

Societal Pressure – Why coming to terms with your identity is more difficult than you think

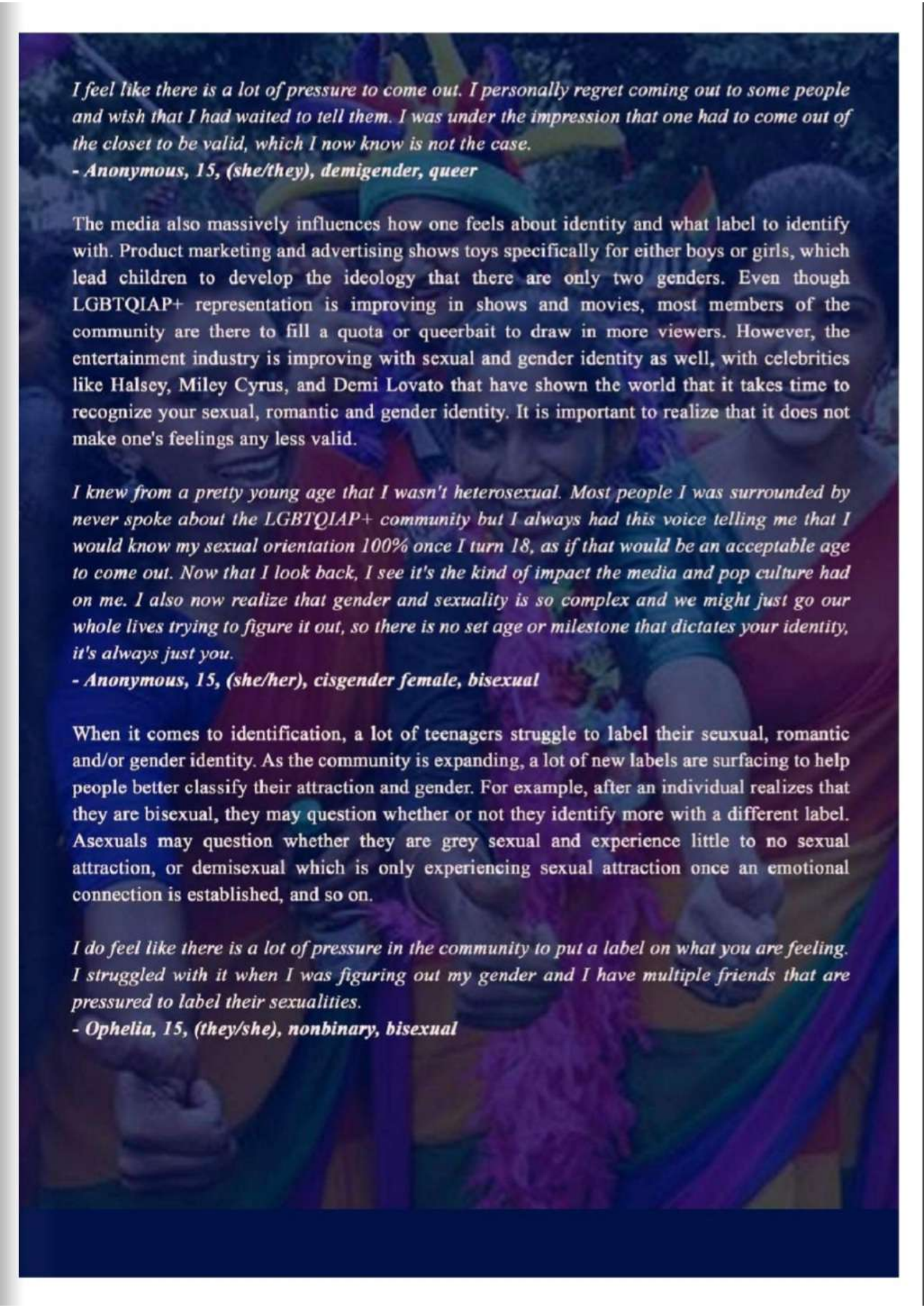
LGBTQIAP+ is an acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, and pansexual. It speaks of the individuals of a community that uses a variety of terms to label and describe their sexual, romantic, and gender orientations. Due to compulsive heteronormativity and a deep-rooted history of stigmatization concerning the community, people can be afraid to come out, especially teenagers. Around 90% of LGBTQIAP+ students hear homophobic comments in school and 28% drop out of school due to harassment, which is why coming out causes more stress than people realize.

I hid in the closet for five and a half years because I know what I felt was not considered 'normal'. Having feelings for both men and women did not seem like it would be accepted very easily by the people I loved. However, when I realized my identity at the age of 13 due to a friend of mine coming out as bisexual, When I realized that my feelings were valid and that I was not abnormal, I started coming out to my friends. I did not expect the amount of support I received from them, and that was when I realized that in safe spaces, I should be as open about my sexuality as possible as I may be able to help someone realize exactly who they were the way I was helped three years ago.

- Anonymous, 16, (she/her), cisgender female, bisexual

Once someone realizes their identity, the question of validity comes into play in most minds. There is a lot of pressure even within the community to identify with a label and come out of the closet. The pressure can be internalized, forcing an individual to come out before they're ready. Social pressure within the community may also be an evident factor, with peers pushing someone to reveal their identity. By doing so, it pressures the individual to be outwardly open about their identity before they are fully comfortable with it. Due to this, a person may come out, and regret it afterwards as they may feel violated or may feel like they identify differently, but feel that they are unable to change how others understand their identity.





I feel like there is a lot of pressure to come out. I personally regret coming out to some people and wish that I had waited to tell them. I was under the impression that one had to come out of the closet to be valid, which I now know is not the case.

- Anonymous, 15, (she/they), demigender, queer

The media also massively influences how one feels about identity and what label to identify with. Product marketing and advertising shows toys specifically for either boys or girls, which lead children to develop the ideology that there are only two genders. Even though LGBTQIAP+ representation is improving in shows and movies, most members of the community are there to fill a quota or queerbait to draw in more viewers. However, the entertainment industry is improving with sexual and gender identity as well, with celebrities like Halsey, Miley Cyrus, and Demi Lovato that have shown the world that it takes time to recognize your sexual, romantic and gender identity. It is important to realize that it does not make one's feelings any less valid.

I knew from a pretty young age that I wasn't heterosexual. Most people I was surrounded by never spoke about the LGBTQIAP+ community but I always had this voice telling me that I would know my sexual orientation 100% once I turn 18, as if that would be an acceptable age to come out. Now that I look back, I see it's the kind of impact the media and pop culture had on me. I also now realize that gender and sexuality is so complex and we might just go our whole lives trying to figure it out, so there is no set age or milestone that dictates your identity, it's always just you.

- Anonymous, 15, (she/her), cisgender female, bisexual

When it comes to identification, a lot of teenagers struggle to label their sexual, romantic and/or gender identity. As the community is expanding, a lot of new labels are surfacing to help people better classify their attraction and gender. For example, after an individual realizes that they are bisexual, they may question whether or not they identify more with a different label. Asexuals may question whether they are grey sexual and experience little to no sexual attraction, or demisexual which is only experiencing sexual attraction once an emotional connection is established, and so on.

I do feel like there is a lot of pressure in the community to put a label on what you are feeling. I struggled with it when I was figuring out my gender and I have multiple friends that are pressured to label their sexualities.

- Ophelia, 15, (they/she), nonbinary, bisexual

Coming out was scary because I was unsure of whether I was actually queer. There would be time periods where I felt like I wasn't, and times where I was sure of it. The issue with this was since I came out before these fluctuations, I was afraid that I had to live up to the label I gave myself, and could not go back on it. However, after having the space to reflect, I'm much more confident about my sexuality. I think it's super important to take time and understand what you're feeling, and not let the opinions of other people interfere with that process!

- Anonymous, 13, (she/her), cisgender female, bisexual

Focus on the LGBTQIAP+ community, especially during pride month from different organizations, tends to shine a light on and cater to the identities in the community that is made up of the majority. These are identities such as gay, lesbian and bisexual. Around 10% of the youth community identify as asexual and 14% as pansexual, as opposed to the 52% that identify as bisexual. This is why when teenagers realize they identify with a label that is not so common, it can be difficult to accept or to come to a realization.

Asexuality is defined as an umbrella term for a group of people who lack and/or experience sexual attraction far less than allosexual identities (hetero, bi, pan, etc.) people. As someone who is ace (asexual), I'm glad to see a growing presence of asexuality within the LGBTQIAP+ community because it will allow a larger number of people to stumble upon this identity and see if it's for them like I did. I believe it can be hard for someone to realize that they're asexual because this identity isn't about a different kind of sexual attraction, but more so a lack thereof, which can be quite difficult to identify, especially to those who've lived their entire lives surrounded by heteronormativity.

- Anonymous, 18, (he/him), cisgender male, asexual

The LGBTQIAP+ community is rapidly growing with new identities surfacing on a daily basis. Representation and discussion on issues regarding it should be normalized in order to make the members of the community feel safer, and to educate those who are not aware of it. It is vital to be inclusive of all identities to help the community grow as a whole and to further fight against discrimination to make the world a secure environment for everyone to express their true selves.

- Adya Yajnik