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Pink, Purple, Blue

As I'm sitting in bed, trying to figure out how I want to start this paper, I catch sight of the flag hanging on my mirror. It's made up of three stripes, purple sandwiched between pink and blue, as tall as I am and about three times as wide; inconspicuous enough that nobody would really *question* it, just see it and maybe wonder for a second or two why it's there before turning away. But to me, that flag encapsulates one of the deepest, most inner components of who I am. It's one of my most precious belongings, yet it's thrown as if in afterthought over the top edge of the wooden paneling and arranged just so all the colors are visible. While it's a comfort to me, nobody else recognizes it. They don't need to recognize it; the flag's not on display for them. The bisexual pride flag is only there for me.

In was mid-April of 2016, I was just shy of fourteen and beginning to question my sexuality. By then, most of my friends had come out to me as part of the LGBT community, and I was struggling to understand my place in that. My whole life, I'd been raised in a conservative Christian household. Though my parents tolerated my friends, I was uncertain that they'd accept me if I discovered I was LGBT, so I forced myself to repress any same-sex attraction I experienced. For a few months, I'd tricked my mind into thinking this was just some weird side effect of puberty, or a coping mechanism for the intense emotional turmoil I happened to be going through at the time. I told myself that it wasn't real. It was just a phase. I wasn't really LGBT; I couldn't be. This whole thing would blow over in a few weeks and I'd be back to my heterosexual self.

That never happened. Instead, I found myself beginning to break down those barriers I'd put up between my consciousness and my sexuality. By that June, I'd given that sexual orientation its true

name: bisexuality. In the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, bisexuality is defined as “the romantic attraction, sexual attraction, or sexual behavior toward both males and females”. Strangely enough, it was a late-night BuzzFeed quiz that allowed me to label what I felt and gain a sort of peace. In early August I worked up the nerve to come out to my mom, who’d been a bit bewildered but for the most part accepting. It took me weeks to summon that kind of courage, knowing there was always the possibility that she’d reject me. In the days leading up to my confession, I’d obsessed over verses like Romans 1:26-28¹, Jude 1:7², and 1 Timothy 1:8-11³, trying to ingest their meaning enough that if she quoted them to me they wouldn’t sting so sharply. Despite her affirmations that her love for me was unconditional, I couldn’t help but wonder if she just hadn’t considered the possibility that I could be bisexual. A part of your heart dies when you have to prepare for your own kin to say they hate you for who you love. I tried and failed to ready myself for that, and I consider myself to be lucky I didn’t need to be.

My mom is one of the most devout Christians I know. While that’s not a problem, it made me nervous because of the religious connotations of being LGBT. She attended an Episcopalian church throughout her youth and made a point to take my siblings and I to church twice a week. I didn’t know how she’d react. The last thing I wanted was the Bible thrown at me like a weapon instead of a

¹ **26** Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. **27** In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error. **28** Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done.

² **7** In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.

³ **8** We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. **9** We also know that the law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, **10** for the sexually immoral, for those practicing homosexuality, for slave traders and liars and perjurers—and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine **11** that conforms to the gospel concerning the glory of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.

vessel meant for love. Too many other LGBT people have to endure that kind of pain; I'm grateful I never did. Too many Christians pervert the true meaning of the Bible to fit in with their homophobia for me to feel entirely safe opening up to them - despite being a Christian myself.

When she said she still loved me, I began to cry. I hadn't realized how heavily my secret had been weighing on me until there wasn't so much of a burden to carry. But despite the fact that she still saw me as her daughter and not an abomination, I was still afraid. It became clear soon after that I was afraid of rejection by society at large as well, which was ironic because most of my friends were LGBT. According to *The Advocate*, a little less than 2/3 of Generation Z identify as heterosexual, so for the most part my fears were unfounded. However, though my experiences were largely positive, many others' were not. I interviewed two of my close friends - Isabella Amorine and Libby Jones - both of whom are part of the LGBT community - about how they were treated by others after coming out. Isabella commented that "I've been told my sexuality was wrong, that it was a choice, or that I was too young to know what my sexual orientation is. They assumed that I had just gone along with the trend of bisexuality in recent years." When asked the same question, Libby responded:

"I've never had anything derogatory said directly to me, but I have been told about comments and opinions people have of me because of my sexuality... I'm not too affected by that kind of thing...but I know a lot of people who can't say the same, so I would rather those comments be directed towards me than at more vulnerable people."

When I became aware that I was bisexual, I became aware of just how normalized and casual homophobia is in American culture. I don't exaggerate when I say that I hear the phrase "that's so gay" said at least twice a day by people I would otherwise assume weren't in any way homophobic. What's

more troubling is that when they're asked about their prejudices, it's revealed that most of the time, those prejudices are unconscious. An article on *Psychology Today* delves deeper into that bias.

“Anti-LGBT remarks such as ‘that’s so gay’ are often unintentional and a common part of teens’ vernacular. Most do not recognize the consequences, but the casual use of this language often carries over into more overt harassment...It doesn’t matter that kids become acclimated to harmful language. ‘That’s so gay’ is *always* pejorative, always harmful, and always homophobic. It is especially harmful to kids struggling with their sexuality who have yet to come out. Think about this: For thousands of years, religions have called homosexuality an abomination. People still get murdered if someone thinks they are gay, and not just in other countries. Imagine being that kid who suspects he is LGBT, is feeling shame and in danger for his friendships or his life because he can’t turn to anyone to talk about it ... not even God.”

In essence, the words become so common that heterosexual teens become completely oblivious to them. *They’re* not LGBT, so what does it matter? The real impact here is on the LGBT students who hear that phrase time and time again, a constant reminder that their sexuality is always associated with the negative, and always a source of joking for those who don’t understand how harmful it is.

Adolescence not only brought about my revelation about my sexuality, but also an onslaught of political socialization. Up until that point, I’d had limited encounters with left-wing ideologies, and considered myself to be relatively right-leaning. As I came to terms with being bisexual, my eyes were opened to the world I live in. In that year alone, I knew three people who were disowned or kicked out of their homes for coming out - or being outed - as LGBT. I started looking into the origins of

homophobia, and found a cesspool of toxic beliefs that couldn't be anything but reactionary. In searching for a way to combat those who would humiliate me for my sexuality, I was sucked into a hateful whirlwind of online misogyny, racism, xenophobia, and Islamophobia. I asked innocent questions, wanting only to educate myself on topics I'd previously known little about, and was met with men three times my age threatening to beat me, rape me, kill me. This acted as the catalyst to what I affectionately call my feminist awakening. I became an avid supporter of women's rights, marriage equality, common-sense gun control, and of dismantling institutional racism. Learning about the economy through my own research caused me to oppose total capitalism and opt for more of a socialist approach, preferring to give low-income workers a safety net if they needed. Accepting my bisexuality opened the doors to this much broader, much more substantial identity in my beliefs.

The flag on my mirror was a Christmas gift from my mom, two years after I first came out to her as bisexual. She smiles every time she sees that I keep it where I can always see it, diagonal from the foot of my bed. My identity in the LGBT community is strong, and her acceptance is part of what makes me so sure of who I am. Though demure, the flag means much more to me than just strips of colored fabric. The flag is my banner. The flag is my journey. And in some ways, the flag is my home: a place for me to shelve my worries, find solace in the confidence of who I am, and rest.

Works Cited

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