

I'm Sorry

I sit by myself in the coldest room of the house, head down on the scribbled table I often rest my arms on. This is the place where I take long and miserable hours doing my work. This is the place where I built a childhood through the movies I see on the bulky television before it was replaced. This is the place where I called my friends, the photo-covered wall always seen behind me. This is the place where I stare at the computer screen for hours, whether it be for a project or just for fun. And this is the place where I have my unspoken breakdowns.

I stand up from my rolling chair and pace around my room, having nowhere to go but back and forth. With the grip of both hands, I pull my hair away from my scalp in frustration. My fingernails deeply graze my skin, coping with the internal misery, wanting these thoughts to go away. *I just want to be normal.* Normal is what I strive to reach someday; and this was impossible unless a sacrifice were to be made—to embrace a different identity. The feelings and experiences I had felt simply did not exist. That is something I will have to accept in order to not feel the hurt, the shame, and the embarrassment of my identity.

I'm straight.

Those times of questioning? Just a phase. I never wrote that journal entry in the seventh grade, trying to explain in writing the complex feelings I had about the people I admired. I have never even been attracted to a guy before. Never have I looked back at the guy working the register at the mall, or the one walking down the street in Chicago, not even the ones I notice while staring at my laptop. Celebrity crushes? Never had one—definitely did not have a Joseph Morgan phase. Nights of guilt never occurred to me, nor did I ever fear of the consequences of being queer—because I am not. I have always been straight, and nothing else.

This is why I have never feared being outed to the world: because there is nothing to “out” about myself. I am just a normal guy who is solely attracted to the female gender. There is nothing to be afraid of when coming out to my male friends who make gay jokes for fun; the same people who think that I like them just because I am (like I said, not) attracted to men. Neither have I heard stories of people dropping their friends simply because they were not straight. Or families disowning their children because they were “living a sinful lifestyle”. I am happy to not be a part of the LGBT...UVWXYZ community, as they go through so much in order to simply live a true life. But even if I were part of such a group, I would never be able to fit in. There is so much history to unpack, all untaught by the American school system. Add on all the hidden meanings I am unaware of, the complicated—for lack of a better word—relationship dynamics & expectations I have noticed thus far, and even having a *gaydar*? Keeping up with all there is to know about being gay can be a lot of work. And as a *straight* man, it is great to have nothing to worry about.

Religious conflicts have never been an issue for me because I know the Church will continue to understand and accept me—despite all the wrongdoings I may have committed—though this is not the case for everyone. Sins do not seem to be equal from each other, at least from what I have seen and heard from the pastors throughout my life. This is somewhat understandably so: telling a lie is far from committing murder. Though oddly enough, in most Evangelical churches, homosexuality is treated like the latter. Leviticus 20:13 says “If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman...they shall surely be put to death...”. It sounds a bit harsh, but who is to argue with the All-Knowing God? I feel for those who are attacked by this verse, with some having to go as far as receiving conversion therapy to “fix themselves”. But I am in no need of such services—because I am *not* like them.

My relationship with my family has been filled with ups and down, just like any other. But I have never had to hide my sexual orientation from them. It would be unfortunate if that were the case since, they are without a doubt against homosexuality, per the aforementioned beliefs I have stated. Never have I experienced a great time with them—eating together, watching a movie, playing a board game—without the thought of being abandoned crossing my mind. *Come to us if you have a problem*, they say. *We'll always love you*, they say. I wholeheartedly believe them because I simply have nothing to hide. I am most definitely not afraid of writing this as they go back and forth near the entrance of my room—the room where I have spent numerous days...*not* questioning my beliefs in a higher power and my parents' ability to care for me, despite my issues.

I did not have a crush on that one guy. And even if it was considered a crush, having it for a year and a half is not *that* long. My world never surrounded around his life. He was just a friend, one who I would try to text everyday, receiving back a dry response. I only walked him to his third period because he was a nice person to talk to, no other reason. And me listening to—out of all people—Ed Sheeran, was simply because the music was good, not because he sang “Perfect” to us on a late night in the rarely echoing hallways of our school. I only mentioned his name about a dozen times a day, bringing him up in conversations that were completely out-of-topic. And no, those nights of spiraling were not about him being interested in someone else; in fact, I helped him reach out to her, because all I wanted was to see him happy, no matter how much I...*didn't* hurt.

And those breakdowns I mentioned in the beginning of this piece? Forget about it. Never have I rocked myself back and forth, comforted by the movement and temporary stability it brings me. Never have I cried myself to sleep, next to the motionless stuffed animals that seemed to care more about me than anyone else. Never have dark thoughts taken over my head, then knowing that I would never act on them; but wishing to disappear momentarily anyway, hoping it will bring a

short period of bliss. It was all a terrible nightmare, a figment of my imagination, an alternate reality created in my unconscious mind.

When considering the overall circumstances I have been in, I am completely normal! Those times of questioning my identity, my beliefs, my relationships; all of those things are in the past and have never even affected my life. Although at this point, I would like to apologize.

I'm sorry for those being seen as different, even though this is an instinct they cannot control. I'm sorry for those who are thought of committing a sin that God is ashamed of seeing in them, even though He was the One who created them. I'm sorry for those who have been hurt in the past, and those who will become hurt in the future. Most importantly, I'm sorry for myself for not accepting who I am. I'm sorry because I am seen as weak and invalid by the world. I'm sorry that I still have to pretend in front of others. But this is what I have to do to, at least for the time being. One day, I hope to live in a world where no one has to pretend.

Until then, *I'm sorry.*