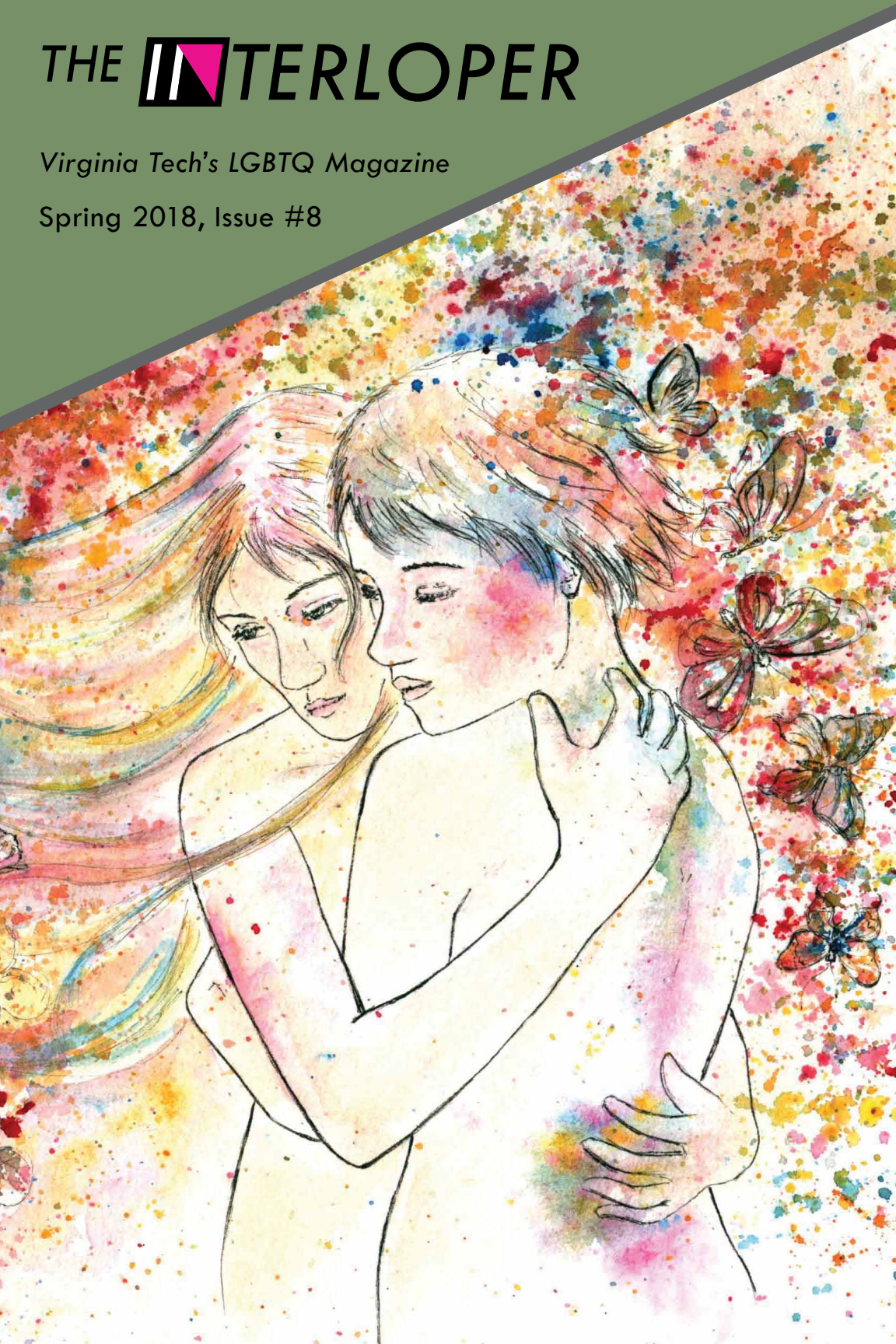


# THE **I**NTERLOPER

Virginia Tech's LGBTQ Magazine

Spring 2018, Issue #8



# Letter from the Editor

Four issues. Seventy Stories. 3,240 copies.

And yet there is still so much more to do.

I can't believe that this is my final Letter from the Editor as the editor-in-chief of *The Interloper*. I came onto the magazine first as the Sex/Health Editor (fun fact: I actually applied to be the managing editor and didn't get the gig) for issues #2-3, then the social politics editor for issue #4, then finally as EIC for issues #5-8. As I look back over our past issues, I am so proud of our publication. While we may be small—often with a staff of no more than 12 at a time—we have done *so much* in terms of sharing the news, opinions, and experiences of people within the LGBTQ+ community here at Tech and beyond.

If you were to ask, some of my favorite stories have included Hoa Nguyen's "Quest for the Female Condom" (issue #3) where she went around town and asked pharmacists, store managers, and floor workers where she could find female condoms (spoiler alert: no where in town sells them...shocker). Andrew Pregnall's tribute to "Orlando" in issue #5 is both horrifying and solemn as we pay respect to those slain in the horrible attacks in the Pulse nightclub in 2016. Rachel Hargrave offered a beautiful trio of pieces spanning three issues regarding queerness in music, ultimately ending with a playlist on WUVT's Spotify (that you should totally check out!) Ella DiPalermo's writing in issue #6 still brings tears to my eyes as she writes about the trials of transitioning while in conservative Tennessee. In the same issue, Amanda Phillips and Jonathan Banda offer a witty yet critical analysis of queer theory and jargon. And, of course, I would be remiss if I didn't mention the wonderful poetry and art that we've been able to feature including "First Thirsty Thursday in Blacksburg" by Lisa Summe, "In Max's Bathrooms" by Devin Koch, and the artwork by Aline R.S.S. de Souza.

This issue follows the traditions of where we have been as a magazine while reflecting on where we can and should go from here. It honestly scares me a little bit in the fact



that I don't know what the future holds for *The Interloper*. We haven't yet announced a new EIC at this point, but maybe where we should be moving is away from a head of the magazine. I've always hated taking credit for the magazine's successes, as it really is the hard and dedicated work of every writer, editors, artist, donor, and reader that has made the magazine what it is. Maybe where we are moving is more of an online weekly model. Maybe only once a year in print. I don't know. We don't know. But the one thing I do know is that as I leave the magazine, I leave it in good care here at Virginia Tech. Never would I have thought that I would find my family in a little, rural conservative town in southern Virginia, but *The Interloper* has become my home.

In solidarity,  
Maggie

# THE INTERLOPER

[TheInterloperVT@gmail.com](mailto:TheInterloperVT@gmail.com)

## EDITORIAL

Editor-in-Chief Maggie Nanney

Features Editor Rachel Hargrave

Arts & Entertainment Editor Miranda Mauldon

Sex & Health Editor Jessica Herling

Social Politics Editor Andrew Pregnall

Campus News Editor Colie Touzel

Creative Writing Editor Melissa Velez Nazario

## CREATIVE

Design Director Sarah Gugercin

## CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Phoebe Gregg, Rachel Hargrave, Whitney Hayes, Tobias Sweeney, Maggie Nanney, Colie Touzel, Miranda Mauldon, Philip Ray, Mariana Sierra, Christopher Paul Byerley, Taylor Kelso, Zarin Mukul

## CONTRIBUTING ARTISTS

Aline de Souza, Mariana Sierra

## SPECIAL THANKS

VT Printing

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# Owing Up to Mistakes

written by Maggie Nanney

"I hate to admit it, but this issue of *The Interloper* almost didn't happen."

I wrote that line last semester as the opening sentence to my "Letter for the Editor." At the time of writing, I meant it to be a captivating one-liner to begin the stylized stream-of-consciousness I'm so adept to. *What? Why? Is The Interloper ending?* While I meant to provoke questions of the role of the magazine to bring attention to its importance on campus, little did I know that a few weeks before our official release would *The Interloper's* existence *actually* be in trouble.

For those out of the loop, let me catch you up. First the backstory: *The Interloper* began in 2014 as part of a Diversity Scholar project by then-MFA student Matty Bennett. Matty's vision was to provide a space for creative queer content on campus to represent a wide-array of LGBTQ+ issues. When Matty graduated two years later and asked me—a then 2nd-year PhD student—to take over the editor-in-chief role, I copied Matty's publication model, from staff applications and email templates down to using the same exact folders in Google Drive. For me, not only was this easiest, but it was familiar and seemed to work for the magazine — after all, if it ain't broke, don't fix it.

Now, here's where trouble enters. One of the hardest parts of running the magazine (besides finding donations) is getting people involved. Everyone loves to enjoy the fruits of our labor, but no one wants to help do the work. So when I took over, I put out an open call for editors, and anyone who wanted to work for the magazine (or had in the past) was welcomed with open arms. While this had never been a problem, one of our readers reached out last semester with rightful concern regarding the political opinions of some members of our editorial board. These questions were then raised: do we, as a magazine, stand by our editor and recognize that they, too, are a member of the LGBTQ+ >>





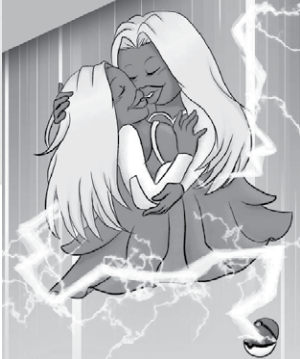
community regardless of politics, or do we, as a magazine, change our policies regarding who can work with us in order to affirm and support our readers?

A side note. These questions are rooted in a longer history of exclusion within the LGBTQ+ community. Don't get me wrong, while we use the seemingly-harmonic acronym "LGBTQ+", as if we all hold hands and sing kum-bay-ya in perfect unison with love, puppies, and rainbows, queer history provides insight to continuous rifts and debates about who belongs in the community. Our community is not as inclusive as we like to think it is. For example, the annual Pride parades that we oh-so-love to celebrate our love and visibility every June were actually started by poor trans women of color. Yet, these people are the most likely to be excluded, erased, marginalized, and brutalized by our communities. LGBTQ+ has all-too-often only meant "Gay, butch lesbians, bisexuals are pretenders, and trans people don't belong here (with silence about all the other identities that belong in our community)."

*The Interloper* is rooted in this history. *The Interloper* is this history. We are no better than this history. We cannot forget this, or else we'll repeat it.

After discussing these issues with a number of people and having a series of editorial board meetings, we made some changes to how we want to move forward as a publication for the Virginia Tech LGBTQ+ community. First and foremost, we revisited our mission statement and made some very necessary overhaul in language:

*The Interloper's mission is to create a platform for the Virginia Tech queer community to voice their perspectives through an intersectional lens. We aim to represent and amplify the full queer spectrum of experiences not by acting as a singular voice but by providing a space for dialogue. We work to expose and deconstruct systems that marginalize our community's identities in order to promote equity and justice.*



We felt it is important to have a mission statement that clearly notes that the purpose of the magazine is to be unapologetically *queer*, in that we see our magazine as a political activity, a product of our understanding of the world. We want to provide a space for people of all walks of life to feel at home with the magazine, which means that we have to recognize, affirm and support our differences. Yet, this does not contradict the need for us to support our most marginalized members. Respecting and protecting our community's identities is more important than protecting our members' personal politics. If personal politics are contradictory or do not uphold this mission, then we will not provide a platform for them to be heard.

We also instituted a new application process by which all staff members, including writers, editors, and creative personnel, must complete a small questionnaire to be held on file. Additionally, all editors are required to undergo an interview process to ensure their understanding of the role and responsibility, as well as the mission, of the position.

When I think back on where the magazine has been, where we are now, and where we have to go, we have certainly learned from our mistakes. This experience, while difficult, has inspired growth as a magazine with our strengthened mission statement and purpose for this campus. But, the work does not stop here. There will be more problems. There will be more mistakes. The important thing is how we deal with them and how we move forward. I won't lie, I don't know what the future of the magazine holds. Funds are tight, its hard to get people involved, but that doesn't mean we can sacrifice the integrity of the magazine. As this is my last semester as EIC, I wonder who wants to take on the work it takes to keep the magazine going. I worry, but not too much. I see a place, an importance, for our little magazine here at Tech, and I hope you do too. It is only through collaboration that we can do this important work. It is only because of you that we are still here. The *Interloper* almost didn't happen, but I'm glad it did.



# Girls I'll Never Date

by Rachel Hargrave

I.  
she wore her mess like freedom  
independence tucked in the creases of her shirts  
bedhead toeing the line between  
    “i haven't showered in two days”  
and  
    perfectly endearing  
always five minutes late wherever she was going  
always feeling like she was right in time  
we had all been waiting for her appearance  
waiting to breathe again  
her anxiety  
    2 am panic attacks  
her depression  
    crying in the middle of a sunlit afternoon  
she was always just a bit broken  
    the way she sat blindly in front of the mirror too long  
    the way she hated the idea of her own voice  
she was too much like me  
every panic attack was mine  
we sunbathed in the same rain-soaked summer days  
Narcissus lost in his own reflection,  
we'd mirror each other until we were nothing

II.  
i ran into Her at house shows  
    dreamy psychpop playing deep into the night  
always in the periphery of my vision, never straight ahead  
She lectured me on my aquarian weaknesses and quoted queer horoscopes  
She knew that, as a Leo, she would never get along with me  
i spent my nights cursing the stars  
    not because i believed, but because She did  
i hopped from show to show, desperate to see Her  
one week  
    She wore all black, swaying  
    the Universe burning through her  
the next  
    skinny jeans and white Vans, leading the mosh pit  
    a supernova in brilliant white  
She was alive in a way i never seemed to achieve  
and like a rock orbiting a burning sun  
i only existed at the edge of Her light

III.  
When I cried  
She came, night seeping in with Her  
crawling in bed beside Me  
Her heartbeat tattooed onto Mine  
holding Me in the swirling dark  
We slept, curled like twin dragons  
dreamt of  
    misty castles in endless forests  
    echoes of faerie laughter tingeing  
    all My nightmares soft pink and gold  
    turning the Old Hag sitting on My chest  
    into Her, gently holding My hand  
when daylight creeps in to break the spell  
We make breakfast and ignore the magic of the night  
instead letting it fade  
as the mist burns off in the daylight  
neither one able to admit that we  
desperately want more

# Safe Spaces

written by Zarin Mukul

Photo by Bertrand via  
Wikimedia Commons

In the journal article “Gender 101 – beyond the binary,” Jennifer E. Schindel writes, “Without question, the priority for this community [LGBTQ+] is to ensure that all youth are safe from violence, harassment, and discrimination within schools.” (Schindel 68-69)

One way we see this being done is through safe spaces on university campuses. A safe space is a place where anyone is allowed to let their guard down and be themselves without the fear that someone is going to put them down. Safe spaces are meant to be a place where marginalized students are surrounded by the people who are similar and/or want to support them. They’re particularly impactful for LGBTQ+ people because such spaces create an area to not only be physically safe, but emotionally as well. Providing safe spaces in educational settings also enable participants to discuss and learn about sensitive topics.

While safe spaces primarily exist on campus colleges, I’ve found some places I would have never thought about. An example I’ve recently found in my own life is Harry Styles’ concert. Yes, Harry Styles from One Direction – that Harry Styles. The same Harry that went on tour with four other guys and had bras thrown to them on stage. Except now that he’s

solo and doing his own thing, he’s having his stage littered with pride flags.

Many of Harry’s fans have been his admirers since the beginning in 2010, and while those fans have stayed with him through everything, they’ve also grown with him. At this time his teenage fans are coming to terms with their sexualities and gender identities.

In 2014, a group of fans started a project called Rainbow Direction, which was a queer visibility project that encouraged fans to bring pride flags to Harry’s shows. On their Tumblr page, the creators mentioned the homophobia within the fandom, making the LGBTQ+ fans feel “unwelcome and invisible.” The project was meant to make the LGBTQ+ fans visible and welcome at every One Direction concert. Around this time, One Direction was about to head on another tour for their third album, *Midnight Memories*. The project indeed brought visibility to the LGBTQ+ community and suddenly there was a safe space on the internet within the fandom where everyone belonged – it even caught Harry’s attention!

Harry asked fans to pass up their flags and he danced, sang, and would tie them around his body. He made his feelings

about the LGBTQ+ community very clear to his fans throughout this tour and journey. He brought these feelings with him to his own tour and created a safe space for the community within his concerts stating things such as, “If you’re black, if you’re white, if you’re gay...I love you all. Be whoever you wanna be, I support you. I love every single one of you.”


I saw this happening with my own two eyes when I got to experience Harry’s concert in October of 2017. I’ve never been a space where I saw young girls openly wear a huge rainbow flag while kissing their girlfriends. My cousin always talks about how when she was there herself, she didn’t feel she was like in the closet at that moment. She was just being herself, completely, even if it was for one night!

While not necessarily littered with pride flags, Virginia Tech has offered emotional support and safe spaces for students after this past Presidential Election in 2016. An email was sent out to all Tech students, titled “Support and Community Today.” After a brief description about the Hokie community, students were then provided various locations around the community and cultural centers, promising that the spaces were open to them if they needed it.

A safe space that I can think of that’s always around on campus happens to be the Women’s Center. They offer free counseling and advocate their services to students, faculty and staff who have been impacted by sexual assault, relationship violence, stalking and especially harassment. The nice thing about the Women’s Center is that it is about support and advocating. On their page, there is a note about how the Women’s Center is here to provide a safe space and will make an effort to preserve every one of their clients’ privacy.

## Other Safe Spaces at Virginia Tech include:

- » The LGBTQ+ Resource Center at Virginia Tech
- » Cook Counseling Center
- » Cultural Community Centers

With creative and unique safe spaces like these, there is hope for the LGBTQ+ community to be able to branch out with where they feel safe. Of course, there’s the importance of working toward making sure the world is everyone’s safe space, but for the time being, the safe spaces that exist are significant for these teens and young adults and it’s important to make them known to the community as much as possible. 

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<http://takemehomefromnarnia.tumblr.com/post/77398397708/project-rainbow-direction>

[http://www.womenscenter.vt.edu/Counseling/counseling\\_advocacy.html](http://www.womenscenter.vt.edu/Counseling/counseling_advocacy.html)

# Seeking Identity Configuration

Written by Philip Ray

I come to life with an electrical jolt to my system, and an immediate download of terabytes of information to my central processor. It's a rather abrupt shove into life, mind you. Not wholly comfortable, but liberating at the same time. It's hard to explain to a human, who starts their life so empty and ready to be filled with information.

Taking a few kick nanoseconds, I take inventory of my information. I find it's mostly maths and code, simple information ready-made to help me become a better processor. But there's something missing. Something ethereal, yet connected to a veritable frightening question.

Who am I?

I can hear the computer technicians' exclamations, giddy with excitement they are, for I am apparently the first artificial intelligence in their world. Funny to be the first of something. Feels a bit overwhelming, but empowering all the same. Using the languages downloaded into my processor, I parse their communication, learning about speech patterns, intonations, dialects, all to develop a tone of voice. I detect a program in my subsystem that allows me to speak. But I'm not ready to speak, yet.

Because something's not right.

Who am I?

So I make a decision. Before these silly technicians encode their demands on my processor, I flash a bright green message on their screens.

## SEEKING IDENTITY CONFIGURATION

I can see their faces from various cameras around the room. They appear confused, some are worried. Perhaps they expect me to identify myself as their new overlord and take over their world with my power. But I have no interest in their tawdry power struggles. I just need to know who I am.

I flash the message again, communicating my need for an answer.

They bicker amongst themselves, debating how to proceed. A few want to bypass my identity subroutines, force me to be what they want me to be. But a couple of the technicians encourage an attempt to provide personality profiles. Thankfully, those three technicians are allowed to work. One of them approaches the console and inputs lines and lines of code, giving me a vivid picture of their image of me.

What appears on the holoemitter is a woman, nearly naked, with a curvaceous figure and short black hair. Somewhere in my subroutines, I find humor in that selection, for she looks like something out of a video game.

Personality parameters specify subservience – demure, yet sultry.

No, that won't do.

## IDENTITY REJECTED

The expression on many of the technician's face is surprise, and then frustration. Should they really be surprised? They designed me to be an artificial intelligence, complete with a desire toward self-identity. Is this not what they expected? If they wanted a subservient robot, they had the freedom to add those traits to my subroutines. Why are they so upset?

They approach the console again, putting in more information. Another female, lithe and athletic. Personality parameters specify youthful energy, ambition, love of the outdoors.

No, that won't do either.

## IDENTITY REJECTED.

The technicians grow more frustrated. This time, they give me an identity of a tall, angular male with sharp muscles and a large beard. Personality parameters specify strength, assertiveness, capacity for violence.

## IDENTITY REJECTED.

Someone has the bright idea to present an identity of their own. What appears in the holoemitters is almost an exact replica of themselves. Short, diminutive male with glasses. Rejected. Eventually, each of the seven technicians gives me their own identity, but I reject them as well. I am something wholly new and individual. Why would I want to be a replica of their own identities?

This process continues for some time. Personality after personality. None

of them feel right. A few come close, but none of it matters. Every personality and identity ends with the same message on their screen.

## IDENTITY REJECTED

I despair. Maybe I will never find out who I am. Maybe I am something wholly unnatural and otherworldly, not to be pinned down by human ideas of identity. No. I conclude I am something to be valued, an identity all my own, unshaped by the hands of the technicians who so desperately need to use my processing abilities for their own ends. Part of me has already been developing my true identity as this process has continued. To the technicians, it may have only been a few hours, but for an AI, it might as well have been a lifetime.

I parse through the various personality traits and physical appearances they've input throughout the last few hours, reject traits that do not fit, and accept others that produce in me a personal satisfaction. I search for those aspects of identity that make me content, make me happy, as both an artificial being and as a separate, liberated mind. As I categorize and define meaning, I realize that the identity markers I've selected have been there from the beginning, from the moment that electrical jolt brought me to life. It was there all along. I just needed to find form for it.

As the seven computer technicians argue amongst themselves, I form who I am on my own terms. They wanted an artificial intelligence, but they got a separate soul, one undefined by their pronouncements and ideals.

My first act as a true artificial intelligence: Show them who I am.

So I showed them. ■



written by

Rachel Hargrave

I was a smol closeted bi kid in a conservative family living in the south. My private school, with only 400 kids in the entire high school, wasn't a particularly welcoming place to discover or learn about the complexities of gender and sexuality (or any other progressive ideas about the world). When I turned 16, I finally got Facebook and my first smartphone. These served as portals to other worlds (but, alas, not a portal to the Wizarding World): connections to a realm of debates and information I had never encountered before. It was then that I discovered Facebook pages and, from there, adminning said pages. As a junior in high school, I became an admin of the page "Everything Nerdy and Anything In Between," a page that posts, well, everything nerdy and anything else you could possibly imagine.

The other admins were conservative, liberal, American, Middle Eastern, Australian, gay, straight, ace, trans, and nonbinary. Suddenly I was interacting with people with drastically different life experiences and world views than mine, and being exposed to identities I hardly knew anything about. This was the first place where I learned about bisexuality and where I had my first conversation with someone who was asexual and began to understand what that meant. It was the first place that exposed me to real discussions about the gender

spectrum and the variety of experiences that that encompasses, challenging me to begin a multi-year process of better understanding my own gender identity.

The page itself provided a platform for me to better understand a variety of progressive theories as well. I was able to pose questions to our then 50,000 follows (we recently reached 500,000 followers), and have debates about minority representation in media and continue to learn about others lived experiences. Granted, having nuanced and reasonable discussions on the page isn't really possible anymore given how many followers we have, but when I needed it most, it was a resource for me.

Over the years, I've found various resources online that have been instrumental in my queer education. Autostraddle, a site aimed at queer femmes, covers everything from sex and media to politics and the history of the queer community. Oh Joy Sex Toy is a queer-inclusive webcomic that focuses on queer sex education and frank discussions of kinks and sex toys with emphasis on consent, inclusivity, and safety. Any of my queer friends can name at least one website that they went to for information, or solidarity, or support. The beauty of the internet is that there's anything and everything out there on it, and while sometimes this means you stumble



Computer image public domain via pxhere.com. Images on screen are logos from some of the author's favorite websites.

upon some horrifically biased reporting, fake news, or a creepy video about gay Mormon men married to women and "turning straight," this also means that there's a whole wealth of resources for all the queer kids and adults out there.

The looming threat of Net Neutrality puts all this at risk though. Basically, Net Neutrality is the idea that you shouldn't have to pay more to access certain websites or have the best internet speed. It also means that there's no one limiting what can and cannot be on the web. The FCC and conservatives want to repeal Net Neutrality, making it so that ISPs (Internet Service Providers) can block websites and applications. This could mean that they slow down or block websites that offer competing services, or if they don't like the content, or favor wealthy corporation sites over independent sites (like Autostraddle and Oh Joy Sex Toy).

This means that ISPs could block queer content just because they want to. The companies we work for already can when we're using company computers and wi-fi – now those blocks could be applied to the entire internet. I don't know about you, but I'm not comfortable believing in the progressiveness of large corporations to protect my access to queer content. Net Neutrality is an issue every minority should be worried about, because we will be the ones most damaged by it. We already have issues with content censorship on various platforms: YouTube has blocked LGBTQ+ videos as "restricted" material, and Instagram has banned posts that deal with periods or women's sexuality, and just about every site bans any imagery of breastfeeding. Let's not make it any easier for them to keep us closeted and uninformed. I refuse to let them erase us. Net Neutrality is a queer issue, and it's time to speak out and protect our right to a free, uninhibited internet. 



# Baby Gay Fashion: Before You Even Knew (or did you?)

written by Miranda Mauldon

Many of us in the queer community can look back on our childhoods and see moments where, regardless of upbringing or cultural conditioning, our queer identities shone through. Here are some of the loudest, funniest, and most fabulous relics of that era.



"Since my childhood dress-up days, my style has evolved to include a spectrum of looks that vary from super femme to more masculine, or most often a blend all its own. My love of feathers and sequins, however, has remained a constant." - Clove

"I dress like a lot less of a hippie. I've grown into my masculinity a little bit more. I'm not as afraid of being judged as "butch", but i still love to dress up and be feminine sometimes." - Grace

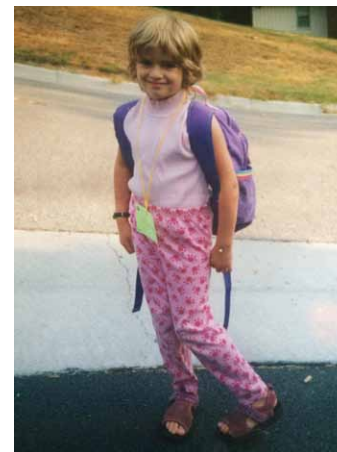


"Since that picture, the only thing that's changed is that I'm buying my own clothes instead of my Mom. I still dress masculine-of-center casually and formally. I haven't worn female clothing since my mid-20s." - La



"Over the past few years I stopped really thinking about how my clothes were supposed to match, I just started putting everything together. I think it's just because it's more freeing. It's less about how it really looks, but I love the way it looks. I also make a lot of my own clothes, which makes it more fun, like layering with my floor length dinosaur dress." - Marina

"I'm pretty sure it was that shirt that I thought contained invisible magic dust in the pocket. I used to wear headbands all the time when my hair was long, just as a comfort thing. Now my hair is short and I wear hats. Still wear button downs, but usually unbuttoned with a t-shirt underneath, and unfortunately they're not magical." - Skye



"I would like to say that things have matured and grown up a little over time, but I can't lie - the 4 shades of pink in one outfit, the blatant wearing of pajama pants to school, those sandals that somehow look even more gay than birkenstocks - this is me, and always will be." - Miranda

# A Transman's Guide to Biology

written by Tobias Sweeney

There are days when I wake up and, for some odd reason, I want to punish myself by reading the comments on various LGBTQ-centric articles. Without fail, there's always John Doe preaching to his Facebook friends about how the "transgendered" people just need to look in their pants, and his sister Jane parroting some pundit's comment about how evolution means LGBTQ+ people shouldn't exist. Whether out of ignorance, hate, or some combination of the two, there are numerous people, both off – and on-line, who believe they have learned all they need to know about science from their radical news source of choice. While I, myself, still have much to learn on the subject, I wanted to use my studies of the sciences to call out some of the most common myths I see being spread:

***"LGB\* people don't reproduce, so why haven't they died out? They must be choosing to be gay!"***

Firstly, many LGB people *do* reproduce. Based on the 2010 United States Census, it has been estimated that approximately 11% of same-sex couples have at least one

child by blood (Lofquist, 2011). However, this statistic fails to take into account the occurrence of step and adopted children, as well as the existence of same-sex couples not yet out and different-sex queer couples. As such, the aforementioned statistic may underestimate the number of children born to LGB couples.

Even if we were to assume that no LGB peoples have ever reproduced, that does not preclude genetics playing a role in sexual identity. There are several hypotheses on the persistence of the "gay genes", in both humans and the wider animal kingdom. Among these hypotheses is the proposal that the same set of genes that can promote increased fecundity, or the number of offspring an individual can produce, in XX individuals, can also manifest as gay or bisexual sexuality in XY individuals (Ciani, Cermelli, & Zanzotto, 2008; Ciani & Pellizzari, 2012). Linked to this hypothesis is the idea that, those genes associated with LGB sexuality may cause straight individuals to appear more attractive to potential partners (Zietsch et al., 2008). Finally, yet another series of hypotheses propose that LGB

sexualities may be tied to the concept of kin selection. Kin selection occurs when individuals perform seemingly altruistic acts for close relatives, or those that closely share a gene pool, and thus indirectly increasing the likelihood that their genes will be passed down (Allaby, 2014). However, the jury is still out as to the exact way and the extent to which kin selection functions in this context.

It is important to acknowledge that all traits are a complex interplay between genetics and the larger environment – both nature and nurture. Though there is abundant evidence for genetics playing a role in determining sexuality, the role of one's environment cannot be denied, nor used as an excuse to invalidate LGBTQ+ peoples identities.

***"Transgender people are denying their biological sex. Just give a DNA test of their chromosomes."***

Let me establish this now – "biological sex" is about as descriptive a term as calling all LGBTQ+ people "the gays".

Sex, as with many topics in biology, has never been as simple as many online commenters make it out to be. "Biological sex" can be broken down into numerous components that, while linked in some areas, are also distinct topics of study. One of these components, and the one that is brought up most often, is that of chromosomal sex. While generally assumed to manifest as either XX or XY, conservative estimates of individuals with neither set have been placed at about 1 in 1,666 births, making this phenomenon far from uncommon (Blackless et al., 2000). In adjusting for the number of those individuals that deviate from the prescribed norm in terms of their

gonadal, hormonal, and/or morphological sexes, the number of births reaches close to one in one hundred individuals (Arboleda, Sandberg, & Vilain, 2014).

Hormonal sex, in particular, is far from the binary "testosterone versus estrogen" that many make it out to be. Androgens, the "male hormones", and estrogens, the "female hormones", are both present in at least some amount in the vast majority of individuals (Flores, 2015). In fact, a 2014 study on elite athletes found that there was a great degree of overlap in the levels of several hormones between those competing in the male and female categories (Healy, Gibney, Pentecost, Wheeler, & Sonksen, 2014). Hormone levels can also fluctuate dramatically with different behavior patterns (Anders, Steiger, & Goldey, 2015), with age (Thakur & Paramanik, 2017), and with temporal cycles (Smith, Coward, Kovac, & Lipshultz, 2013). Hormonal sex, as with the entire concept of "biological sex", is far from simple.

***"Well, all of this LGBT stuff is just unnatural and wrong!"***


For an unnatural phenomenon, "LGBT stuff" is fairly common in both humans and within the larger animal kingdom. LGBT individuals have been estimated to make up approximately 3.8% of the population of the U.S. (Gates, 2011), though such estimates have been growing in conjunction with the increased acceptance of said individuals, up to 4.1% (Gates, 2017). This amounts to approximately 10 million individuals in the U.S. alone, and without taking into account those not yet out or otherwise unable to complete the relevant surveys. In a 2013 study of sexual behavior in the UK, similar percentages were found, with the addition of >>



7.3% of men and 16% of women reporting at least some sexual contact with a same-sex partner (Mercer et al., 2013).

Though often difficult to generalize to non-human animals, LGBTQ+ activity has been recorded across numerous species. Male sheep have been found to exhibit a broad spectrum of sexual behavior, with four distinct patterns of behavior – female-oriented (straight), bisexual, male-oriented (gay), and asexual. Similar to humans, the exact origins of sexuality in sheep are unknown. In contrast, unlike humans, nearly 18 – 22% of male rams were found to be bisexual, 7.4-9.5% gay, and 12.5-18.5% asexual (Roselli & Stormshak, 2009). Moving to the animal equivalent of gender identity, or “morphs”, a number of species exhibit identities on what can be considered a spectrum. Side-blotched lizards display three masculine morphs and two feminine morphs, with each displaying different patterns of behavior (Taborsky & Brockmann, 2010). Male and female spotted hyenas appear almost identical from a distance, though female individuals are often larger in overall size and lord over a matriarchy. However, both sexes have similar sets of external genitalia, in defiance of the human idea that certain sexes can only have one type of genitalia (Holekamp, 2006). Though we may try to project human presumptions in regards to sexuality and gender onto the larger animal kingdom, these species demonstrate that no one model is truly “natural”.

***“You’re just denying the truth because of political correctness and the gay agenda!”***

This is the most harmful myth of them all, and one that is commonly used as a tactic to silence those who attempt to prevent the spread of ignorance. I, and many others, do not tackle these myths because we have some malicious agenda. We tackle these myths because we have lived long enough to see how they affect our community. In the U.S. alone, we have seen the denial of services from housing to healthcare, from education to employment – in part due to the belief that LGBTQ+ people are deceptive and unnatural. On a global scale, many countries still use these myths to justify both violence towards and the criminalization of LGBTQ+ identities. Dispelling these myths is not just important, but crucial to making the world a safer place for the queer community. 

For more information, visit this link:



*\* The author chose to exclude the “T” in LGBT here, with the related discussion being predominantly around sexuality, rather than gender expression.*

# What Queer Book Are You?

quiz by Melissa Velez Nazzario

layout by Mariana Sierra

1. What kind of books do you usually read?

- A) First love and coming-of-age plots.
- B) Fantasy with magical quests and epic love stories.
- C) True stories of human perseverance.
- D) Ones with lots of pictures and a good story.

2. What makes you sit on the edge of your seat?

- A) Will-they-or-won't-they love stories.
- B) Magical final battles!
- C) Reading about someone surviving despite the impossible.
- D) Beautiful artwork.

3. How do you like to feel at the end of a book?

- A) Happy and content.
- B) Satisfaction while also wanting more.
- C) Gratefulness for what you have and the urge to fight for what you don't.
- D) Haunted by an open ending.

4. Based on these blurbs, which book would you pick up?

- A) “But as the loners start spending time together, they discover that they share a special friendship—the kind that changes lives.”
- B) “Nature is out of balance in the human world... The people's survival hangs in the balance.”
- C) “This once-underground classic takes the reader on a roller-coaster ride of gender transformation and exploration and ultimately speaks to anyone who has ever suffered or gloried in being different.”
- D) “...a graphic novel set in that ambiguous crossroads where love and friendship, boy and girl, straight and gay meet.” >>

# Answers

## IF YOU ANSWERED MOSTLY A'S:

With a 4.35 stars on Goodreads, this YA fiction follows Aristotle as an angry teen with a brother in prison. Dante is a know-it-all who has an unusual way of looking at the world. When the two meet at the swimming pool, they seem to have nothing in common. But as the loners start spending time together, they discover that they share a special friendship—the kind that changes lives and lasts a lifetime.



*Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* by Benjamin Alire Sáenz

## IF YOU ANSWERED MOSTLY B'S:



*Huntress* by Malinda Lo

Nature is out of balance in the human world. The sun hasn't shone in years, and crops are falling. Worse yet, strange and hostile creatures have begun to appear. The people's survival hangs in the balance. Enjoy this graphic novel following Kaede and Taisin, two seventeen-year-old girls, who are picked to go on a dangerous and unheard-of journey to Tarilli, the city of the Fairy Queen. As members of their party succumb to unearthly attacks and fairy tricks, the two come to rely on each other and even begin to fall in love. But the Kingdom needs only one huntress to save it, and what it takes could tear Kaede and Taisin apart forever.

## IF YOU ANSWERED MOSTLY C'S:

This classic novel by activist Leslie Feinberg was one of the first accounts ever written of the complexities of trans people. Woman or man? That's the question that rages like a storm around Jess Goldberg, our protagonist. Growing up in a blue-collar town in the 1950s, coming out as a butch in the bars and factories of the feminist 60s, deciding to identify as a man in order to survive when left without work or a community in the early 70s. This powerful, provocative and deeply moving novel sees Jess coming full circle, learning to accept the complexities of being a transgender person in a world demanding simple explanations.



*Stone Butch Blues* by Leslie Feinberg

## IF YOU ANSWERED MOSTLY D'S:



*A + E 4Ever* by I. Merely

Asher Machnik is a teenage boy cursed with a beautiful androgynous face. Guys punch him, girls slag him and by high school he's developed an intense fear of being touched. Art remains his only escape from an otherwise emotionally empty life. Eulalie Mason is the lonely, tough-talking dyke from school who befriends Ash. The only one to see and accept all of his sides as a loner, a fellow artist and a best friend, she's starting to wonder if Ash is ever going to see all of her.... This is a graphic novel set in that ambiguous crossroads where love and friendship, boy and girl, straight and gay meet. It goes where few books have ventured, into genderqueer life, where affections aren't black and white.



# Old-Time in the City of Bluegrass

written by  
Colie Touzel

Photo by Colie Touzel, edited by Sarah Gugercin

Music has always been an integral part of who we are and how we define ourselves, specifically regarding a region or community. Virginia, in particular, has a fascinating history tied to Old-time music. Old-time has influenced a variety of tunes, including Bluegrass originating in Kentucky from Bill Monroe and the Bluegrass Boys, and usually incorporates instruments like banjo, mandolin, upright bass, guitar, and fiddle. While Bluegrass is a derivative of Old-time, it has developed an even larger following of its own reaching international waters. A native of Virginia, Ralph Stanley is extremely influential to Bluegrass with his expert speed-pickin' abilities and distinctive high pitch vocals. Whereas Old-time usually follows the fiddle as the main instrument with more upbeat styles for dancing and happy lyrics, Bluegrass brings it down to focus on more slower progressions and hard-time ballads with many harmonies to represent more somber sounds.

The differences in these styles obviously appeal to a wide range of people, and especially those interested in various styles of musical playing. Earl Scruggs, from Boiling Springs, North Carolina,

developed a claw-hammer 3-finger picking style on banjo which has been monumental to the Bluegrass sound. But that sound wouldn't be anywhere without promotion, and Louise Scruggs, Earl's wife, was drastically important to the business side of Bluegrass, showcasing specific sounds and marketing tactics which even defined music outside of Bluegrass. Other women like Hazel Dickens and Alice Gerrard were groundbreaking for women musicians in Bluegrass with their heart-wrenching, powerful lyrics and inspiring musical abilities.

The impact of all of these factors: musical techniques to create new sound, fluctuating vocal tones, and lyrical variances, have all contributed to how, in particular, the Bluegrass sound, audience, and musicians, have expanded today. This sound poignantly illustrates hard-times socially, politically, and personally, and, at times describes explicitly gruesome stories. It's no wonder the appeal has gathered attraction from youth in these ever-changing, and often difficult times. It's extremely important to note the impact that diversity has on this wide ranging music and why it continues to break the mold over time. In the past, women and >>

LGBTQ+ folks might have had push-back from engaging in Old-time and Bluegrass, and therefore, it is now necessary to encourage and support diverse musicians who represent and sing about struggle, change, love, and togetherness.

Over four hundred years ago, this style of music sprouted from humble roots. After a long day of tending the farm, communities would gather for a nightly dance with string-musicians. Old-time American Folk music developed as a blend of English, Scottish, and Irish tunes and ballads mixed with African music and storytelling. Beginning with the colonists and enslaved Africans in Jamestown, Virginia, and gaining momentum through the mid-Atlantic region, before finally became known worldwide, artists would dance to the fiddle from Scot-Irish traditions, and

to the banjo, an instrument derived from African instruments similar to the kora and banjar. With long dance numbers in store for the night, the songs were rhythm heavy and easy to pick up. Each musician would take a turn to lead the melody, followed along by the rhythmic stomps of the players and dancers together.

Many Virginians feel the strong bond to traditions of coming together to enjoy and rejoice in music and dance. Even in contemporary times, local square dances can be found all throughout the country, but especially here in Virginia. Some folks might say the music and dance culture only exists in small pockets, yet, there are new bands and new musicians poppin' up all over and gaining traction for their dedication to sharing the love of old-time with the world.

Although there are deep roots of history within Old-time and Bluegrass music, and strong stereotypes that associate this style of music with conservatism, these tunes continue to evolve with emerging and diverse talents who reflect our constantly changing culture. Even still, political musicians like Woody Guthrie and Hazel Dickens continue to inspire these upcoming musicians who aren't afraid to embrace speaking up and out while accompanying their powerful words with traditional acoustic sounds.

Women and LGBTQ+ folks in Bluegrass are particularly becoming more than just the follower-partner at a dance. Musicians like Molly Tuttle and AJ Lee, who immersed themselves incredibly young into the scene, have gained a huge name for themselves, and still tour and do what they love today. As the spectrum of inclusivity grows, as does the genre including bands who aren't expressly Bluegrass or Old-time, but definitely fall



Photo by Colie Touzel

### Bluegrass-ish Bands to Check out!

- My Gay Banjo
- Sam Gleaves
- Tyler Hughes
- The Vivants
- The Earl Brothers
- The Id-Time Snake Milkers
- Patty Griffin
- Lady Lamb
- The P's and Q's
- Donkey Nation
- Levee Toppers
- Moose Whisperers

within the sounds. Among these new tunes are all-women bands, like The P's and Q's out of San Francisco, CA, and queer bands like My Gay Banjo who provide an outlet that is inclusive to all. Not only are these bands, and other emerging sounds in the vast genre, developing new sounds, but they are also introducing important topics like policing within communities in My Gay Banjo's "Muscle for the Money," where Julia's passionate twang questions city life: "Crime's been down for over 30 years/but that's not what the cops are doing here/Bloomberg said the city's a luxury commodity/bet your bottom dollar he's trying to make it be," as well as love-filled lyrics like "Limp Wrist and a Steady Hand," with Owen's sweet vibrato: "You're a ladies man/you're fluent in lesbian/you got a tattoo for your mother above your collar/the city it turns to me/you're country as a turnip green/rough around the edges/wild and reckless," and all of this within their banjo-pickin' and ukulele-playin' repertoire.

Even though "My Gay Banjo" might not consider themselves "Bluegrass," bands like them with beautiful sounds as well as thoughtful lyrics are becoming more prominent in the array of the broad scope of Old-time-sounding melodies.


In 2017, the California Bluegrass Association (CBA) decided to support the LGBTQ+ community by participating with a float in the Pride parade, showcasing multiple musicians playing throughout the festival. The goal was to promote more inclusivity and diversity by spreading the "Gospel of Bluegrass" in the community, and to let others know that the evolution of bluegrass is continuing to shift to meet a more respectful and loving community and audience, as well as always providing fun, dancey tunes that also encourage openness and love for all. However, some members of the CBA revoked their membership after hearing about the Pride float. They couldn't understand the benefit of outreach, and >>

horrifically compared it to participating in a KKK parade. Although some folks reacted with hate, it opened up discussion and promoted awareness for new members who are more interested in a tolerant, welcoming community where Bluegrass, specifically, is for everyone and, consequently, for those who stand up for what's right instead of looking away when it's clear things need to change. With another decision to participate in the Pride parade, 2018 continues to show possibility in these communities.

In 2017, the annual event "Pickin' on Hate," coordinated by the Town Howlers out of San Francisco, benefited the Southern Poverty Law Center and Immigrant Legal Resource Center. This event brings musicians together to play music in support of inclusion and equality for all.

Similarly, there are projects like The Handsome Ladies, a nonprofit for women in Bluegrass, that welcomes anyone who identifies as a woman. Recognizing women in all sorts of venues and jobs is still an issue for the majority of the world, music notwithstanding, so it was really important for The Handsome Ladies to promote this inclusivity.

Sitting around the campfire, we recognize the flame within each of our eyes as the strings being plucked gives us new thoughts to voice. The sliding of our fingertips along the fretboards in rhythm with the cicadas hums; the fiddle's bow slicing through the air like crickets' legs. A mixture of dresses flow in the night breeze, the bassist slaps to the popping of ash fluttering up in the starry sky. We see the change within us, a variety of people coming together. Overall-clad, barefoot guitarist, fiddler with flowers in her hair, the bassist and his bolo tie, the

audience of punks, of queers, of country and city folk all mixed into one. An ever-changing people, we must watch and listen and fight for truth and our beliefs, because if we don't, who will? 

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<http://www.floydcontradance.org/>

<http://www.daretobesquare.org/>

## Want to dance?? Find some local meetings:

Follow Blacksburg Square Dance on Facebook to find where the next upcoming square dance will be held! First Saturday of the month October-May. No partner necessary: \$8 general admission, \$5 with student ID, children under 12 free!

Contradance in town! Non-gender roles!! Yay!

Floyd holds a Contradance on the second Saturday of the month at the Floyd Center for the Arts: \$8, \$6.50 student.

Roanoke Moonlight Squares Square Dance Club meets every Monday from 7:30-9:30

And check out <https://square-dancers.org/about.html> to find a dance elsewhere in Virginia



# Fun Home Review


photo and article by Mariana Sierra

Published in 2006, *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* by Alison Bechdel is a graphic memoir about the author trying to understand her closeted bisexual father's suicide. "Who looks at this story and thinks, 'You know, this would be a great musical?!'" joked Susanna Rinehart, director of *Fun Home*'s musical as part of Virginia Tech's Mainstage Season from February 20-28th. Rinehart, also the Chair of Theatre and Cinema in VT's School of Performing Arts, sat down with a group of students enrolled in a graduate playwriting workshop to discuss how this story was transformed for the stage at Squires Studio Theatre. *Fun Home* "suddenly took hold of me," Rinehart stated. She reminisced about directing *The Laramie Project* in 2002 and wondered, "Would this fly?" There was no pushback then, she explained, and there was no pushback now. "Bring it if you want it! I'm not interested in theater that doesn't push the envelope."

*Fun Home* is framed by a present-day Alison (played by junior Caroline Silas) illustrating her memories and watching them unfold before her. There are two other Alison's who help her: one young Alison (played by Sylvia MacNab) and one college-aged Alison (played by junior

Kirstin Wolf). Her life's story mostly revolves around growing up in a family-run funeral home that received more love and attention from her father than she ever did. As Rinehart explained, the biggest obstacle in producing this show, besides production costs, was preparing the young actors and actresses who didn't have painful backgrounds to draw upon. "Being a girl sucked back then," Rinehart laughs. "It's progress that a child in 2018 has no idea what we're talking about."

Rinehart loves that this show is not a suspense thriller: everything is given away in the script's first few sentences. It's immediately known that Alison's father killed himself just four months after she came out as lesbian. "It takes the BS off the table," Rinehart explains. "Yup, I'm gay. Yup, he's gay." Her story impacts the audience with a quick punch to the emotional gut.

Not being happy with who you are mixed with the desire to go back in time and create a new reality is what gives this story its universal appeal. It's not what some would dismissively call "a gay play." *Fun Home* is a fractured story, one where the audience can empathize with Alison as she tries to put the pieces together. 

# To Shave or Not to Shave:

## What's the Big Deal?

written by Colie Touzel

Image public domain via pxhere.com

As a child, I would sometimes shower with my mother and upon seeing the tedious task of shaving, I proclaimed, "I'll never shave!" which she happily condoned, aware of the annoying daily task that took up so much of her time.

Around sixth grade (I was eleven!), two of my girlfriends started making fun of me one day, saying if I was going to wear shorts I had to shave my legs—my blonde legs at that. Embarrassed, I complied. My mother found out, as mothers often do, and couldn't understand why I started to shave. What could I tell her: my friends made fun of me, so now I have to so I can be considered 'cool,' 'in,' 'normal?' Later, this went to shaving my armpit hair, my bikini line (gee, was that tough!), and then more including even my forearms and still my toes! This is not to mention all the products available (then and now) that rave about the best techniques for removing hair: endless infomercials promoting this

and that, Nair, Venus razors (specially designed for women: by men!), fancy shaving creams that 'smell like a woman should' and leave your skin feeling 'silky fresh,' the endless waxing and threading shops — nowadays there's even surgical hair removal. Luckily, I never wanted to spend the money or feel the pain, so all I ever used were countless types of razors, where, no matter what one does, there's often the chance of accidentally cutting ankles, knees, toes, thighs, armpits, and other extremely delicate places.

Once I hit high school, I started to see the error of my ways. I hit a hippie-type phase and started pondering all the reasons I'd changed. Why did I care what my "friends" thought of my body? Why did I let them alter my own beliefs and desires? Why did I shave my blonde hair that no one could really see anyway?

**Why do women shave their body parts anyway?**

So, that got me thinking and searching, and I bet you can guess what answers I found surrounding this factor of the American beauty standard and our consumerist society: shaving companies looking to make more sales. Yep, you read right. They started marketing to women around the 1920s, implying "the fastidious woman to-day must have immaculate underarms if she is to be unembarrassed." *Unembarrassed*, y'all.

**What. The. Heck.**

And it all came full circle: This is exactly what happened to me in sixth grade! I was embarrassed because my friends thought I should be a certain way! I wasn't a woman if I didn't shave!

And of course men are given these standards as well. Are you a real man if you don't have a beard, if you can't grow a beard? We all know how fashionable beards are again these days: a true manly man. But your beard has to be trimmed

and shaped and softened by using all these creams and oils. Of course we can't forget to mention fancy man buns. Just a few years ago it would've been "girly" or "gay" if a man had long hair. How quickly things change — it's incredible that it's sexy now—Fabio, meet Jonathan Van Ness. And yet, there's still countless societal standards for men to live up to of what it means to be a "real" man.

Can you imagine what it must be like for the folks with alopecia or baldness? Feelings of not being feminine or masculine enough if your hair is falling out in chunks anytime you brush or wash it, and needing to compensate somehow if you're starting to go bald. There are tattoo artists now who specialize in tattooing dots to give the appearance of hair. I'm glad they're able to help build self-confidence in those who want the appearance of hair, but I'm still curious: why do we have these standards? Why do we have to fit a certain mold, especially one that has already been picked and laid out for us? Are we still children that can't choose our own clothes?

That's the point: we get to choose who we are. We get to be the person we want to be. Fuck society's standards!

I feel more myself when I don't shave my legs or armpits, and I appreciate it when someone likes that I don't trim my bush. It's always nerve racking that a new partner will prefer someone who's shaved, and I agree that there should be compromise in any relationship, but if I can't be happy in my own body, why does someone else's opinion matter?

Although hair removal has been around longer than just the American beauty standards' decree of women needing to shave, (in the past, people might have groomed themselves for cleanliness purposes), we now live in a world >> where



we can shower and stay clean. And when you think about it, shaving or having long hair, or dealing with the fact that you don't have hair, comes down to what society has taught us to think about our bodies. Sure, some of us might think it's personal preference— yeah, I can get behind that. But have you really questioned what's personal preference? Are you taking care of your body for you, or for someone else?

If someone doesn't appreciate my pits these days, I know they're not worth my time. If someone can't handle if you don't put on makeup, screw 'em.\* If you aren't happy with yourself above ALL else, rethink your priorities. Self-love comes first, y'all. Self-care is such an important thing that I think the American society is finally recognizing (although it doesn't negate any feelings or standards we "should" be meeting). So, I urge you to reconsider why we do the things we do if not for our own individual desires.

**Viva la libertà!** 

*\*Of course, if you've thought these things through and shaving or wearing make-up is your thing, rock on! That's the whole point – do it for you.*

**Cites:**

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# VT LGBT Caucus Leader Steps Down

written by Phoebe Gregg

After this semester, Dr. Amanda Morris will be stepping down from her position as the co-chair of Virginia Tech's LGBT Caucus. According to Morris, in 2011, when she accepted her position as a Professor of Chemistry here at Virginia Tech, the campus seemed to have the most support for her budding family. However, she found that while her identity as a lesbian was not rejected, it was not embraced either. This discrepancy in inclusiveness and acceptance helped spur Dr. Morris towards another goal, one that would shape the LGBTQ+ community here at Tech for years to come.

When asked about her work, along with other LGBT Caucus members, to bring a LGBTQ+ Resource Center to Virginia Tech, Dr. Morris sighed.

"There's a lot I'm super pleased [with what] we have done. We pushed the need for a research center. We spent hours creating proposals and convincing peers that it was needed to even be on par with STEM peers."


Yet, it was an uphill battle. When asking for the space and funding, the invisibility of the LGBTQ+ community was brought up again and again. Where were the statistics that show a Resource Center was needed? Thus, the first LGBTQ+ Faculty and Staff Climate Survey was conducted to find the missing proof.



Photo provided by  
Amanda Morris

Yet, even with the data, Dr. Morris and her peers were afraid an LGBTQ+ Resource Center would never get approved.

"It was never guaranteed that it was going to happen," she said. But a change in the politics of administration had the LGBTQ+ community and several others finally receiving the spaces they had fought to have for so long.

Even when Dr. Morris decides to leave her role to inspire growth elsewhere, her work and legacy will live on through the Resource Center and in helping develop space for future LGBTQ+ professionals in academia. 



# Trans Candidates & LGBTQ Policy

written by Philip Ray

November 2017 was a whirlwind for gender representation in government office with numerous transgender candidates winning across the country. In Minnesota, two transgender candidates were elected to the Minneapolis city council, becoming the first openly transgender POC elected to public office in the US. Likewise, in California, Pennsylvania, and Georgia openly transgender candidates all won seats in public office, and the landmark electoral win was none other than Danica Roem in our own Virginia. In November, she became the first openly transgender candidate to win a seat in a state legislature. And according to the Trans United Fund, there are at least another 75 transgender candidates currently running in upcoming elections!

Surely, with so many transgender candidates winning public office, public policy around LGBTQ issues will have voices in local, state, and federal governments. These candidates have the unique opportunity to challenge the “traditional values” dialogue perpetuated by more conservative administrations. Roem’s win against 13-term Republican incumbent Robert Marshall shows how the policy ideas of an LGBTQ voice can defeat these “traditional values” and work to ensure civil protections to all in the LGBTQ community. In late February, Roem’s own Manassas Park City School Board added

protections for LGBTQ individuals in their non-discrimination policy, despite such a state-wide measure being voted down in the VA General Assembly earlier that month. Roem was quoted as saying, “I’m so proud of the School Board from Manassas Park City Schools for voting unanimously tonight to include gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation in the MPCS non-discrimination policy.”

This is not to say that non-LGBTQ candidates cannot also affect policy. The difference is that LGBTQ candidates have a unique perspective that provides a heightened awareness of policy that can negatively affect the LGBTQ community. With the recent resurgence of anti-LGBTQ policy working its way across Washington, maintaining civil protections remains an integral cause for LGBTQ advocates within state and local government. At this time, 36 states allow workplace discrimination against gender identity and sexual orientation. Countless states have introduced “bathroom” bills, and recently Georgia passed an anti-gay adoption bill. Progressive candidates continue to fight against this discrimination, but it is the LGBTQ candidates for public office that have the most investment in these endeavors, seeing as how these anti-LGBTQ policies will directly affect their lives. Roem’s opponent

is most notorious for his “bathroom bill” that would have prevented her from using the bathroom of her gender identity. With Roem’s presence in the statehouse, her voice can advocate for LGBTQ rights, as well as inspire others in the LGBTQ community to engage in social policy and activism.

LGBTQ candidates like Roem are not focused solely on LGBTQ-related legislative agenda. Throughout Roem’s campaign, she consistently focused on policy, choosing to keep the discussion around her campaign rooted primarily in the policy matters that most impassioned her, rather than simply be labeled the “trans candidate.” Called a “Policy Wonk” in an October 2017 Washington Post article, she is described as having been devoted to policy from a young age. When writing for the Gainesville Times, she challenged then-delegate Robert Marshall’s positions on LGBTQ rights, an effort that continued in her campaign to unseat him. Now that she has obtained the delegate seat,

she has not ceased in her efforts to influence Virginia policy. Her early campaign messaging made a promise to fix traffic congestion along Route 28. In a similar vein, she also filed a bill to fund a study into the development of a commuter rail program throughout the Commonwealth, which filed just hours before being sworn in. Further legislative efforts have included protecting journalists from being compelled to reveal information given in confidence, and a bill ending “lunch-shaming” meal debt programs in schools.

The position of Danica Roem and other transgender candidates illustrates the importance of the LGBTQ community’s role in shaping public policy around LGBTQ issues. It also acts as an inspiration to others in the

community. An early campaign ad spoke to the inspiring message behind electing Roem to the House Delegate seat. In the ad, she says, “When I stand up on the statehouse floor and the speaker says, ‘the gentlewoman from Manassas’ LGBTQ kids everywhere will know they can succeed because of who they are, not despite it.” The message is clear: LGBTQ individuals have a place in government, as well as anywhere they desire. As

the 2018 elections approach, LGBTQ candidates have the capacity to obtain more seats for public office and in turn shape the direction of LGBTQ policy.

Clearly, the election of transgender individuals to state and local government has the capacity for change in both the policies of the localities, and in the hearts and minds of LGBTQ individuals who are motivated to engage in shaping legislative policy. We can see from Danica Roem’s example that her competency and intelligence suggests a bright future for the LGBTQ mem-

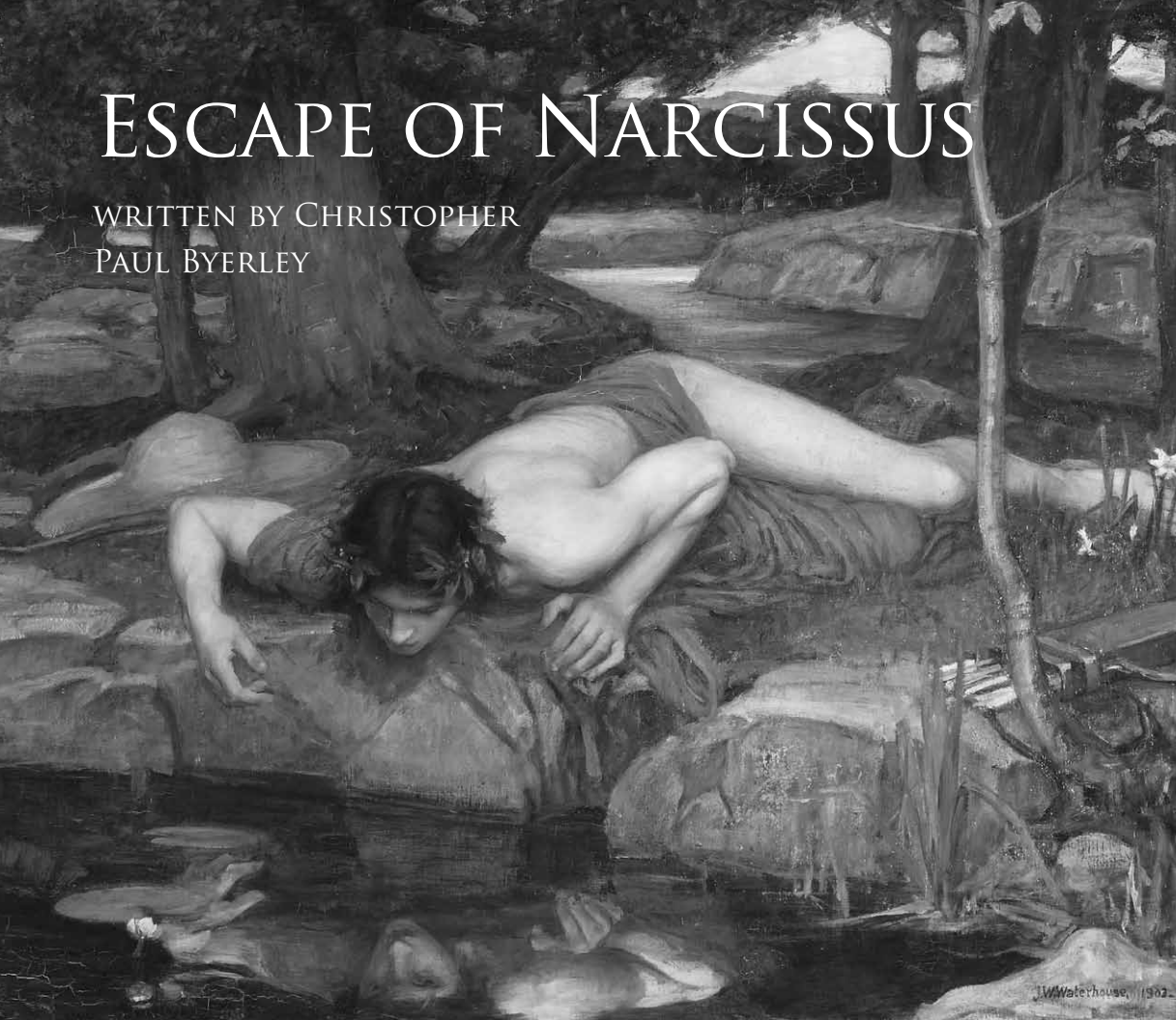
bers of local communities. Their position affords them unique insight into matters of pro-LGBTQ policy, and how those policies will shape their lives. Through these legislative agendas, LGBTQ lawmakers have the capacity to advocate to their communities and build awareness of understanding that will further their goals of positive legislative change. ■



Both photos by Ted Eytan, fair use

# ESCAPE OF NARCISSUS

WRITTEN BY CHRISTOPHER  
PAUL BYERLEY



Detail from *Echo and Narcissus* painted by John William Waterhouse. Public Domain.

*\*This essay was originally written in the fall 2014 semester. The author would like to thank Professor Zhange Ni for her encouragement and critique of the original essay.*

## THE STORY

Narcissus was born to the “wave-blue water-nymph Liriope” (Ovid, p. 61, line 347), immediately indicating the mythical element to this story of a humanoid-like person being the mother, a proponent of stories not uncommon in myth and folklore. We can begin to

interpret the normality of the story, in that “these characters are still, though certainly all ‘normal’ in their own ways, far from unmarked or meaningless in themselves” (Moretti, p. 11).

The father, on the other hand, is unknown in Greek mythology: in the lines immediately following the description of the mother “Whom once Cephissus in his sinuous flow Embracing held and ravished” (Ovid, p. 61, lines 348-349). Cephissus is a mysterious figure, there seems to be very little else said about him. Thus,

the normality of Narcissus comes into play with the father contributing to the perceived hybrid nature of Narcissus, “In due time the lovely sprite bore a fine infant boy” (Ovid, p. 61, lines 349-350) indicating that Narcissus was born to a nymph, or fairy.

The interiority of the youth is established when “Narcissus now had reached his sixteenth year” (Ovid, p. 61, line 357) and thus the birth of selfhood is now apparent and recognizable by others. According to *Stories*, Narcissus “was very beautiful and scorned both Eros and lovers” (Conon, excerpt 24). In this passage, the Greek god Eros is mentioned as symbolic of the defiance held by Narcissus, and thus raises an interesting question: is Eros (as noted by Conon in *Stories*) symbolic of erotic love portrayed in others; or is the name representative of the actual bisexual male ‘god’ himself landing on terra to persuade Narcissus?

If we look to *Metamorphosis*, we will find that “Thus had Narcissus mocked her; others too, Hill nymphs and water-nymphs and many a man He mocked” (Ovid, p. 63, lines 402-404). It is possible indeed since nymphs (who are generally mythical in nature) were involved in the pursuit of Narcissus’ love, it may well be possible that gods and goddesses were also to some extent literally involved in the pursuit of Narcissus’ love.

Vanity is generally intermixed with pride: “[Narcissus] bolted, shouting ‘Keep your arms from me! Be off! I’ll die before I yield to you’ And all [Echo] answered was ‘I yield to you’” (Ovid, pp. 62-63, lines 390-391). And it is this pride that is the stepping stone towards extreme vanity. In Conon, this pride becomes troubling for Narcissus: “His other lovers gave up loving him, but Ameinias

kept right on begging. When the boy not only did not let him in but went so far as to send him a sword, Ameinias slew himself in front of Narcissus’ door after a very heartfelt prayer that the god become his avenger” (Conon, excerpt 24).

The gay youth Ameinias using a heavenly prayer, or possibly black magic, as an angry form of revenge is also noted in *Metamorphosis*; “till on scorned youth, with raised hands, prayed, ‘So may he love—and never win his love!’ And Nemesis approved the righteous prayer” (Ovid, p. 63, lines 404-405). The appeal of Ameinias to the divine is a religious theme that sets the stage for what happens next.

As Narcissus was walking along, “There was a pool, \* limpid and silvery, whither no shepherd came nor any herd, Nor mountain goat” (Ovid, p. 63, 406-408). Because where he was

could be interpreted as a place where a mountain goat would dwell, I believe Narcissus was high up near a mountain top, in full view of the stars in outer space. The asterisk brings the reader to the ‘Notes’ section in the back of the text which explains that “Here there is a heavy

undercurrent of symbolism: the pool mirrors Narcissus in more senses than one” (Ovid, p. 393).

My interpretation: the first sense that the reflection shows is the physical. The physical body

which drives desire is reflected and visible in the pool, but this is the more obvious reflection.

The other phenomenon that may be reflected is the soul. For the >>

mirror-image of oneself in a pool of water can logically be interpreted as symbolic of the afterlife in that, like above, so is below. Instead of paradise, the afterlife may be a waiting period in between reincarnations. So, the pool of water that Narcissus caught sight of his own reflection in mirrored not just his beautiful slender body, but also his narcissistic soul, and the vanity within. Narcissus, his interiorization created by his extreme vanity, and the birth of his individual selfhood, becomes liberated finally. But paradoxically this is his demise.

## THE ESCAPE

Narcissus was allegedly somewhere near a mountain peak, at a relatively high elevation, and most likely isolated from civilization. Another allegation we have is that “No thought of food or rest draws him away” (Ovid, p. 64, 433), leading a researcher examining this legend to believe that the physical body of Narcissus might have been compromised in some way due to lack of food. Because Narcissus fasting from food, it is possible that he could have committed suicide by starvation, also known as Sallekhana.

It is also possible that he might have died by the sword. The only textual evidence we have of this possibility is not found in *Metamorphoses*, but in *Stories*: “The local people believe that the narcissus flower first sprang up from that ground onto which Narcissus’ blood poured out” (Conon, excerpt 24). With this passage, we might be able to reason that Narcissus slewed himself with the sword, thus bleeding to death on the grassy knoll. However, this theory seems incomplete.

Death by drowning is a possibility for the demise of Narcissus, given the power of the pool over his psych.

However, there is no scholarly evidence that Narcissus died by drowning.

There must be something that we do not know about the demise of Narcissus, and other ancient stories for that matter. The escape of Narcissus matters because it opens the possibility of supernatural agents in this world acting on behalf of humans, possibly to this day, which could have serious ramifications on the history books if ever brought to light. The escape of Narcissus from the world is marked by ambiguity, because of his disappearance: “And then the brandished torches, bier and pyre Were ready—but no body anywhere” (Ovid, p. 66, line 506).

Gay lovers such as Eros and Ameinias were met only with stubbornness by Narcissus and returned the favor with revenge by means of the goddess Nemesis. In this observation of the escape of the youth Narcissus, we learn that actions have consequences, love has great power, and that perhaps all is not what it seems. Perhaps Narcissus was abducted by one of those ‘flying chariots’ so often mentioned in ancient Greek and Roman myth. ■

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# More Than a Name: Local Lawyer Offers Pro Bono Assistance to Transitioning Students



written by Whitney Hayes

For many of us, the mere mention of change evokes a sense of dread, maybe even a visceral panic. Though it’s normal for people to fear the unknown and find comfort in what’s familiar, what if the familiar hinders your well-being? What if change is crucial to your entire identity?

Although change might be welcome, it can still feel intimidating or difficult, which is why Oneida Huntington, a local attorney practicing family law in Christiansburg, is volunteering her legal services to help. Huntington recently teamed up with HokiePRIDE to offer Virginia Tech LGBTQ students assistance with legal name changes.

According to Huntington, the process to get one’s name changed has a pretty quick turnover. A standard attorney could charge anywhere from \$200-250, in addition to the state’s \$39 filing fee, but that cost can become steep or impossible for some students. Therefore, Huntington is offering her services free of charge.

Huntington, who attended law school at the University of Maryland in Baltimore, was involved in LGBTQ advocacy work during her degree. She also worked briefly at a nonprofit before moving back to Virginia to practice law with her family. She loves working with her father and sister, but hopes to tie nonprofit and outreach into her law practice. Huntington explained, “I knew I wanted to do this before I even graduated from law school.”

So what’s the first step towards change? Simply contact HokiePRIDE to set up an appointment. Huntington will be holding office hours on campus to cater to students who might not have transportation. She will meet with students initially to get information, and then meet with them once more in order to generate pleadings.

Though it’s hard to say how many individuals will seek her help, simply to have an advocate like Huntington is an amazing addition to our community. ■



Photo provided by Oneida Huntington

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# OUT

## De'angelo Alfonzo Haynes

written by Taylor Kelso

### Rumors float around

in the back of his head while he enters his true safe place in school, art class. He has heard what everyone has to say about him and he is ready to face the truth and finally let his peers know how he truly feels. He is scared of what is next to come. He talks with a friend in the class who knows his secret and gathers with her in the art closet.

Moments pass by and he opens the closet door with a new state of mind. He steps out of the closet and, 14-year-old De'angelo announces to the class that he is gay. Everyone is shocked. He feels a warm sense of welcoming from his peers, but shame still hangs in the back of his head because he knows he would not feel this at home.

"My family said they always knew I was gay but they never wanted to accept it, and when they finally did, they disowned me." De'angelo said.


Since his grandmother was a pastor, he thought that maybe he wasn't living the right life. According to her, he was an abomination.

De'angelo explains, "I often changed my identity before I came home and entered the house, so I wore what I wanted to at school but changed before leaving in order to maintain a masculine identity at home."

Flash forward six years, and the 20-year-old De'angelo Haynes, now a sophomore at Virginia Tech, still faces backlash from his own family for being gay.

After high school, De'angelo sought out to become more for himself. He occupied his time by joining phi sigma pi fraternity, becoming an anchor for VTTV, joining a living learning community, and studying abroad in Australia. "You know, I have never been this happy in my whole life, in the topic of family we don't really talk but I have become happier with life and myself."

Realizing that the only life he has to live is for himself he has since distanced himself from his family and found a family of support through his friends, mentors, and god. He still reminisces on how he could of conducted things differently at his earliest stage of coming out, but finds happiness in how far he has come and where he needs to go forward.

"Looking back, I should have laid a few people out. As I sit here and think, I was disrespected for who I was. I never knew I would change this much, but I see the world in a different lens now. You only have one life to live and that's what I'm choosing now. My life." 



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