

I discovered I was not gay when, in fifth grade, Jack held my hand in a movie theater and I swear I saw sparks fly from our clammy palms. I discovered I was not straight when, the summer between sixth and seventh grade, I sat next to a camp counselor named Lily who was so beautiful she was almost luminescent. I discovered I was bisexual when, in eighth grade, a group of high school students spoke to us about LGBTQ+ definitions and afterwards I cried in the bathroom because finally it all made sense.

My sexuality is not black and white, rather a gray area on a scale where we have been trained to see only one side of the spectrum. Bisexuality means that only part of my identity is visible. If I were to be dating a girl, everyone would think I was gay. But at all other times I am presumed to be straight. When I first came out I panicked and thought that I was not queer enough, so I wore bomber boots and wanted to cut my hair short. But something was wrong, presenting as masculine wasn't right for me.

Trying to fit a stereotype was like putting a mask on when I had just taken one off. I protected myself because I was afraid that I was letting down the queer community by not looking 'the right way'. Soon I understood that I was only failing the queer community if I was unhappy in my own skin. So I decided to look the way I want to look.

Since I look straight, I have to come out more often. I come out in many different ways; sometimes nonchalantly, slipping my sexuality into the folds of a conversation. Other times I am coming out with intention, assisting a friend, teacher, parent into acknowledging and understanding my queerness.

The coming outs are hard because I have to make something so private so clear to the world. But they are also opportunities, unmaskings. The ones that carry weight and create relationships.

One of these most critical moments was when I had to share a cultural story about myself in front of my school. Avoiding eye contact, I started to talk, shaking so much that my tea sloshed over my legs. I explained what my sexual orientation meant to me. I stumbled over my words, tripping myself because I had so much to say; it was like a dam had been broken. I glanced up from my fingers knotting themselves together over the tops of my knees and saw a sea of smiles, people nodding along, tears streaming down a teacher's face. And suddenly, I got it.

I understood why it is important to come out. Not everyone in that room was queer, but they empathized with me. They recognized the feeling of baring their souls. They could make this connection with me because we all have our own 'coming outs'. Our coming outs happen any time we have to reveal a truth about ourselves – a differing opinion, a private thought.

We all know the frustration of having something important to say but not knowing how to say it. We all know what it feels like to pretend, to be only part of who we really are.

My coming out story isn't necessarily about sexuality. It is also about making connections with people, reaching inside myself to bring something out in another person. It is about those moments of clairvoyance. It is offering someone a helping hand when they're struggling through a coming out and it is allowing someone space to come out on their own. It is about being empowered to tell my truths so someone else can as well.