asking me "how do you even have sex as a lesbian?" It was so clear that not only did the queer teens not know how to engage in safe sex at all, but most of my peers didn't even know how to have sex that isn't between a cis man and woman. Learning how to clean and safely use toys, using condoms (even on toys) or dental dams for oral sex - we never even learned about consent!

It would have never come up in sexual education back then, but if teenage me was able to learn about trans bodies in school, it would've saved me years of confusion. To learn how trans people can still conceive, what happens to our bodies once on HRT. Not even just for people like me, but for everyone to learn. Why are we only learning about cis bodies in a class about sex?

After transitioning I was left feeling like I wasn't enough because I was missing some parts downstairs. If I had learnt it's okay for some men not to have a penis, I wouldn't have felt so ashamed - like sex with me was enough and penetration isn't the only way to do it.

After bad experiences and realising my body was a fetish to others, I made it through the maze and was able to let go in sex with some people. Not everyone - there still have been times where I don't always see a sexual partner's true intent until the deed is done. By putting myself first every time and not getting into something I'm not 100% on has protected me from more situations going sour.

Navigating sex as a trans person shut me off from moments which could be amazing because I truly don't know where it could go, my apprehension was and is rooted in fear of the unknown. It can still be difficult and probably always will be for people like me, but I do find beauty, pleasure and joy in sex and intimacy.

From one-night stands to relationships, being trans can be hard. When I found a partner who didn't just want me to embrace my true self authentically, but also protected and guided me through my transition, I never let them go. Being in such a freeing space made me finally feel sexy as a man.



There were no rules. I didn't feel I needed to act masculine in the bedroom and I got to explore things which used to make me feel dysphoric or uncomfortable. I knew they would always see me as the man I was, no matter what. It made me feel so empowered to do more and make change. I wanted to see people like me on magazines covers, mainstream media in Australia, on billboards, even more within my own queer community! I wanted to see us amplified and empowered.

It means the world to me to be able to have a platform, a voice to allow people to understand more about trans men and for other guys like me to feel seen and encouraged to love their body. My sexual journey had just begun when I started doing the work I do now. I started to love my body more than ever which was

so liberating after the early years of being so uncomfortable and confused. Of course, there are still times I can be left feeling like a fetish, but I have learnt very quickly what kind of people to avoid and what people I can work with who just want to help amplify me and make me feel comfortable and free.

I create things I would want to watch. I wanted other trans men to feel sexy and seen, to change the narrative of how we are seen within the industry. Placing us in places we weren't noticed before. My sexual journey has been a wild ride and I regret not doing it all sooner, but I know there are still plenty of years ahead to unlock and achieve so much more, for me and my community.

I'm so proud of the man I am today and the work I do. The boundaries and self-love I have for my beautiful trans body. Everyone's sexual journey is different but being trans adds multiple hurdles. I know I still have a few more to jump over, and I don't really have an end goal with the work I do. But I know I'm on the right path.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Hi! I'm Oscar, some people know me as hotboiyo. I'm a model, artist and sex positive trans activist living in Naarm. Over the decade of my journey and career I've been dedicated to pushing visibility for trans men, my passion for my work and the industry helps me keep striving for trans men to be seen for who we really are!

IN CONVERSATION WITH OSCAR

NAVIGATING SEX

AS A TRANS MAN

Exploring sex can feel isolating and confusing, especially when the images we are shown in mainstream media and porn, don't accurately reflect who we are as individuals or the people around us.

We speak to proud Trans Man, Oscar, about his relationship with sex and himself.

Q: How would you describe your current and past sex life?

A: Uncomfortable.

I didn't really know much about my own mind and body. I didn't understand why sex made me feel so uncomfortable, it was how they looked at me, how I felt they viewed me. Before transitioning I wanted to feel like the man I was but I didn't feel I looked it or they perceived me like that either. It was one of the only times I felt dysphoric.

I never even took nudes for partners, so having sex was something I craved and wanted but was in two minds about it in most situations. I could never relax and enjoy it. I had good and bad sex just like everyone, but when it was bad it was mentally damaging.

I was everyone's experiment, someone else's toy, 'something new to try'. The world is so phallocentric, it made me feel like having a pussy as a man was the most unattractive thing.

Q: What's one thing you wish your past self knew before engaging with sex?

A: You don't owe anyone anything, don't do things that don't please you, and that sex isn't goal focused – it's about pleasure. In high school I let boys lead everything. Like most teenagers, I didn't know better.

The only thing sexual I knew is what's shown in porn and media, then transitioning I wanted to be liked so bad I let people talk about me and use me as their toy. It was never for my pleasure, only theirs. You deserve so much more, learn to love your body and be strong in your boundaries. You have sex for you, no one else!

Q: What is something you hope for your future self in terms of how you want to progress on your personal journey with sex?

A: It's crazy to think less than 2 years ago was the first time I was shirtless in not a safe space, crazy to think since then I've achieved so much personal growth around my beautiful trans body, the way I view myself in sex.

I just want to keep this momentum, I went through so much of my transition thinking I was disgusting and didn't see people wanting me as anything beyond a fetish. I hope to let go even further, to enjoy and be free and keep pushing for visibility in Australia with trans-masc bodies in sex.

Q: How are you currently feeling about your sexual self?

A: Empowered, comfortable, confident.

In my personal life, I don't feel any pressures to be masculine in sex anymore. I don't care to put up with transphobic, fetishisation comments because I don't know what to say anymore. I'm so proud of my genitals and hardly dysphoric in sex ever!

I feel so free, so beautiful in sex. With fetishisation, I deal with all the things I have from my past. For the first time in my life, the last year has been the most empowering I have felt in my own sexuality. It's all for me, all I want and deserve.

Q: What advice do you have to others who might be in a similar situation to you?

A: Navigating this world as a trans person is hard, especially in sex. Everyone's journey is different. Everyone's wants, needs and choices in their sex-life are so different. So, the best advice I can give is be strong in your own boundaries. Put yourself first.

There are plenty of people who will treat you the way you deserve. It's a battlefield sometimes, but you know what you deserve, so don't take anything less.

Interview by Lovehoney writer, Holly

Who I Am & Who I Was Expected To Be

By Naavikaran

The greatest tragedy of my life is not that I was assigned male at birth, but that I was expected to live in a certain box.

A place which did not offer any form of kindness or guidance to the various levels of confusion and punishment I was experiencing, when really, as a child and young trans person, I deserved play, joy, and fulfilment. For over 20 years I did not expect to find any form of pleasure or happiness with being present in my body.

Growing up I found myself stuck between who I am and what I am expected to be. It was deeply clear from the very beginning of my memory that I would never fit in as a man and was forcing myself into a world where my body and being does not fit with the ways of the world.

The only other place in my life where the word trans was not used as a taboo was the world of pornography. But porn was another form of chaos where every trans body was a commodity to be exploited and every expression of trans bodies and genitalia is disgusting.

The heroes of my story really are Black and Brown women who helped me realise there was a different narrative to be written.

I am significantly disconnected from my culture. Therefore, any form of happiness derived from being Indian needed me to figure out some form of spiritual connection with my ancestors and the many magical ways in

which trans identities in South Asia expressed their ways of being. It led me to my pronouns as 'she/her/hers' (to honour the women of my lineage) and 'they/them/theirs' (to honour the beautiful chaos of my being) as I began leading a life closer to my truth.

A few years ago, I was introduced to the concept of 'T4T' or 'Trans for Trans' a slang term which states sex for trans people with other trans people is the best kind. And geez, did that blow my mind!

Being seen and acknowledged for who I am, whilst having sex, derives so much pleasure. There is a level of respect and intimacy, regardless of what one is into, which has the blessing of freeing you, when you consensually sleep with other trans people. It's beyond societal norms, attraction and every lie porn has told you.

I did learn soon enough that trans can be synonymous with liberation; a sense of freedom offered by gender diversity. I also think everyone truly does have access to this form of freedom. Gender diversity, I've recognised, is often less about one's gender and more about the deep relationship they can create with themselves for an entirely fulfilling wellbeing.

I have experienced some horrible realities, and if I could go back in time, I would take my younger self out of every scenario of harm. I am excited that transgender young people have a future before them. And I am hoping the way ahead continues to be safer and beautiful.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Goddess Naavikaran (she/they) is a musician, community facilitator, writer, theatre producer and choreographer from India, based in Meanjin (Brisbane). Their work creates platforms for accessible and safe storytelling for identities of various intersections and communities.

In 2021, Naavikaran produced two sold-out and new theatre-works, *People Of Colours*, and *Brown Church*, that premiered at Brisbane Powerhouse and Queensland Theatre respectively. They have previously been awarded the 30 Under 30 LGBTIQ+ Leaders title in Australia by Out For Australia in 2019 for their contributions to the community.

You can find her music on all streaming platforms under the name 'Naavikaran'.



What I Would Tell My Younger Self

By Jack Vidgen



When I think back to what I was taught in sex ed as a young queer person – whether I knew I was queer at that stage or not – I realise there really weren't any conversations that would have created a space for me to have a healthy view on sex as a gay man.

From the lack of education and normalisation of sex as a queer person, sex became paired with secrecy for me. Every time I had a sexual experience with a guy, because I wasn't taught that it was normal (I feel like I was almost taught the opposite), it felt like I was doing something perverted, and I always felt so much shame afterwards.

The only queer sex education I feel like I got was from porn and I think we all know that's the last place we should be getting foundational learnings from! In hindsight, I know the mix of shame, secretive sexual encounters, porn, and an abusive relationship when I was young, were my only sources of gay sex education. This really opened the door to a lot of issues for me – body confidence, my identity as a gay man, and unhealthy romantic relationships which only now am

I starting to work through. It's taken its toll and it's taking a long time to actually have a healthy view on sex as a gay man.

I'm reading a book at the moment called 'The Velvet Rage' by Alan Downs. It's been such a powerful read I feel like the book was written about me and my experience. I've had a couple of gay friends who have read it as well and they've said the same thing. It talks about our parallel experiences of shame as gay men and the stages of life we go through.

So often we are the ones that are seen to be excelling in our careers and social lives in such a fabulous way. However, beneath the surface, serious problems within our community such as depression, substance abuse, suicide and sex addiction are at an all-time high.

I can't help but question whether we'd be having these experiences if we'd only been affirmed in our sexualities at a younger age, and actually had some level of queer sex ed?

There's a quote I read once, that basically describes gay men as often creating a version of ourselves, growing up, to feel safe and accepted. Then once we come out, we spend the rest of our lives unlearning this identity we created in order to embark on a journey of truly discovering our authentic selves.

I remember relating to that so much but feeling like there was a phase left out. I've seen this phase firsthand in myself where after coming out, I've expressed my sexuality in a very overt and over sexualised way. I'm only now seeing that this has been part of my journey of self-acceptance and probably also related to the abuse I suffered when I was young. I denied myself of my sexuality for so many years so finally when I could, it kind of came bursting out the sides.

I'm fortunate enough now to have had some positive queer role models to look up to but this wasn't always the case. If I take myself back 10 years, to my teenage self – even though being gay was a lot more accepted than say in the 80's – I can see now by the lack of education and role

models available to me, the topic of queer sex itself was still very taboo.

I just came across a video from an ABC special called 'Little Kids, Big Talk' and I'm wiping the tears from my eyes as I'm writing this. The video shows a few children asking one of my favourite drag queens, Courtney Act, a bunch of questions surrounding gender. It brings me so much joy that something like this is on a national TV and from a predominantly conservative network.

It warms my heart to see we are slowly changing and progressing, and our younger generation will have more education than I did. That said, it also stirs up sadness for me when I think of the young Jack Vidgen who knew he was different but couldn't quite put a finger on exactly what it was about himself that was different. The vocabulary wasn't really available to him and looking back, I still vividly feel the confusion my teenage self struggled with.

I'm in a space in life where I'm truly seeking to live authentically. Whether that's in my work,

personal, spiritual, or sex life, I feel like as each year goes on, I'm peeling back the layers of a false identity I created to make myself feel safe, and now I'm getting to know myself as a gay man.

As Alan Downs so eloquently wrote, "we are a unique blending of testosterone, and gentleness, hyper-sexuality and gentle sensuality, rugged masculinity and refined gentility."

One of the truths I hold on to throughout my life is that so much beauty can come from pain. I wish I could go back in time and tell my younger self that, and reassure him he will find happiness and authenticity as a gay man. I would tell him that two men having sex will one day be seen in the same light as those of the opposite sex. I would tell him that even though he's going to experience abuse, it doesn't define his worth.

I would tell him he'll one day be celebrated for his differences and will find peace in his journey of discovering his truest, highest form of himself.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jack Vidgen is an Australian singing sensation, best known for winning the fifth season of Australia's Got Talent at the age of 14. His debut single and too album, "Yes I Am", charted at number three on the ARIA Albums Chart, and was certified gold. In 2019 Vidgen took part in season 8 of Australian 'The Voice' and was eliminated after the Semi-Finals. He has also appeared on 'Eurovision, Australia Decides', 'America's Got Talent: The Champions' and 'I'm a Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here!'.

Jack is a fierce member/leader of the LGBTQI+ community who has faced major brands as part of Mardi Gras over the years and was in the top 10 googled Australians in 2019–2020. In October 2021, Vidgen was revealed as the "Kebab" on The Masked Singer (Australian season 3), again making it to the semi-finals.

AN ODE TO THE LOCKER ROOM GIRLS

Behind the red rope and down the stairs, I'm welcomed under the familiar hazy arch of peach-scented vape clouds and eight-dollar Hello Kitty body spray. I'm about to be swallowed whole by shimmering craters of belly button rings and seas of hair extensions. My heart beats and swells like it never has before as I'm enveloped whole in cuddles and howls of laughter. We ricochet off each other and the walls like we're in a pinball machine. It hasn't yet been twelve hours since we've last seen each other, but it feels good to finally be home and back in their arms. I hop around the carpet pulling up my compression stockings, placing Band-Aids on my blisters and rubbing arnica cream into my dance bruises. Locker doors are doused in stickers of glittery dolphins, love hearts, rainbows and ACAB paraphernalia. Someone asks "Does anyone have a spare..." - without hesitation, perfectly manicured hands fling themselves out holding gifts. Ural sachets, wet wipes, tampons, G-strings, condoms, crystals and gum. This is your home now, what's mine is yours, no questions asked.

In our house we use the bathrooms with the doors open, balancing on the 8-inch wedges of clear plastic we have to watch Kim Kardashian play dress up in every other month. We sip on plastic glasses of Prosecco whilst stretching our glutes and calves like a more raunchy group of ballerinas. For those bleeding, we open our legs for others to check if our tampons and sponges are shoved up far enough, strings all tucked in. In the background the same old top 40 playlist echoes while we cuddle on the couches. Some of us cry here over troubles with our exes, families, partners, landlords, our body image, our sexuality. Some of us laugh for the exact same reasons. Some of us curl up in our lingerie with migraines or cramps while others stroke our hair. Each act here is a form of worship to who we are, who will come here after we are gone, and the workers here before us.

I lean against the hand dryer in the bathroom and am met with expectant eyes and folded arms. It's my turn to give my dating life update. I missed a few shifts and they all know why.

I met Aiden* at a bar almost a month ago. As soon as I saw her, I had to have her. At first, she declined my offer to grab a drink due to her assessment load, which meant The Locker Room Girls declined her too, no questions asked. But Aiden and I had since found ourselves calling each other late at night, my toes curling around my bedsheets when her name appeared on my screen. Any chance I could, I would message her. "Hiiiiiii," My breath would hitch in my throat at the three undulating dots. "Hi baby".

When we eventually found ourselves underneath my bed sheets, I was spinning. I felt like I'd spun right off the pole at work and landed in bed with her without a chance to stop the dizziness. Despite everything that has ever made me doubt who I am, having sex with her was something I knew I was truly sure about. Climaxing with her was different and exploring our bodies with each other - together as a team and in a safe environment - created a sense of euphoria I had never felt before. I was sure of things now. I was queer and I was safe to be here.

"Have any of you guys felt that before?"

Immediately I was back in the pinball machine, all of us feeding off each other like bees to honey. The Locker Room Girls and I talked about our previous experiences in "straight" sex before we "caught the gay". We shared how it felt like sometimes we never had a voice in sex, we never asked for things, we never set boundaries or even asked what our partner's boundaries might be. Instead, we would just lay back and think to ourselves, this is pretty enjoyable, right? This is what we've seen in the movies so it should be pretty good? Shouldn't it?

It wasn't until I started engaging in queer sex (and talking about it openly) that I realised a whole other dimension existed. It's a thin veil, a portal, a black hole. You can just make out the sheen of it when the cheap strobes and disco balls touch the light just right. It only has one message for you.

You deserve to want what you want and to have all of it, fully, wholly and unashamedly.

I believe it's why as part of the L.G.B.T.Q.I.A.+ community, we can be perceived as a threat because we are the people who want it all and furthermore, know we deserve it all - and that is asking for too much already. One thing I've learnt along my queer journey is to always ask for more, if not to demand it. It's easier said than done to unpack yourself out from your neatly packaged Tupperware container and to stop apologising over for you who are. It's easier said than done to let it be too late for everyone else, to let your screams of pain and ecstasy be a siren song of knowing who you are and what you deserve. As a white cis woman within the queer community, the ability to be able to do these things are already more accessible to me than others.

The queer community will always welcome you with open arms. There is enough room within this space for everyone to be loved and to love. It is here you can find a place that you can call home and bring yourself back from the underworlds you could be drowning in. Let your own version of The Locker Room Girls help you take up the space you deserve. Fight for each other and fight for yourself. Use your voice to lift up others in the community who can't use theirs. Let yourself ask for more. Never stop living for your right to love and be loved by whoever it is that makes you feel on fire.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Holly* is a young, queer, sex-positive writer and sex worker who wants to create an inclusive and safe sexual community for everybody and hopes to do so by sharing all the highs and lows of her own experiences.

*Names have been changed



The Importance Of Language & Small Gestures

By Christian Hull

Growing up in the 90s was fun. I have older parents, who were in their late thirties and early forties when I was born. A few years later mum popped out three more boys, triplets! My childhood was wild – chaos even. We went to church and were raised catholic. It wasn't a strict catholic upbringing. My theory is that dad only took us to church every Sunday so mum could have an hour of alone time without all of us raucous kids.

Our home was very supportive. My parents have always been our biggest fans. Something I noticed growing up was the language they used around topics like homosexuality. When it appeared on the TV they never said anything derogatory, they always used inclusive language in my teen years when I should've been getting a girlfriend. I remember it was never "when you have a girlfriend," it was "if you choose to have a partner," and while I was still coming to terms with my sexuality, I knew as a 13-14 year old, from those small gestures it didn't matter what my sexuality was.

They never sat me down and confronted me. They never made things super awkward. They really let me discover who I was and supported me. That for me was so important. They let me come to terms with it and then when I was ready they let me tell them.

It was abundantly clear I was a little raging homo from the get-go. The theatre performances I would put on and the prancing around. I was a gay kid – watching the old home videos is hysterical. I really commend mum and dad for letting me just do whatever without feeling the need to point me in the direction of "being a boy." For parents of my mum and dad's generation that was a big thing.

As each year passes, I notice more parents and children being far more open and expressive. I would have never come out while I was in school but now I see kids happily identify within the LGBTQI community.

There is still a lot of work in various communities to be done. I think organisations still have a long way to come but I see small gestures and the language they use starting to change. Change takes time sadly. If you want to be a supportive ally, you can start by making sure you don't let someone's sexuality define who they are. No whispers of "are they?" or trying to out someone because you're ok with it. Making your language inclusive and not assuming anything.

I won't lie, it can be extremely hard. Most of us have been ingrained with pink for girls, blue for boys. It takes time to unlearn these things. YOU CAN DO IT!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Christian Hull is an AACTA nominated Australian Comedian and Content Creator who has accumulated over 670 million views on his plethora of hilarious videos. He is best recognised for his character sketches, enthusiasm over a t-shirt folder, guessing paint colours, reacting to hilarious 5 minute craft hacks and trying to find the 'soy sauce' Coles Mini. Christian has since published his book titled 'Leave Me Alone' through publishers Allen and Unwin which instantly became a bestseller.



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