

## Transcript of Podcast 047: I'm Coming Out

{Intro.

*KITTY (from a WhatsApp Group I'm on): What do you mean you're not Trans? You're really ruining my wokeness!*

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{intro music - jaunty, bouncy}

{Intro standard announcement:

*Hello. Thank you for tuning in. You're listening to Travel Tales From Beyond The Brochure, a fortnightly series looking at unfamiliar places across the world, and aspects of travelling you may never have thought of. I'm your host, The Barefoot Backpacker, a middle-aged Brit with a passion for offbeat travel, history, culture, and the 'why's behind travel itself. So join me as we venture ... beyond the brochure.}*

{Music fades. Podcast begins}

Hello :)

Do you remember when I used to have a travel podcast? And I used to talk about subjects like solo travel, luggage, and hometown exploration, and talk about destinations like Vanuatu and Uzbekistan? Ah, one day I'll go back to that. Maybe one day soon. Who knows ...

Anyway. Housekeeping. Do I have any housekeeping? Any life updates? None that I'm prepared to say at this point, for privacy and nothing-is-certain-yet reasons. But there may be change afoot. [muah hah hah].

I've realised there's actually two things that could potentially refer to; I'm categorically not talking about my visit on Friday to Sunny G Radio; it's a local community radio station in 'Sunny Govan' who are always looking for volunteers. I will talk about that more next time (including its name), but not for those aforementioned reasons, more because at the time of typing the podcast, we've only had a preliminary conversation and there's no discussion yet as to what I'm going to be doing there, if indeed anything at all.

I had fun at the weekend. I mean, the meetup I had with my friends in Kirkby-in-Ashfield was grand, if a bit fleeting (and I had to sack off Parkrun to make it a viable visit), and it was great as a follow-up to meet up with Nat, from Natpaker Travel, and her hubby, for a night of gratuitous ... drinking in the best pub in Birmingham. Which was, I may point out, rammed to the rafters when I walked in, and facemasks were very definitely notable by their absence. This was true for the whole of the West Midlands, in fact, as I took the tram into the city centre at Sunday lunchtime and despite masks being mandated, I was the only person wearing one. Because obviously the Covid pandemic is over.

I was staying in a Premier Inn, just outside Oldbury in the Black Country, a part of the world which is really interesting and right up my blog niche, but equally an area I used to live and work in. Indeed I walked past the building I had my first job in in the energy industry, which I started in September 1997. Given we moved out of that building and into a different town in August 1999, and given that building is on a backstreet, I can honestly say I walked down a road that I hadn't set foot on since before some my Travel Twitter and Asexuality Discord friends were born. Which, hm, yes. It did feel a little strange to see what had changed, and yet also so familiar.

My journey back up to Glasgow was a bit fraught. I'd taken the plane, because it was much quicker than the coach and significantly cheaper than the train. Getting down was fine, but flying back was ... for some reason at security they'd only got one scanner open, so the queue stretched back almost to the departures entrance, and it took almost an hour to get through. It didn't help that some people had clearly forgot how to go through security - 'you're not allowed a bag that size for your toiletries', 'why didn't you take your laptop out your bag and have it ready while waiting in line' - but for the number of flights, this struck as being inefficient. But then, once everyone had boarded, we set off from the departure gate ... and then went back because of an issue with

one of the engines. That they had to call a toolbox of engineers to come fix. Which they did by doing a 'reset'; basically they switched it on and off again. It's amazing how often that cliché actually works. I'd have been more worried had they conducted 'percussive maintenance', to be honest. Anyway we landed at Glasgow only an hour late, after all that, so that was all right in the end.

Anyway. On with the podcast. As I mentioned last episode, this month is full of all manner of commemorative and awareness days, weeks, months, etc. These include Coming Out Day, which was, ironically, the day I eventually dropped that previous episode, Pronouns Day, and Asexual Awareness Week. The latter is, at the time of typing, not listed on the Wikipedia article for October. So if anyone wants to update Wikipedia and cite this podcast as a source to state that the last full week in October is Asexual Awareness Week, that would be ... exactly what Wikipedia is for, I guess. Look, if the Sounds Fake But Okay podcast can get its own Wikipedia article, I'm sure that's a valid citation. Cite them, too, if you need to.

[As an aside, a while ago I was curious as to why I had a strange blog traffic spike on my post about St Kilda. Research discovered my blog was used as a citation to one of the sentences on the Wikipedia article for the island group. I am one of 166 references; it's a very referenced article].

It made sense therefore to continue the journey from my last episode, into self-awareness and 'Coming Out', and talk this time about sexuality and gender identity. Now, some while ago, well, in Episode 7 in fact, I talked about sexuality in the context of travel, I (and my contributors) spoke specifically about the issues and mitigations we face as LGBTQIA+ travellers. Similarly, I touched upon the idea in my more recent episodes on Influencer Responsibility (episodes 41 and 42) over whether we as Queer-spec travellers have a duty or responsibility to our peers over places we travel to (and of course businesses that we frequent, both at home and abroad). And while our specific issues are different, both in scope and intensity, between the different letters, it's definitely true that we as a community share a lot more of those issues than are separated by them. One of the biggest issues, one that needs to be faced before we can assess our travels as part of the Rainbow Acronym, is 'Coming Out' in the first place.

'Coming Out' is obviously a huge topic with many layers. But in keeping with the theme of my last episode, I want to talk firstly and largely about a side that isn't mentioned as often in the conversations around 'how do you come out', and 'is it safe to come out', and that's the very first step of all - 'coming out' to yourself.

<coming out to yourself>

{Sarah - SFBO

*For me, coming out to myself was not the hard part. I mean, obviously there was some questioning going on, you know that lasted a little while, but for me, once I kind of landed on the identifier as Aro and Ace, you know I was okay with that, I've always just been the kind of person that's just been like 'okay, this is the way it is'.*

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That was Sarah, one of the hosts of the Sounds Fake But Okay podcast, giving a brief overview of how she felt when she 'came out' to herself about her sexual and romantic orientations, and, let's be honest, that's pretty much what I did, tho perhaps for different reasons.

So, you all know I'm asexual. It's in my Social Media bios, and in the past the asexual pride flag was a part of my social media profile pictures. I've spoken about it before in some depth on at least two podcast episodes - the one about sexuality and travel, but also one specifically about my growing awareness of my asexuality I recorded for Asexual Awareness Week this time last year, episode 32. You'll have seen me wear asexuality-themed clothing and face-masks. I'm obviously clearly open about my sexuality, both to other people and to myself.

Coming Out to myself as Asexual wasn't really something that I worried about, maybe because I came to the word so relatively late that, like the way I took on the word dyspraxia, I saw it as a simple explanation of something that I'd known about myself for years but for which I'd never had an easy and clear description or word for. The feelings that I'd had over the years were more 'no-one else is like this, I'm just weird' rather than

'I'm actively not 'standard issue' and that's scary'.

And I think that makes a huge difference. I think coming to it late meant I'd already gone through the 'is there something wrong with me' phase before I had words for it, whereas if there's a word that you feel you can relate to, that word may have 'baggage' already that you're scared about, or you feel 'no, I'm not that, I can't be that'; what are those five stages of grief? Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, Acceptance. I was, at least for asexuality, lucky in the sense I 'accepted' it when I found it, because I'd already experienced the other stages without even knowing what I was feeling was a common and accepted feeling. It's more common to know the word, the idea, exists, and when you realise you might 'fit' it, immediately hit denial.

It helps to be younger, I guess, so when you're going through those initial realisations and thoughts, what you're thinking is already ... you can grasp it, you know what it is. Here is my friend Kira, you'll have heard them on previous episodes of the pod, talking about their journey through sexual orientation, which started at a young age when they were playing with toys.

*{Kira - 5*

*I mean, my sexuality has leaped quite a bit, cos obvs you go through the pre-teen and early teens bit where everybody's brought up to be straight therefore you're straight because man and a woman, you know, Adam and Eve and all that kind of bollocks that you're indoctrinated in whether you want to be or not, you just are, it's how you're brought up, I have a man and a dad, so you know, there you go, that's how it's supposed to work, and you're always told 'when a mummy and a daddy love each other', course you are, because we want to indoctrinate our children into normality.*

*And then you get to your teenage years where you start experimenting. And my one was, and this is gonna sound so weird, so I'm completely outing myself here, but usually as a kid I loved the Barbie dolls and the female sculptures and all that, because I was obsessed with all the curves and the curvatures of them, because that's what grown women are supposed to look like, it's a beauty standard, so all these curves, all these tiny tight waists on the Barbies and stuff like that, and I used to find them kind of amazing, I was just kind of like 'is that what we're all going to look like when we grow up', why don't people always look like that?', raised questions and all that, my parents found it harmless, and that led to later on I did the whole 'god I must be a lesbian, because I'm attracted to women, because I find them so much more attractive', and yeh I went through that stage for a bit, I got me a girlfriend, and then I kind of realised that I still liked men, so I was like 'okay, so we're on both sides of this', so from about, what 14, 15, up to being like 28, I just assumed I was Bisexual, I was just like 'well that's the only term there is for it'. And you get the common misconceptions with that: 'You're just greedy', no, I just happen to like both, I do, that's just how I feel about this entire situation.*

*It was before the Bisexuality movement stated that they included Trans people that I realised that it was, you know, when I was asked 'would you date somebody who's Trans', 'Yes', but there was like zero hesitation there Kira?', 'Yes'. 'Why?' 'It's more because I'm attracted to a person's personality. I mean, granted, looks are a small part of what I look for - I do have 'a type', if you will - but it's the personality. If I can't get on with the personality of a person then I'm not dating them, because what's the point? They can be as pretty as you like, it doesn't matter. So Trans never really fell into any sort of ... it never really registered with me. Are they a nice person? Do I get on with them? Yeh, sure. Bring them on.*

*Sex to me is a recreational activity. I know it's supposed to be this whole 'only with the one person you love', no, fuck that, it's fun. I have sex for fun. I love and show love in different ways. So whether I'm having sex or not, whether my partner's comfortable with sex or not, I can give or take that, I'm not that arsed, it's more ... if that person is spectacular in that way to me, then the sex can fall by the wayside, it doesn't matter.*

*Before the bisexual community came forward and outwardly said that they accept Trans people in, Pansexuality was something that came forward that included Trans and was based more on personality, and I was like 'that is something I identify with much closer than I do with Bisexuality, but at 26 and 28 it's hard to come to terms with these things, cos you're just kind of like 'am I just copping and changing because this is the new In Thing now?' I don't know. Have I just gone for it because the flag's prettier?' [laughs] You kind of doubt yourself, you just kind of like, I should know myself by this point, I'm 28, I've been bisexual for this many years. But it made more sense, and I looked at it logically, it ticked all my boxes, so that was one the for me, and I kind of just took that. And even when the bisexual community did say 'we do include Trans', it's like 'Yes,*

*but Pansexual is slightly different, it is more to do with personality, so I'm going to stick in this box and I'm going to stay with this one thank you very much.*

*Not that I particularly want to put myself in a box or a label, but at the same time sometimes it's nice to have clarity, and have that one word there, so when people ask 'what is your sexual orientation?', I can immediately say 'Pansexual. It's the closest fitting label for me, it ticks all the boxes for me'.*

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[The Pansexual flag is, clearly and absolutely, far better than the Bisexual flag, but we do not choose our orientations for the flag. Otherwise Asexuality wouldn't ... no, no, there are people who like the Asexual Pride Flag, and I must be respectful of that].

As a culture, possibly as a species, we like to put ourselves in boxes, as a way to describe ourselves easily, but also as a way to accept who we are, to define ourselves, and in a sense to be proud of ourselves for being 'us'. As a data analyst, I love boxes. It makes graphs and tables much easier to display if there's only five or six options, as opposed to, what, 66 million in the UK, if we're all unique individuals. As a unique individual though, I have a tendency, not on purpose, to be the outlier in those graphs, the rare data point that tends to get ignored because they don't fit. I like this. But in general, I like the way we can define our own boxes. There's a lot of microlabels in both sexual and gender identity, and while some may go 'what do you need to call yourself that for', I think it's lovely that people can find super-specific things that tie them together and make a community, share their feelings, and find people who can help them on their journeys.

Here's Kayla, the other host of the Sounds Fake But Okay podcast, talking about her realisation and 'coming out' to herself as Demisexual, which is often seen as a 'microlabel' within Asexuality, but is definitely a unique identity and separate from it. In case you don't know, a Demisexual is someone who does not experience sexual attraction until they have formed a deep emotional connection with someone.

*{Kayla - SFBO*

*When it came down to coming out as demisexual, I can honestly say that coming out to myself was the hardest part, and I kind of came out to other people before I even came out to myself. So, I have the podcast Sounds Fake But Okay with my best friend Sarah, who is AroAce, and from the very first episode I started talking about how I might be demisexual, and I was actively talking on the podcast about 'Well I think I might be demisexual which means blah blah blah, and here's why I think I might be that way'. And for genuinely like maybe a year, I was saying, not a year, either way, for a long time I was saying things like that a lot, like on the podcast I would say 'I think I'm demisexual, I think I'm this', but I would never think about it in the rest of my life, like when the podcast, when we'd finished recording I would stop thinking about it and I didn't really let myself think about it because I was just so uncomfortable with the label, like I knew my experiences matched up with it, but it felt really daunting to have to accept that that's what it was, and that I would then have to conduct my life in a way that matched how I actually felt. It was very daunting to me to know, okay if I am demisexual, I'm going to have to date in a way that makes me comfortable as a demisexual person. And so for a while, even while on the podcast, I was saying 'yeh I might be demisexual', I was actively ignoring that and pretending I wasn't, and was trying to go about dating the way any Allo person might, which ended up being really bad for my mental health, and it just made things a lot harder, and honestly that's what ended up pushing me to come out to myself, is that things were just getting really hard in terms of dating and trying to form new relationships, because I refused to come out to myself, and literally everyone else in the world knew it and they were just kind of waiting, like I was actively saying 'yeh I might be but I just don't feel comfortable with the label', and it was just really like a detriment to the rest of my life, so, I mean, coming out to myself and admitting it to myself was the hardest part because it meant finally accepting it was something I was going to have to face and deal with.*

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Kayla also talks there about issues she had in coming to terms with realising her sexuality and what it meant to her. In a way that's one of the disadvantages I had about coming to the word 'asexuality' relatively late on in life. I didn't get to have those decisions about how to conduct eg relationships with that knowledge about myself; I only had a slightly clouded and incomplete picture. This is a concept I'll keep coming back to over the course

of this pod.

We'll also come onto mental health more in a little while, as well as something else Kayla mentioned, about everyone else in the world knowing apart from her, but I find it interesting that she realised her sexual orientation while actively hosting a podcast that talks about sexual orientation. Again, over the course of this episode, it'll become clear how important and helpful it is to have discussions with other people going through similar journeys or having had similar experiences, and be open to the fact the resulting conclusions may well challenge who you are and what you are.

One such from my own personal experience is my gender identity. This was a subject I talked about a bit on episode 35 of my podcast, where I talked about Toxic Masculinity and then lightly took the mickey out of most of the Pride Flags, something that's quite hard to do on a podcast but you can be sure it'll come to a Reel and YouTube Short near you soon, or possibly TikTok, depends on what my VA thinks.

I'll talk towards the end of the pod about how the clues were all there, and how my revelation at being comfortable wearing the non-binary flag as a facemask shouldn't have come as a surprise to me, but for now I want to talk a bit about how it felt to 'come out' to myself as demiboy non-binary. And here I'll say it's still an ongoing journey in my mind - unlike my asexuality for instance which is pretty much a fixed part of me, and the resulting revelation I'm probably aromantic (despite what I said in episode 7, and that in itself has been an interesting development, though that's mainly because of a better understanding of what romantic attraction is, or, in my case, a realisation that I don't really \*know\* what romantic attraction is, and aromantic is much easier to describe than quoiromantic. And a marginally better flag).

What helped me in my gender orientation self-revelations was already having gone through the process of realising my sexual identity. That's not to say they're linked for everyone, what I'm saying is that by being open to questioning and accepting one core part of your identity, it then becomes easier to question other parts of your identity. The Trevor Project, who I've referred to before, reported around 41% of younger asexuals were also non-binary in some form (as opposed to 25% of LGBTQIA youth as a whole), and while I don't believe there's a direct correlation, I'm certainly sure it's reflective of a holistic 'questioning' approach to all aspects of life and culture.

But. Realising this myself was much harder. In my case it was a combination of my age and ... it's hard to explain but in a way, intent? No, not intent, not dedication, more ... so for instance obviously I'm fully aware of the Trans journey. And for me, in my head, claiming the non-binary epithet was also a 'journey', like, from the first moment I started to find ways in which I could relate to non-binary culture and realised this could apply to me, I was all '... but I'm not like that, I can't be like that, I'm quite obviously and distinctively male'. This slowly changed then to '... but I'm not non-binary \*enough\*'. When I said I imagined it like a journey, in my head it meant there was a 'goal' to head for, a definitive 'yes, I am now non-binary', and that was a goal I wasn't ... headed towards? And it almost felt like a form of cultural appropriation for me to start identifying with the non-binary flag, because I wasn't, and could never be, truly 'non-binary'. In the same way I could never be Trans because I wasn't ... trying to transition, so it's not my flag, not my identity.

One thing that initially confused me about this, about the concept of Transition, when I started thinking about gender was around the question of: if you could design your ideal body, what would it look like? How much did I ever imagine changing the way my body looked? It is true that if I could have any superpower, shapeshifting (with added texture manipulation) would certainly be the top contender, but it would be a flexible power; just as likely to turn to stone to prevent attacks as I would change my appearance to resemble other humans. Though I have small issues with being in a male body, much of my objection is to masculinity rather than having the male edition of the body itself. As I say, I never saw myself as Trans, even though ... in some ways non-binary gender identity is covered under the Trans umbrella. And that again initially made me think 'well, I'm not Transitioning to non-binary either, therefore I'm not non-binary enough'.

My age was important too, because I felt 'I'm too old to be non-binary'; it was something only accessible to young people, and again, by attempting to claim that identity, I would be almost 'appropriating' it because ... I dunno, maybe people would think I was only doing it because was trendy or something. Listeners: I have never been trendy. I'd love to say 'but they don't know that', but let's face it, one look at me and they certainly would know that. I could cope with being asexual at my age because I'd have a lifetime of experience of those feelings, and while I couldn't put a word or description to it, once I found the word, it just felt ... accurate, it felt like a

word I could claim, regardless of my age or anything else about me. Gender orientation felt different, it was 'new' and therefore I was much more wary of it.

What helped was community discussion. In May 2020 I joined a server on discord, run by the Sounds Fake But Okay podcast, and a couple of the channels on the server are dedicated to discussions about sexual and gender identity. While most of the people chatting there are younger than me (I am, roughly, the third or fourth oldest person on the server, and indeed many of them are younger than my personal website), we are all having similar revelations, similar realisations, we are on similar journeys

And this of course means coming to similar realisations at the same time, or rather, picking up from things each others have said, and going 'oh, I do that', or 'ah I can relate', and things you didn't realise about yourself, or didn't think about as being relevant, or things you'd even forgotten you did, get placed into context. You learn that you're not alone, and you learn that it's okay to think the way you do. People further on in their journeys can help you on your own, even if they end up being different journeys. The server has pronoun roles, and it's really interesting to see people's personal development as they take on pronouns, maybe alongside those they start with, maybe eventually replacing them, and then maybe changing them again as they feel that something else more closely matches the way they feel. It's not just about pronouns, indeed one might argue pronouns are only a very small thing, but they're a window onto someone's mind, a reflection on how they see themselves.

And so to my own gender realisations. Without the Discord I wouldn't have come across the concept of demiboy as early; it's a dreadful-sounding word with a highly uninspiring flag, but the definition, "a non-binary gender in which one is partially, but not fully, a boy or man" did resonate strongly with me. Strongly enough that I could 'accept' it myself much easier than I felt I could accept being non-binary. At that stage, anyway. But as demiboy is considered on the non-binary spectrum, it wasn't as difficult a step as I'd feared to start calling myself non-binary. That said, I still even now qualify the term by saying 'demiboy', whereas I don't qualify my asexuality with any specific microlabel. Because I feel I don't need to.

The other thing the Discord helped with was in regard to my feeling of not being 'non-binary enough'. With so many people on that journey in particular there, they were able to reassure me that there's no such thing as being 'enough', that I wouldn't be taking things away from, I don't want to say 'more committed' enbies, but I mean, more ... developed?, and that, uhm, we are all valid.

Also, what helped my coming to terms with my own gender identity was pronouns. The first time someone, one of my friends on Twitter in fact, referred to me as 'they' rather than 'he', I had a weird flutter in my heart. I can't explain why, or how, but all I do know is that when they did that, and I saw it, it felt ... weirdly far more comfortable and comforting than I expected. I thought it would be awkward, and sometimes it still is, but at that moment I felt like it was right; I felt that it belonged.

But it's not all chocolate boxes, roses, and friendly debates with friends. While coming out to others is always seen as a fraught and stressful time, sometimes your background, your immediate or home environment, makes even coming out to yourself really hard, because of the negative connotations you've been led to believe about doing so, and the fear about what this means going forward; knowing that you're going to have to 'come out' to others at some point. Here's my Instagram friend Miranda, talking about the fear she had when she had her first realisations of her sexual orientation and identity.

*{Miranda - 3*

*The entire several years of 'coming out' was pretty intense for me. I didn't grow up in a household where it was allowed for me to genuinely date who I naturally found myself attracted to; in fact it almost wasn't even an option, wasn't even talked about. So realising I liked women was shocking to begin with, and honestly I just ignored that part of me for a long time, cos it was scary and intimidating at first; I didn't understand it. And then on top of that, then realising I didn't even like men was entire process adjustment in itself. Talk about having to learn that 26 years of everything you thought was 'normal' or 'how it should be'. It took a serious toll on my mental health, and I hadn't heard anyone in the LGBT community at that time talk in depth about their experiences. So after initially reading about 'compulsive heterosexuality' (which going forward I'll just say comphet) I instantly broke down. Like, sobbing in my kitchen while making dinner kind of breakdown. All my life I felt I was being shoved into that specific box of who everyone wanted me to be, parents, teachers,*

friends, co-workers, church people. SO after learning about comp het I felt lied to and betrayed, it completely broke me. All my life I thought was I was feeling, all the thoughts I was thinking throughout my teenage years, and college years, I thought it was all completely normal for a straight woman that dating men, I would have to just deal with those thoughts all my life. But I was ... just gay.

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"Compulsive Heterosexuality" is one of the most difficult things to overcome when it comes to 'coming out', not just to others but to yourself. If you've been raised in an environment where it's assumed and expected that you're going to grow up, marry someone of the opposite sex, have children, etc, and any deviation from this is criticised to the point of exile, it's incredibly hard to even come out to yourself, because you know you'll be seen as 'wrong' and 'evil' if you dare broach the subject, yet keeping it all in ... well, you all know how that could end. And if you think those sorts of beliefs only happen in strongly religious or traditionally western-cultural families and environments, you'd be wrong. As an entity, our whole society and culture is set up for allonormativity; everyone is assumed to be heterosexual, to the extent that people don't even think about it. Everything from having a best friend of the opposite sex when you're five years old and both sets of parents going 'aww they'll get married some day' all the way up to the assumptions and acceptance of toxic masculinity; 'real men go after women' and all that. Romance movies, adverts with families, assumptions about friends, everything is geared up towards heterosexuality and if anything looks different people go 'oh, why are doing that, are you just trying to be woke', and 'children shouldn't learn about LGBTQIA+ issues because that's sexual and they shouldn't be exposed to sexuality', yet are happy to dress their 11-year-old daughters in t-shirts that say 'hello boys' and don't allow mixed-sex sleepovers because 'things will happen'. Heterosexuality is sexual, no more and no less than homosexuality is, but society isn't ready to have that conversation yet.

And there are levels of societal discomfort. Asexuality is ignored or infantilised, lesbianism is ... kinda fetishised because Men Are Weird, gayness is either 'entertaining' or seen as a weakness that needs to be beaten out of you, and, at the bottom, is Trans. Here's Katelyn, a Trans Woman, talking about her journey of self-discovery, and the stages she went through coming to terms with coming out to herself.

*[Katelyn - Fetlife*

*So, it was probably about three years ago in New York. For the first time in like, ten years I think, I was on my own, didn't have any family out there, didn't have any friends. I had no idea really what I was thinking. I guess to some that might sound like a bit of a nightmare, but for me it was super liberating.*

*The apartment that I was in just happened to be in just happened to be just across the street from a big LGBTQ+ bar and club, and every weekend I would just look out of my window and be like 'one of these days I'm going to pluck up the courage and I'm going to go there'.*

*I finally had the courage to go to the LGBTQ bar, which was a really great thing. I was so super nervous but at the same time it allowed me to find the sense of community, support, friendship, and even some relationships that I was truly looking for. However over the year that followed, the more I explored this new life and learned more about who I was and what I wanted, the more I realised that I wanted more. It just wasn't enough, it didn't feel like it was enough to just be a very effeminate male. But at the same time this was when I started to get feelings of like 'ok, maybe there's more to this', but those feelings terrified me, because I knew if I listened to them, ultimately there was only one way that this could go. It was thoughts that would often creep in every now and then and I would just swiftly knock it away, just make up any excuse I could that this was not who I was, and I could never be that person, I could never possibly identify as being Transgender.*

*I would just bury those thoughts deep inside and I would just hide them behind a facade of 'it's just a kink' or 'I just like cross-dressing'. I would do this to the point where I would believe myself and it would stem the tide of those feelings even if it was just for a little bit.*

*But I was in so much denial I think I was the only one who was completely blind to clearly the very obvious. Even my parents questioned me, one of the last times we visited them as my old self, just before the end of 2019. I was kind of living a double life at this point, and they asked if I was, well they didn't specifically ask, but they pretty much hinted and asked if that was where I was going, and I said 'no', I said 'I'm not transgender'. I realise now I lied.*

*Then we got to Christmas 2019 and into early 2020, and that's when shit basically hit the fan, so to speak. I sank into regular depressions, my body dysmorphia was crippling, and at some points I very much became suicidal. I had to take time off work, and some days I just laid in my bed and cried. I cried until my eyes stung and my cheeks hurt, it was just awful. I was just so angry and upset that I'd got to this point in life where I felt like I had to make a seemingly impossible decision: either be depressed and deal with all these horrible feelings for the rest of my life, but outwardly lead a "normal" life and know that my family and friends would continue to love and support me as they always have; or accept myself, accept the person that I was becoming, and begin a journey and hopefully be happy, but the expense of potentially losing those I cared about most in the world was just such a horrible thought.*

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### <mental health>

Following Katelyn's contrib there, I just want to take a slight detour here into mental health, which I also touched on in my last episode. As I intimated earlier, the whole concept of 'Coming Out' is something that definitely can affect your mental health, and certainly a couple of other contributors have suggested similar issues.

But here's Miranda again talking specifically about how coming out to herself affected her mental health.

{*Miranda - 3*

*What hit me the hardest in regards to my mental health was when I started dating more consistently, I started disassociating more. It initially started when I was going out more often on dates, out in public, walking around, and actually showing PDA, holding hands, etc, like normal couple stuff. Except I noticed people's dirty looks, and the glares go from looking at us, down at your hands, and back to our faces again. And that's when I started noticing that I just never felt like I was there on dates, It felt like things were just happening around me, and I wasn't present at all, and each time I almost had to force myself to come back to reality. It was as if watching the date play out on a screen. A friend of mine had to explain to me what was going on when I just made a few initial comments. The disassociation was a trauma response because of my religious upbringing. It was how my brain tried to make me feel safe, because I was essentially taught to hate who I was as a person. It happened more and more even at home, but only if anything LGBTQ was being referenced, whether it be a movie, a TV show with gay characters, and instantly I felt like I wasn't there, and I was just floating through my apartment, doing things as normal. I am very fortunate that this in part was very short-term, but it was really scary that it was happening. I hadn't even heard of dissociation, and I felt such an intense guilt from it too - I mean I never wanted to be 'not present' with someone I actually found myself genuinely interested in, but over time, the more I truly accepted myself, and dating women became my 'new normal, I stopped disassociating as my brain slowly realised that I really was safe.*

}

The connections in her words are clear to hear; her fears about coming out to herself, let alone to others, caused her some mental health issues. At least though it was only temporary; after a while she managed to pull through the worst of it and began her journey to acceptance. She also identifies and compares her feelings to that of a trauma response; this seems to be a theme that underlies many people's feelings, even if they're not necessarily able or willing to phrase it in those terms.

As you heard in my last podcast episode, I 'came out' with certain neurodiversities that have a bearing on my mental health, including dyspraxia and ADHD. While I'd say they were unconnected with my sexual and gender orientations, at least directly, it is true there's an overlap between asexuality and neurodiversity - in the Trevor Project survey referred to earlier, 25% of asexuals expressed suspicions of having ADHD, with around half of those having fairly solid diagnoses, while a whopping 75% expressed a suspicion of Anxiety Disorder, with a third, \*a third\* having been medically diagnosed. The figures are similar for medical depression.

One might think this adds another level to the mental stress that 'coming out' brings. And I'd imagine that's true for most people who experience those overlaps. In my case though, it was 'just another thing to think about',



and I knew I had mental health issues most of my life, in one form or another, so having identity issues laid on top of that didn't feel as angsty as it would to other people. When you're already overthinking about 639 things, another couple won't really do any harm.

Sarah, from Sounds Fake But Okay, agrees in principle; her sexual awakening (if one can say that about asexuality) came at the same time as several other things happening so for her it was all one globby mess.

{Sarah - SFBO

*In terms of the way my identity as an AroAce interacts with my identity as ye old depressed anxious ADHDer, I think, for me, finding out that I was acespec and finding out that I had these mental illnesses happened kinda around about the same time. It wasn't necessarily triggered by one another tho. I think they all came to light because my life was changing a lot, I was kind of in that transition from High School to College, and you know, suddenly, the sport I'd been doing all my life, I suddenly couldn't because of an injury, and there were just like a lot of things going on, and because my life was like a little bit tumultuous, a lot of things suddenly came to light at that time, and so it was ... I don't know if it was easier because everything was already kind of changing to begin with, to say like, okay yeh, these changes are happening, but maybe it did help, like maybe because things were moving and grooving and changing, it made it easier me to be accept those things and just be cool with them.*

}

Of course one of the biggest causes of stress in the whole 'coming out' journey is having to 'come out' in everyday life, to society, and to other people.

<coming out to others>

{Miranda1 & 2

*So I decided to publicly come out on National Coming Out Day last year, 2020. I state publicly to mean I posted on social media for friends, family, followers, and prior to coming out publicly I had known I liked women for several years, dated women, and my close friends knew as well. I didn't put a label to it at the time in the original post, tho I do label myself Gay / Lesbian, using both of those terms interchangeably.*

*I personally felt the need to come out because I grew up in an extremely Christian and conservative household and was actually more-or-less still going to church. I really just wanted to avoid getting talks about my future husband which is actually huge in the religious environment, in the church, and I didn't want to get any questions about "cute guys" I was seeing.*

*I knew being lesbian that I'd have to be constantly coming out for the rest of my life, and I just wanted to avoid the possible conversations with extended relatives, any acquaintances, people from work, college, and all of that.*

*As for reactions - it was vastly different. I actually had come out to my mum as Bi several years prior, which ... I really don't know how to say this, wasn't the best reaction at that time. My mum said a lot of stereotypical things like 'what if you marry a woman' and 'what are you gonna do about kids', completely forgetting that straight couples all the time have issues getting pregnant naturally, and there's millions of other ways to have kids, and to have a family, but I digress. Coming out to my mum a second time was easier initially, tho the process months later was still difficult. But it was still the first time I'd come out to my dad, my brother, and my sister-in-law. My dad didn't say anything. In fact he's still uncomfortable hearing me when I say 'gay' or call myself a lesbian, any of that, he's just flat out walked out the room when I've talked about a girlfriend before. The only thing he did say, because I made him, was 'it is what it is. I can't change anything.' And that's the only thing my dad's said on the subject.*

*I was most scared to come out to my brother, based on our relationship and our teenage years and our relationship since college has always been a little rocky, but honestly I was surprised with how well him and his wife took it, being super-religious and living down in the Bible Belt.*

*Most of my friends in general were very supportive, and I'm so thankful for that, except for one. And this is the one friend I've known essentially since daycare, since we were babies, and whose wedding I was in. She had told me she couldn't be in my wedding, so a lifelong friend out the door, just because of who I love. I tried to still remain friends because so many people told me 'oh she just needed to get used to it, you know, she's gotta have time to process it, she'll come around'. But I quickly learned a pattern as she would respond to every single text of mine except anything about my dating life. And this happened for months. It wasn't just a few weeks and I gave up, This happened for months. We tried talking about it, and all I got was anger, arguments, gaslighting, she denied everything, and honestly you can't be friends if you're going to ignore an entire portion of who someone is, an entire portion of someone's life. So it was hard, it was really hard for that especially, but I mean, you just kind of get over it as time goes on, I guess, but the thought of someone 'getting used to' my sexuality was frustrating, to say the least, actually, extremely angering. I was the same Miranda before I learned about my sexuality, I liked the same food, I found the same jokes funny, and I was still that supportive best friend that all my friends knew me as. But people need to 'get used to' a new hair colour, a new pair of shoes, even a new job. No-one needs to get used to a human.*

}

Miranda talks there about how it felt to 'come out' to other people, and how she had a variety of reactions to doing so. I'm sure many of you listening to this can relate to much of what she said; her experiences are pretty typical of people 'coming out' - some supportive, some indifferent, some negative & confused. But as she says, while it's hurtful that someone you thought was a close friend would react negatively, ultimately you haven't changed, you're still the same person, just that you now have a word to describe yourself that you're comfortable using. You haven't changed, at all, it's just other people's perceptions of you that have changed.

In this pod I've talked about both my sexual and my gender orientations. And here's where it gets very divergent, for me at least.

I've 'come out' in terms of my online identity in both. And I'm pretty comfortable with that, and I didn't have any negative comments or feedback. But then I wasn't expecting any; pretty much everyone I know via Twitter knows the sort of person I am, or at least has a strong vibe about the way I am, so I doubt anything I say on either score would really surprise them. While my Instagram feed is either my Twitter followers, or it's a bunch of UK-based hikers who have better things to concern themselves with. - "I'm asexual" - "Does that help you cross Kinder Scout without getting lost?".

The difficulty comes more with family, and with the few people I know offline. Here, one of the two has been a much easier journey than the other. I'm incredibly comfortable with walking around advertising my asexuality, with the sweatshirts, the facemasks, the badges, etc - partly because I'm comfortable with so few people recognising the flag, but also because I'm comfortable with people knowing that about me. It's such a fundamental part of my life. I mean, sure, it opens up some awkward questions about love, marriage, and children, but as a single middle-aged man, I was getting those questions and comments anyway. As I've said before, the difference between me as an asexual traveller and me as a solo traveller is arguably only that I'm less likely to respond to amorous advances on my trips.

Partly this is because of course while being asexual (and aromantic) is a challenge to 'allonormative' (cis-het and sex-centred) society, it often feels less 'threatening' in everyday life than many of the other parts of the Rainbow Acronym, as my walking down the street isn't so much of an affront as, say, two women holding hands, or someone transgender.

All that said, I wouldn't say I ever 'came out' as asexual. Nor aromantic, really. In the sense that I never had That Conversation, I never went through the process of figuratively sitting people down and 'admitting' it. I did things like change my FB profile pic to the asexual flag, talk about it on my podcast, wrote some blogs about it, and pretty much put people in the situation of 'well I did tell people, don't you read my content?'. Partly this was because it was easier to explain asexuality in those terms; coming out as 'gay' is a harder conversation but at least if you say 'mum, I'm gay', there's a strong chance your mother knows what gay is, without having to add a TED talk into your coming-out conversation.

Also, I'm an introvert with a small measure of social anxiety and a desire not to cause a scene; I don't like conversations. I like writing more than speaking, at least where I'm expecting to get a reply, partly it must be

said because then I can control when I see the reply. I am That Person who would send deep e-mails at 2am and then switch the computer off and go to bed. My uncle does the same; his announcement of the death of a family member once took place overnight and the first I heard about it was when my mother called me on my morning commute to work asking me if I'd checked my e-mails. I approve of this. Others wouldn't.

Someone who seems to have the same viewpoint, and whose 'coming out' I find quite relatable, is Sarah, from Sounds Fake But Okay.

*[Sarah - SFBO*

*For me, coming out to other people was hard, not because I didn't feel safe or sure of my identity or anything, but more so because I'm just a really non-confrontational person; I'm emotionally distant because I'm my father's daughter not because I'm aspec, and for me broaching those conversations was just really difficult, so that was the thing that I struggled with most, just bringing it up I guess, and finding a natural way to properly come out, which was why the way I did come out was so anti-climactic, like, I didn't have one big 'coming out', I had a lot of very small, very casual, very passive 'coming outs' really.*

*]*

It's a very different situation with regard to my gender orientation. Partly because I'm still working it out so I'm less ... I'm more reluctant to talk about it because I'm not certain myself. Partly because we're dealing with microlabels and that requires a much more complicated or detailed 'coming out' discussion, and partly because, in my head at least, querying your gender orientation is a much more personal and culturally difficult situation; it's one thing to be asexual, it's quite another to be, well, whatever I am. Demiboy non-binary.

I mean, as I say I'm 'out' on my social media profiles, but given the subjects I talk about in my blogs and podcasts, it would be weird for me not to be. It's a part of my brand image. And, being fair, I've also had a pic of my wearing the non-binary facemask as my image on social media.

But. I've been a lot quieter about my gender identity in general. It's not that I'm not open about it, more that I just don't mention it as much. Because doing so would cause more questions that I may not be able to answer to the person's satisfaction, and they may end up going away at best confused, at worst actively angry at me being 'weirdly different'. More weirdly different than usual, anyway. More people understand being gay than being asexual, but I feel more people would, well not so much understand, as have a reference point to cling on to, get asexuality than would get gender non-conformity. Having little to no sexual attraction is seen as 'weird', but at least it's a concept that's relatively easy to grasp with comparisons. Trying to explain my gender identity to a 71-year-old Daily-Express-reading Boomer who already pretty much ignores every reference to my asexuality, and who almost certainly won't grasp concepts like the separation of sex and gender, and toxic masculinity, is quite a hard sell.

I'm also not sure what benefit it would have? Like, for me personally, does it make a difference? Bearing in mind my age, and my lifestyle means I'm surrounded by friends who already know the sort of person I am. Obviously there's a sense of the wider world, and that's definitely something I'm still having thoughts about; like, how do I describe myself on web-forms? Do I try out using gender-neutral names in certain environments? I did recently book a table in a pub under the name 'barefoot backpacker' and I felt I sounded weird, even tho I do that sort of thing quite regularly online. The organisation I work for is very keen on people putting their pronouns in their e-mail signatures, if they feel comfortable doing so, and I do have they/he listed, so at work I'm definitely tentatively open about it, but I'm definitely not as 'out' out as demiboy non-binary as I am asexual.

Mind you, people kind of ... guessed already.

<the clues were there....>

What I've found quite interesting for both my sexuality and my gender identity is, since 'coming out to myself' about both, and discussing my feelings with friends and other people online going through the same realisations, I've been looking back at bits of my past, the ways I felt when I was growing up, the things I did and said, and going 'ahhhh, I see'. It's something I mentioned in my previous episode, talking about therapy,

and how that's allowed me to collate my thoughts into a, well, a kind of funnel really, and see them all together rather than as separate pieces of information flying about spacetime.

Like, so, asexuality, there's the fact most of my penpals in my teenage years were girls, and furthermore that I didn't ever contemplate dating them, even though that would have been a natural thought process. Well. Except one. But we don't talk about that. Not even my therapist knows about that one. And while I did end up dating two of my penpals, that was certainly never the intention and both relationships got that far pretty much by accident. Related, possibly very related, I'm absolutely no good at flirting, or understanding when flirting is occurring. I remember having a chat with one of my very dear penpals at the time saying this exact point and her response was 'everybody can flirt'. I ... never knew how, or what. I didn't want to assume. Literally someone could have hit me on the head with a huge banner that said "I like you" and I'd've still wondered about their intention. There's a lot of memes about, specifically, lesbians, who have this issue and I relate, I relate a lot. That doesn't mean I'm a lesbian.

Asexuality. There's the fact I never really thought about sex, and the only reason I had sex for the first time was because my then girlfriend kept badgering me about it and I figured I might as well, just to see what all the fuss was about. And the fact I was 20 and a half at the time. It went about as well as you imagine.

Asexuality. Like the way I tended to have friends that became dating partners and then drifted back to being friends again because their expected sex ... kinda didn't happen as much as they'd have liked? And, related, how I prefer to have close intimate friendships that don't do that sort of thing.

Asexuality. Like the way when everyone I knew at school, at university, had posters of people on their walls that they found sexually attractive, and I had ... what did I have? Prog-rock album covers, and maps. It never occurred to me to look at people; I just didn't get the allure that people, especially famous people, had. They look at posters with their tongues lolling about and I'm stood there like '... but you'll never get them, why do you lust after them?'

And, relatedly, my relationship to porn. Full Swap Radio listeners might raise an eyebrow at this, but I have never found the naked form to be appealing. Yes I have kinks, but those kinks don't require sex or nudity. And I'm actively put off by society's suggestions at sexuality and allure. Lacy underwear does nothing for me. Certain stereotypical poses that you always found in magazines, do nothing for me. And the vast, vast, majority of porn, honestly, bores me. Because with pictures nothing's happening and what you see, I'm not interested in and quite often just find quite unattractive. I've watched a very small number of porn movies, and I'm sure I've mentioned it before, but one of them I was with, oddly, a girlfriend whose idea it was to watch it, and we just spent the time eating dinner and commenting on the décor of the furniture. It was, it must be said, horrendously 1970s style furniture.

All of this at the time I assumed it was just because I was 'a bit odd' and 'just very bad at heterosexuality'. I never really connected it all together. And then, when I realised that asexuality was a word, and that it applied to me, it was amazingly liberating and made these different factors all make sense and all connected.

I managed to find this out mostly on my own. Miranda made those connections through other people recognising the themes and suggesting things for her to think about.

*{Miranda - 4*

*So I mentioned before that I had identified as Bisexual before I publicly come out once I realised I was lesbian. I could go on and on with tons of 'I should have known I liked women' examples but I'd like to share my favourite 'I should have known' along with what made me realise it.*

*So, when I was younger, I never really had the best dating track record with men. To put it short and sweet, let's just say I didn't pick winners. Probably the lesbian confusion, I'm sure. But at 20 years old, while discussing dating with a friend of mine at work, I just offhandedly said 'I don't know, I just don't find many men attractive, like, I find more women pretty than I do men hot, don't you.?', to which my friend just stared blankly and when 'no! What?'*

*So, fast forward four years, I was dating another not so great guy, and I was at a party with his friends, and I was*

*with all the other girls off to the side, joking about kissing other girls, you know, we were drunk, I will admit I was unfortunately that drunk "straight girl". But I'm like, 'well it's not a big deal, I mean, who wouldn't kiss girls', and this other girl just gave me the most shocked look and just went 'what? No way, no no, absolutely not, no thanks, not for me' in such a horrified manner it was actually kind of funny. But that comment stuck with me, I thought 'she didn't want to, I always thought it was normal', like, why doesn't every woman want to kiss other women, and then I started thinking, 'do I actually like women, is this what this actually means'. It took a few months really mulling things over, until I told that story to a friend of mine who actually did identify as bisexual, who then said to me 'yeh,. Miranda, you definitely like girls. Not all women think that, and want to kiss other women'. Fast forward another two more years, another friend of mine, ironically having met on Tinder, who is a lesbian, explained comphet to me and said 'you know you probably don't actually like men'. So, a bi chick told me I wasn't straight, and a lesbian told me I didn't like men.*

}

As for gender identity, oh my.

It's hard sometimes to disentangle my asexuality from my gender identity, since they both kinda express themselves in a relative avoidance of sexuality and sexual activities, but I guess the difference for me is asexuality is kind of an outward projection, where it concerns other people, and my gender identity is more of an inward, self-projection of it; that is to say, asexuality is where I demonstrate a lack of sexual attraction to and with others, while my gender identity is where I avoid cultural and societal representations of sexuality and sex in general.

That I never related to the boys I grew up with should have been the first clue; that I never had the same interests in sex, in porn, in sexy posters, in following bands and actors they found sexually attractive. I'm sure they probably thought I was gay, but if I had been, there would have been clues that way even then, and there weren't. And of course that's carried through to my adult life, hence my posts about toxic masculinity, hence my aversion to male culture, hence another reason most of my friends are female. It's not just because I'm seen as 'safe' because of my asexuality, but because I feel I get on better with them and can relate to them more.

I'm not saying I had a significant feeling of body dysphoria, but it's certainly true that certain activities I had were body-avoidant. I didn't like looking at myself in mirrors. There are almost no pictures of me after about the age of 12. I tended to wear baggy clothes, hooded sweatshirts, nothing body-hugging. I hated, hated, having to wear shorts for athletics (and vests for cross-country races); both of these, incidentally, are issues I still have, which is why I'll tend to wear over-the-knee capri-length trousers and leggings for everything from hiking to Parkrun. In my younger days I assumed the lack of photos were because my grandmother was the one who liked taking pics of me, and she died when I was 12, and the baggy clothes because I was a teenager at the start of the 90s and that was The Thing at the time - the whole Madchester movement of loose-fitting and highly-colourful clothing. But even then I knew I wasn't trying to be trendy; I always had that level of self-awareness.

I went through phases of wanting to remove my body hair. I justified it to myself as saying 'I'm a cross-country runner, it's a lot easier to clean'. And I knew people at school who shaved their legs because they were cyclists, for exactly that reason - if they fell off and grazed themselves it was easier to heal. But even then I knew it was a ... well not a lie, exactly, but certainly I knew there was something else to it, though at the time I couldn't explain what.

Certain little things too, certain thoughts, certain ideas, definitely not something with strong culturally masculine vibes and commitment, things like the fact I paint my toenails, the fact I'm a fan of daisies, even my preference for being barefoot, my desire for longer head hair, that I'm not interested in cars, that I don't have a passion for certain movie genres; all taken in isolation are perfectly normal but when taken together they could suggest a rejection of masculine culture and norms, and once you start accepting that, there's only small leaps to something more fundamental. Especially when seen alongside the points mentioned previously. My gender identity I think is very much tied in to all of these things.

Here's Katelyn again, talking about how she connected a few dots which eventually allowed her to realise her own gender identity.

*{Katelyn - Fetlife*

*So I guess, going back to like my early 20s, I knew my sexual preferences had expanded beyond the opposite sex, which I suppose at the time given I was doing what society expected of me ... I mean later on I would come to realise that this placed me more of a Pansexual, however at the time most of my sexual fantasies revolved around men. I was very much into extremely effeminate men, essentially what some refer to as twinkies or femboys. But I think what was really striking for me was that although it wasn't necessarily a 'I wanted to be with them', it was more that I wanted to \*be\* them. And this was a thought that had stuck with me for a long time, since my early 20s, so I had a lot of time to contemplate this and accept the fact I was most likely gay. However I didn't know that that acceptance would lead to something far bigger and would ultimately be far harder to come to terms with and accept.*

*The next sort-of 3-4 months I would say I really started to make massive changes in my life. I was starting to feel more free to really explore the person I wanted to be for so long. I started to change everything, so my wardrobe of baggy jeans, shirts, and cargo shorts, very quickly changed to mostly women's clothes, very bright, tight, colourful, very effeminate, clothing sets. I even bleached my hair, g began to grow it out, I pierced my ears. And I started to look after my body, I was losing weight, I was keeping my skin very clean and soft, and hairless - I was never a huge fan of body hair. I even started to change my mannerisms, almost kind of subconsciously, as it allowed the freedom of what I was doing to really expose my feminine side, though at the time I was still very much identifying as male.*

*Even as I continued down this road, this journey, and wearing a bit of make-up outside of the house, to work, waist-clinching to give my body a more feminine appearance. Colleagues and friends started to notice, even started asking about pronouns, but I would just still again beat those thoughts away of ever possibly being Transgender.*

*But it got to the point where I was like 'I need to make a decision'. I was just fed up and felt like I couldn't move on with my life until I made a decision. And for weeks and months I wrestled with my own self-identity; it was just horrible, it was just agony, the whole thing, like, everything else had lost all meaning and I just knew I couldn't really move on until I made this choice. And I think ultimately I'd already made the choice, but it was just admitting to myself, taking that chance and just accepting who I was. And it was one particular day I very distinctly remember that I feel finally allowed me to get to that point of acceptance, which would ultimately open the door to my Trans journey, as it were. I remember I had a shower, and I was drying off, and I caught a glimpse of myself in the mirror. Now I'd been suffering from body dysmorphia on and off sometimes badly, sometimes not so bad, but this time was just one of the worst. I stood there in the mirror for what felt like hours, and I just stared at my face and my body, this body and face that I'd just come to loathe so much, that I broke down right there in the bathroom, I was angry, I hated myself, I was just grief-stricken, I just wanted to punch the mirror over and over again, and the fact that I couldn't even look in the mirror at myself any more without breaking down and crying, I realised that I needed to make this decision.*

*One I'd sort of collected myself and calmed down a little bit, I remember I rang my boyfriend, and I just said 'I think I'm Trans', and he said to me 'I know. I've always seen you that way. I've always seen you as a woman.' And just like that, it was gone. All that doubt, all that confliction. It was like the biggest weight had been lifted off my chest, and the relief was indescribable.*

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It's interesting that for both my asexuality and my gender identity, when I took on those words, those concepts, and accepted them, some of my friends were almost like 'we were waiting for you to realise'. And that seems to be a very common thing; several people on this pod (including Kayla, Katelyn, and Miranda) mentioned it as well. When I came out as asexual, one of my friends literally said 'I thought you were but I didn't want to ask'. And when he found out I was identifying as demiboy non-binary, one of the contributors to the old Ungagged podcast said 'I was wondering when they were going to realise that'. In addition, the canteen staff where I used to work always said I had the same vibe as Kenny Everett, who, in case you don't know, was a comedian and radio DJ in the 70s and 80s who was ... he reminds me a bit of Eddie Izzard actually in terms of presentation. In any ways, Kenny Everett was Not CisHet. Evidently the clues were always there; we're just often either unable to see them, or unwilling to accept them.

<Conclusion ...>

One question that's interesting to ponder is: had I known earlier about my identities and orientations, would I have done anything differently? I mean, if we're being honestly practical, had I known earlier, I could have talked about it sooner, like, you know, in the mid-late 90s when it mattered more, rather than now when I'm old and everyone already knows about them, but that's just me being selfish.

But certainly, with regard to my asexuality, it might have made me more ... able to explain my needs in a relationship, as I'd have had a word, a concept, to describe myself rather than just aimlessly poking around at sentences that didn't quite work and certainly didn't land; in fact I'd probably have been more confident to talk about the concept in the first place rather than come across as cold, aloof, and just a bit weird. Would it have made a difference? Who knows. I'd certainly have a slightly different attitude, but I don't know to what extent my life would have been different. I'd have had fewer relationships, certainly, but I'd still probably have been friends with the same people, we just wouldn't have ... had a bonk stage.

Anyway. Coming Out to yourself is a hard process, but one made a lot easier if you know what you're coming out \*as\*. Not just that there are people who have gone before, people you can see what they did, how they reacted, and see what and how they learned, so you can learn from them, but even that the fact people \*have\* gone before means you're not thinking you're the only person to ever have those thoughts, and you have something to hold on to. You might be unwilling to at first, but ultimately, if you know who and what you are, it eventually becomes easier to accept.

Kira is happy with this self-awareness process.

*{Kira - 3b*

*I love that there are so many different gender identities, right, and again, speaking as somebody who is Autistic, I was led under this belief that Autistic people can't understand this, and they can't understand Gender Identities, and stuff like that. I get it, I'm good with it, I'm alright, I just slip up a lot because, not because of my Autism, but because I was brought up in the 90s when a girl was a girl and a boy was a boy and that's it. And now I'm having to unlearn a load of shit.*

*- "You Identify as She/They"*

*- "Yes. Because I fall under the Trans umbrella, mainly because of the gender fluidity of, I can flow in and out of all different things."*

*- "You've never thought of yourself as Trans, like a Trans Man."*

*- "No. No, I've never thought of fully, well, I have, I have on several occasions considered actually undergoing the whole Transgender thing and becoming a man, and then I realised it's mainly due to trauma. We don't change our gender identity due to trauma - that's not a good idea!"*

*I somewhat enjoy being a woman, I really like being a man, I like confusing people more than anything else. I'll sit nicely in the middle, somewhere around there.*

*Gender identity is a wonderful thing, I love it so much, I love that it's so vast and diverse and everybody's included in it, I love everything about it.*

*}*

But I'm going to leave the last word to Katelyn. I'm not going to lie; a lot of what she's said for this podcast has definitely resonated with me.

*{Katelyn - Fetlife*

*So if I can kind of give any advice for those who are sort of struggling to accept themselves, it would be 'don't ignore those feelings', It's totally fine to be scared or confused by them. I don't think anyone who feels that way wouldn't be scared or confused by them, but don't ignore them, don't try to lock them, away, because they're very much like a rising water in a dam, so if you just ignore them, they will continue to increase until you can no longer contain them, and if you're not careful they will drown you, they will get to you. And I felt very lucky, I was very close to doing something really bad, and I broke through that, I accepted myself, probably far too*

*later than I should have, but I did it, and I think everybody can do that as long as they listen to those feelings and you can then accept who you are as well.*

*{standard section separation jingle}*

Well that's about all for this pod. Join me next time when I go back to making a travel podcast; it will be the long-planned and hopefully not-out-of-date episode on lesser-known boroughs of London. Until then, , and if you're feeling off colour, keep on getting better.

*{Outro theme tune, same as intro, just a different bit of it}*

*{Outro voiceover:*

*Thank you for listening to this episode of Travel Tales From Beyond The Brochure. I hope you enjoyed it; if you did, don't forget to leave a review on your podcast site of choice.*

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*Until next time, have safe journeys. Bye for now.}*